

# **The Aluminum Man**

## **By**

### **G.C. Edmondson**

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Dedication  
To Trevor Hearnden who may someday program an aluminophage.

#### *CHAPTER 1*

It was murder. Polished, urbane, witty, this Mohawk was slashing Rudolf to ribbons with a martini glass, doing it without spilling a drop.

"Now we of the Six Nations," he was saying, "had undergone the iron-axe-and-canoe revolution a full century before you Plains Indians got the horse and suddenly became noble warriors instead of scavengers after wolf leavings." The glass swung in graceful punctuation. Rudolf felt his jugular spurt as the Mohawk continued, "Elijah, Baldur, Christ, Mohammed — all spent their forty days in the wilderness. We Mohawk fasted to find Manitou. You Sioux went on solitary journeys, fasting until a totem animal appeared." The Mohawk shrugged. "Hardly a unique phenomenon."

Rudolf glanced desperately around the circle of listeners. Pamela St. Audrey stirred. "By the way, Rudy," she asked, "what *is* your totem animal?"

For one panic-stricken moment Rudolf almost admitted having been raised Christian. Soul Brothers could get away with that but an Indian couldn't. Not yet anyway. What the hell did he know about totem animals?

A door opened and Rudolf thought he was saved but it was only Pamela's father. Mr. St. Audrey's silver-haired matinee idol facade was deceiving. Thoroughly immersed in money-making, he passed through the room, nodding absently, his mind still somewhere between Chase and Manhattan. A door closed behind him and there stood Rudolf. Pamela had moved closer to the goddamn Mohawk. From somewhere drifted the sweet smell of burning grass.

"Rudy doesn't have a totem animal!" somebody shrieked. Even the Mohawk seemed slightly aghast at the fervor with which these liberal cocktail circuit habitués were turning on their darling. But that,

Rudolf noticed, did not stop him from adding fuel.

"Perhaps a journey back to one's roots—" He let it hang a moment then drove in the clincher: "From time to time I find it imperative to shed the artificial restraints of an alien culture."

And before Rudolf quite knew what was happening he found himself stuffed into a canoe loaded with groceries and camping gear dredged up from somewhere. And all because he'd written a book! Paddling up this sludge-filled river, Rudolf belatedly remembered a quote from that Christian work he'd so struggled to disown. Who had said, "O that mine adversary had written a book"?

Rudolf had come a long way from the mission school on the reservation and rather faster than he had expected. Last week he had been top totem on the liberal cocktail circuit, with guest appearances on TV and the whole bit. Now he was fending off rusting beer cans in upstate New York. Was it his fault he was only seven eighths? Was he personally responsible for the nineteenth-century metaphysicist who deserted a wagon train to go native with Teutonic thoroughness? Paddling fiercely and ineptly, Rudolf remembered a Plains Indian rite for bringing disaster upon an enemy. Would it work against that goddamn Mohawk?

Rudolf had already capsized and lost most of his supplies as well as soaking his clothes and sleeping bag in this excremental excuse for a river. He tried to remember if his last meal had been yesterday or the day before. He had intended to start fasting but not this soon!

"Damn all reviewers!" he muttered.

Somewhere ahead on the right bank rose a pillar of smoke. If he paddled briskly Rudolf might reach it before dark. Another night alone in this forest, shivering in wet stinking clothes, trying to ignite wet matches... Unwillingly his thoughts returned to that Mohawk's review:

"Unfortunately, Mr. Rudolf knows less about the Iroquois Federation than the average white man. Perhaps his overly bookish approach could be remedied by a return to his own Sioux roots. Obviously young Rudolf is still searching for a totem to lend focus to his own life."

Rudolf believed in totem animals slightly less than in Santa Claus. Did any of the old people still believe that jazz, identifying with whatever animal they met after the ritual fasting, living their days in spiritual partnership? Be nice if he could find a red wolf — this being the English for Rudolf. Did wolves survive in upstate New York? Did they attack men?

By now he could see a faint flicker of campfire. He paddled clumsily another hundred yards and grounded, cringing as his shoes squelched through semisolid sludge. The fire was inland up a foot-wide rivulet of clear water. Rudolf walked up the middle of it and got the worst of the crud off his shoes.

Though there was no trace of road, he saw what looked like a 1948 DeSoto standing on end, and without wheels. Before it was a spring and beside the spring a campfire. Sitting before the campfire was a barrel-chested man in Levis and checkered wool shirt. "Never work," he was saying. "Can't be done that way."

"Hello," Rudolf said.

The stranger turned and Rudolf saw a week's growth of red whiskers surrounding a bulbous nose and two bleary eyes. "My god, another one!" the stranger said.

"Another what?"

"Anybody can see pink elephants. Only the Flaherty has the originality for squelching horrors and wild Indians."

"I'm not wild. And if by squelching horror you mean that river—"

"That's what they all say." Flaherty delved into a jumble of blankets and found a bottle. After a swallow he cautiously faced Rudolf again. "You go wild on firewater?"

"The only thing that'd drive me wild at the moment is a hot bath and a meal."

Flaherty offered the bottle. "Try to hallucinate the rest."

"I don't even believe in you." Rudolf took the bottle. It was good whiskey and a moment after it landed in his empty stomach he felt more on a par with the world. "What makes you think I'm not for real?" he asked.

"Are you?"

Rudolf thought a moment. "No," he admitted. "I'm a fake like everybody else. Only I got caught."

"Happens to us all." Flaherty's voice was mid-range between *basso buffo* and transit-mix. "What d'you suppose *he* was before he got caught?"

"Who?"

"Him."

Rudolf looked toward the wrecked DeSoto. There was a pile of wet earth where the spring had been deepened and widened to bathtub size. Flaherty had not used it.

Water flowed from the spring to make the tiny stream he'd rinsed his shoes in. But there was something odd. He blinked. Could one drink so affect his vision, even on a two-day empty stomach?

There was a faint swirl like congealed turbulence, as if a giant egg white had been broken into the spring. Except for three triangularly spaced black dots, it was nearly invisible. "Pollution?" he asked.

The viscid mass convulsed. While Rudolf stared in horror the black spots emerged from the pool stretching toward him like the neck of some improbable snail. "Hello," they said.

It was a mouth; the two spots over it were eyes. Rudolf shook his head and the apparition went out of focus. "There isn't any such thing!" he exploded.

"No more than you're here," the man by the fire said. "Happens every time I despair for humanity and hie myself off to save my own soul."

One mad corner of Rudolf's mind kept saying, "This is your totem animal." He wondered if it referred to the Irishman or the thing in the spring. How could he present either vision to the tribal elders? "It's not really there," he persisted.

"That's what the other of you keeps saying," the thing in the pool conceded. "Yet I remain firmly convinced of my own existence. I am less convinced of yours. How do you absorb oxygen through that leathery outer mantle?"

"Skin," Rudolf corrected absently. Looking at the night sky's sparse, smog-tinged stars, he wondered how to answer. "What's your name?" he asked.

"Tuchi."

"I'm Rudolf."

"Flaherty." the red-whiskered man chorused. "And sure I can do it — maybe in six months."

"I must get home sooner," the thing in the spring said.

"For an uncooked omelet you have remarkably human needs."

"I am gravid. I do not wish to consummate my most private and sacred act where neither gravity nor radiation are suitable, much less this foul mixture you breathe. No wonder you're leathery."

"Could I have another?" Rudolf asked.

Flaherty handed him the bottle. This time the whiskey burned and Rudolf guessed he was finally getting warm. "What does — uh, Tuchi want?" he asked.

Flaherty looked owlshly at Rudolf. "You're not really here. Neither is he."

"I'm not sure enough to argue the point. But if we were, what would he want?"

"*She*" Tuchi insisted. "I want to go home."

"You can't go back," Rudolf said morosely.

"Gravid!" Flaherty exploded. "Does that mean what I think it does?"

"You can start boiling water," Rudolf said.

Flaherty shuddered. "How many?"

"Two to three thousand."

Flaherty put the bottle to his lips again.

"At home there would be a selection. Only the hundred best would survive. But here, without proper facilities..."

"We already have a population problem," Rudolf said.

"I'm leaving," the thing in the spring said. Momentarily the three black dots came closer together in an expression Rudolf could only guess at. "All I need is a little help."

"Like what?"

"His — her ship's out of fuel," Flaherty explained.

"Gasoline?"

"Powdered aluminum."

Rudolf thought a moment. "Like the pigment they use in aluminum paint?"

"That might do," Flaherty said, "if it was pure enough."

"Why not go to town and buy some?"

"I can't wait," Tuchi said impatiently. "I'm gravid."

"I could grow it in six months," Flaherty said.

Rudolf was suddenly reminded of some Massachusetts Indians who planted gunpowder bought from the Pilgrims and were chagrined when it failed to grow a crop. "This hallucination's getting out of hand," he said.

"Who asked you?" Flaherty growled. "And what's funny about growing aluminum?"

"Perhaps my sense of humour is deficient."

"More likely your genetic engineering's deficient."

Rudolf looked wistfully at the bottle. For the moment he no longer cared that he was tired, dirty, hungry.

"I'm a good one when I want to be," Flaherty growled.

"Good what?"

"Genetic engineer."

"I'm a good Indian when they let me be."

"You think I can't grow aluminum?" Flaherty was growing ugly.

"How do you do it?"

"Tailor a bacterium to eat bauxite. Gets its energy from the sun like any growing plant and excretes tiny grains of metallic aluminum."

"You can do this?"

"I've been working on a strain of high tolerance yeast," Flaherty said. "Once that's cleared up I think I'll tackle it."

"Why not now?"

"Because that curdled omelet already has it."

"Has what?"

"A strain of aluminophagic bacteria."

"Why doesn't she go home then?"

"Time," Tuchi said exasperatedly. "This red-fringed specimen needs half of one of your years to plant and harvest. By the way, are you of the same species? You don't have red cilia like Flaherty. Oh, I know. Black cilia and no facial fringe. You're female!"

Rudolf ignored this. Suddenly he began to see riches, fame, entree back into the cocktail circuit. Back into the front seat of Pamela St. Audrey's oriental red Lamborghini...

"Could you use solid aluminum?" Rudolf asked.

"I could pulverize it. It would be better than nothing."

"How much would you need?"

"I suppose you just happen to have an ingot of pure aluminum wrapped up in your sleeping bag?" Flaherty sneered.

There was a moment's silence while Tuchi converted into Earth units. "Perhaps fifty pounds."

"I wonder how much my canoe weighs?" Rudolf mused.

"You can't cut up a canoe!" Flaherty protested.

"You have metal?" Tuchi asked.

"Make me an offer."

"The bacteria."

Rudolf looked at Flaherty. "You're the expert," he said. "How much would they be worth?"

Flaherty sputtered a moment before upending the bottle. "Millions," he finally gasped. "Be the biggest thing since atomic power!"

"You've got yourself a canoe," Rudolf said.

"You can't!" Flaherty protested. "Besides, there's a catch. What if they don't breed true?"

"Won't they?" Rudolf asked.

"No."

"See!" Flaherty triumphed.

"They're for a different planet," Tuchi explained. "Different atmosphere, gravity, solar constant—"

"I guess the deal's off."

"Damn well better be!" Flaherty huffed. "Hallucinations must obey their creator's innate logic."

"How were you going to grow them?" Rudolf asked.

Tuchi produced a small black object. Rudolf thought it was a transistor radio.

"Incubator," Flaherty explained. "We're holed up here to get a crop and get her back on her way."

"It's a soil problem," Tuchi continued. "Bauxite beds on this planet lay somewhere around the equator. This far north there is little bauxite."

"Can't recall seeing any. What's bauxite?"

Flaherty gave the Indian a sharp look. He sighed. "It's several ores. All they have in common is a high alumina content."

"You mean aluminum?"

"I mean carborundum."

"What good's that?"

"Four tons reduce to one of pure aluminum."

"How?"

Flaherty sighed again. "First you dig it up in Guyana or Liberia, then ship it where there's cheap hydroelectric power. Somewhere above a thousand degrees it melts and starts electrolysis. At one pole you get aluminum. At the other you get crud. Some of this river's pollution probably comes from an aluminum plant. They hide them in the boondocks so ecologists can't see."

"And this — uh, Tuchi has something that does it without electricity?"

"Hallucination," Flaherty insisted.

"All right. But if it was for real how would it work?"

"Plant bacteria, come back and scoop up your metal."

"But they don't breed true?"

Flaherty pointed at the black transistor gadget.

"They live eight of your days," Tuchi interjected. "A hundred-generation safety factor before viability is lost. The incubator preserves a true strain."

"Won't it run dry?"

"Not for thousands of your years unless you try to open it."

"What'll you take for the incubator?"

Whorls of curdle writhed, then Tuchi's three pointed "face" emerged again. "Ordinarily I wouldn't sell. You must treat it with great care."

"I will." Rudolf didn't intend to go about sowing aluminum crops for everyone.

"Very well. Pulverize your boat into micron-sized particles and you may have the incubator."

"You're out of your skull!" Flaherty roared. "Even if we had the time and machinery we couldn't grind it that fine. Besides, that damn canoe—"

Spring water roiled suddenly and slopped over its banks. "All right!" Tuchi snapped. "I'll do it myself."

Rudolf slogged down to the river. Fumbling in the dark, he piled his stinking water-soaked gear on the bank. He horsed the canoe back up the rivulet, splashing clean water on it and himself along the way. A pseudopod stretched an astonishing distance and smeared wetly over one side of the canoe. "This is aluminum," Tuchi said. "I can smell it."

"I wish I could do things like that," Rudolf said.

"You'll be sorry about selling that canoe," Flaherty warned.

"So I forfeit my deposit!"

Flaherty reached for the bottle and couldn't find it.

There was another commotion in the spring then Tuchi began flowing toward the wrecked DeSoto.

Suddenly a back door opened smoothly to reveal an interior that showed no signs of weathering. It showed no signs of being an automobile either. Rudolf squinted around all that whiskey on an empty stomach and suddenly realized this vehicle had never known wheels. "Your ship?" he asked.

"What did you think it was?" Tuchi asked testily.

Rudolf decided not to answer.

"Help me," Tuchi continued.

"What?"

"The metal. Help me put the canoe inside."

"It's too big," Rudolf protested. "You can't get it in there until you cut it up."

The pseudopod turned until that triangle faced Rudolf. The three black dots came momentarily together. Rudolf wished he knew what that particular gesture meant.

"There are more things in the universe than Euclidean geometry," Tuchi said. "Give me a tentacle."

Rudolf and Flaherty got on opposite sides of the canoe. Rudolf wondered if that last remark had anything to do with the way the eighteen-foot canoe entered, the five-foot wide car and kept on going and going — and going! The canoe disappeared and the door began closing. Flaherty turned back toward the fire and stumbled headlong. The tiny box flew across the campfire and Flaherty landed face down in the spring. Once Rudolf had made sure the incubator was unharmed he slipped it into his pocket. Then he helped Flaherty. "You've got a boat somewhere," Rudolf insisted.

Flaherty gagged and vomited and did the usual things people do when they've almost drowned. Finally he pointed. Rudolf walked into the darkness and stumbled over a lath and canvas canoe. It was heavier than his, but it had an outboard. He began horsing it down to the river.

"Where we going?" Flaherty protested.

"To make some money!"

"Ah, the curse! 'Tis called Holy Ireland because there's so little of it there. And what would you be needin' money so bad for that you'd be leavin' in the middle o' the night?"

"Later," Rudolf said. "Let's go."

"You go, lad. I'll be back when I've communed with nature, purged my soul, and finished my whiskey. Won't you be spendin' the night?"

"Find me some clean dry blankets, find me a square meal, and I'll spend a week."

"You may have a point," Flaherty conceded.

"I've also got my totem." Rudolf wondered if Tuchi meant anything in Sioux. Someday he'd have to learn the language properly. Once reestablished on the cocktail circuit all he needed was some goddamn paleface anthropologist speaking perfect Sioux to shoot him down again. As if he didn't have enough trouble with Mohawks!

The door opened again. "Careful with that incubator," the alien warned. "It could disrupt your ecology."

"It's two hundred years too late for that," Rudolf said.

"Before my ship moves, you'd better."

"How far is safe?"

Tuchi hesitated. "With those leathery skins you may be immune to gamma radiation."

"My skin's not that thick!" Flaherty hastened. "You going now?"

"Before your primary has brought light again."

"We won't wait for sunrise," Rudolf reassured the alien. "Thanks for everything."

"Whatever that means," the alien said absently. The door closed again with the smooth sucking sound of an airtight seal.

Rudolf began tossing things into the canoe. He got Flaherty on his feet. Finally they were drifting down the stinking river.

"You shouldn't have sold that canoe," Flaherty repeated.

Rudolf was busy with the outboard. "Why?" he asked.

"That curdle you chose to swindle was buying pure aluminum."

"You think my canoe was made out of old beer cans?"

Flaherty sighed and stared through the smog blanket at dimmed stars. "Pure aluminum is softer than Wrigley's Doublemint," he said. "You sold that poor thing commercial boat grade."

"So what?" Rudolf was fiddling in the dark with the outboard. Like everything else in the white man's world, it refused to perform the way he expected.

"That aluminum was alloyed with eight percent magnesium. It had bits of chromium, manganese, and zinc."

"You worry too much." Rudolf was worrying a little himself. This goddamn outboard refused to start no matter how many times he dislocated his shoulder.

"Gas turned on?" Flaherty asked.

"Yeah."

"Not flooded?"

"How would I know?"

"Can you smell gasoline?"

"No."

"You check the tank?"

"No."

It was too dark to see. Rudolf put his finger in and felt nothing. He gritted his teeth and began plowing through the jumbled gear in the middle of the canoe. Twenty minutes later he was convinced there was no gasoline.

"Must've left it ashore," Flaherty said.

They had drifted downstream. He could never get back to the campfire and the alien's ship without a paddle. Abruptly and irrelevantly he remembered who had wished that his adversary had written a book. Job was an author too. Maybe he had established the trend.

Rudolf sighed and tried to relax. The current was carrying him slowly back to civilization, to riches, to the front seat of Pamela St. Audrey's oriental red Lamborghini. Now what could he do to fix that goddamn Mohawk's wagon?

## ***CHAPTER 2***

Rudolf woke and for one magic moment he seemed back in some Rousseau-Thoreau dream of how it had been before Whitey came and real estate plummeted. Fog lay low and the canoe drifted in an eerie world where totem animals were not absurd inventions. For an instant he understood how an Indian living this way could instinctively know oneness with nature, could actually practice all that ecology crap.

Now wide awake, Rudolf saw sludge, smelled corruption. Sun and flies were rising. Rudolf sat up and began planning how to get his.

He had been an engineering student, until an English instructor had noted his facility with words and encouraged the young Indian in a literary career. Sometimes Rudolf lulled himself to sleep planning cruel and unusual ends for that unsuspecting man.

Flaherty stirred and groaned. He opened his eyes, closed them again, and screwed up his face in pain.

"Got any money?" Rudolf asked.

Flaherty began searching his pockets.

"Not that kind. I mean big money."

"Where are we?"

"Somewhere downriver, I guess."

Flaherty opened his eyes and squinted. The fog was burning off, leaving only a brown blanket of smog. "What'm I doing here?" he asked.

"I don't know metallurgy. I need you."

"I don't need you."

"Yes you do."

"Why?"

Rudolf produced the incubator the alien had traded him.

"What good is it? That poor oyster's already hocked itself off this afflicted planet — if any of it really happened."

"Don't you want to get rich?"

"No."

Rudolf was so startled he said nothing for a minute. "Why?" he finally managed.

Flaherty pointed at the river, the scum-clotted banks, the brown sky. "Each time I made money I made that a little worse. I've dropped all research in favor of a high tolerance yeast."

Rudolf wasn't interested in high tolerance yeasts. "White man not interested in money? Christ, I might as well go back to the reservation!"

"Why'd you leave?"

"Jesus!" How to explain what it was like to grow up half freak, half zoo animal? Poked and probed by anthropologists, slobbered over by do-gooders, encouraged to revive Indian crafts, told to adapt to modern ways, trying always to divine what improbable directive would next emerge from the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

"Once the gorilla swung all over Africa," Rudolf said. "Then the forest went. Now he humps around, walking when he evolved for swinging. An evolutionary blind alley isn't a fun trip."

"Sounds like growing up in Ireland," Flaherty said.

They rounded a bend and saw a dock. Flaherty knelt and began paddling with his hand. "Ow, me head aches!" he groaned. Rudolf began paddling too.

"Don't git many campers anymore," the grizzled native said. "You fellers see that flash upriver last night?"

"Flash?"

"Coulda been a falling star. Maybe one of them rocket things."

"Going up or down?"

The old man gave Rudolf an odd look. They paid and Flaherty nursed his outboard into life. Hours later he headed into a cove. Then they were in a car only slightly newer than that upended vehicle in the forest.

"I suppose that flash was just our friend taking off," Rudolf said.

Flaherty shot him a quick look. "Want to go back and see if the poor thing made it?"

There was an uncomfortable silence. Finally Rudolf said, "What's a genetic engineer? Where do you get a degree like that?"

"Percussion U."

"Never heard of it." It certainly wasn't Ivy League.

"School of hard knocks. Like Freud got his degree in psychiatry."

"Where do you work?"

"Each time I did, some dipshit perverted my work and got rich. I got tired of being a pervert."

Rudolf patted the incubator in his pocket. "You think this'll destroy civilization?"

"I wish it would. But as a matter of fact, I don't even think it'll work."

Rudolf felt a moment of pure panic which, for Rudolf, always involved subliminal shots of himself back on the reservation. Then he guessed what was eating on the Irishman. "Relax. It really happened."

"I'm sure it did. But what kind of planet did that poor gob of slime come from?"

"What difference does it make?"

"Me bhoy, do you know what rust is?"

"Iron oxide."

Flaherty wrenched violently to avoid a little old lady in a Ferrari. "You've never seen aluminum rust. Right?"



"No."

"Wrong! You've never seen aluminum. It reacts violently with oxygen."

"Why hasn't civilization exploded?"

"Aluminum oxide makes a protective cover. But if you think aluminum's not explosive, you've never heard of thermite."

"I haven't."

"You will," Flaherty prophesied. "But not now."

"So what's wrong?"

"If a bacterium eats alumina and excretes metal, how small would the granules be?"

"Pretty small, I guess."

"Aye," Flaherty gloomed. "A molecule with a molecule-thick layer of oxidation. Less than zero."

Rudolf saw himself back on the reservation. "You're sure?"

"And how do we get a bauxite bed? I've no longer possession of my own bed."

"You said there's aluminum everywhere."

"There's more in the tropics."

"If our process is cheap we can work low grade ore."

"I suppose so. But why?"

"What have you got against refining aluminum without pollution or electricity?"

"I hadn't thought of it that way."

"Do you think it's immoral for a poor Indian to get rich while he's benefitting mankind?"

"Why should I interrupt my own research?"

"For half?"

"You'll have to come up with a better reason than that."

"What do you want?"

Flaherty sighed. "I want peace. I want to go to hell in my own quiet way."

"Are you hiding from somebody?"

"Sort of."

"You want a quiet place to work, somebody to run errands to the liquor store?"

They inspected houses from New Rochelle to Far Rockaway. Finally they chose one.

"Damp," the agent warned. "Cellar's not floored."

Flaherty dribbled acids over soil from the cellar. "Perfect for mushrooms," he said. They rented it. Rudolf wet down the cellar floor and gave the incubator a squeeze. "You any good at cooking beans?" Flaherty asked.

"On the reservation one learns."

Rudolf's TV had elicited a laugh when he'd hocked his all for rent and eating money. He turned it on. Bored, he watched some gabby talk show. Finally the news came on. They stared at riots, hijackings and bombings. Suddenly Flaherty leaned forward.

"... Week's second explosion in upstate New York. Observers have found traces of radioactivity but no debris..."

"This afternoon Ambassador Fyodorenko denied any hostile intent on the part of the Soviet Union's new..."

"D'you suppose the poor thing's having trouble getting away?" Flaherty wondered.

Rudolf felt a slight uneasiness. He went to the basement. The mud was tinged with faint silvery streaks like spilled paint.

"There it is," Flaherty said. "Now how do we gather it up and sell it?"

"Sluice box?" Rudolf vaguely remembered gold miners.

"Aluminum isn't heavy enough." Flaherty picked up a pinch of silvery slime and frowned.

"Flotation?" Rudolf hadn't the slightest idea how flotation worked but it had something to do with copper mines.

Flaherty gave him an odd look. He found an empty peanut butter jar, scooped mud, added water and a drop of dishwashing detergent, and shook it. They waited.

Flaherty's jaw dropped. "Be... damned if I didn't forget the oil!"

There was mud in the bottom. The middle was filled with rapidly clearing water. There was a scum of floating metal on top. Flaherty opened the jar and stuck in a finger. "Greasy!"

"What does that mean?"

"What you can't understand means trouble. How much money d'we have?"

"Eighty-two dollars."

Flaherty hummed and clucked. "Microscope and reagents," he said. "Got to have it all back."

Rudolf sighed and began changing into his clean clothes. Two hours later he returned from the hock shop with Flaherty's esoteric tools. There was a stink of hot oil coming from pots on the stove.

Rudolf had supposed geneticists used transmission electron microscopes that took up half a building. Surely the days of discovery by white-coated men peering into test tubes had ended with Pasteur or with TV commercials? Flaherty's was a simple optical microscope out of freshman biology. Yet his joyous blasphemies convinced Rudolf that something was happening. "Are we in business?" he asked.

"Buy a washing machine."

"A what?"

"To wash clothes. I don't care if it's automatic."

"I have fifty dollars and twelve cents to last the rest of our lives," Rudolf said.

"You also have a tendency to worry. Hock the microscope again."

"Don't you need it?"

"I know what's going on now. Remember I said surface oxidation would eat up the whole granule?"

"Yeah."

"Our slimy friend thought of that. Each grain has some kind of waxy coating. When I boiled it the wax came off."

"Then what?"

"It oxidized."

"So how are we going to get metal?"

"You *do* worry."

"Every time I spend my last fifty dollars."

When Rudolf found out how much extra it cost to deliver the venerable Maytag he was suddenly thankful no purchaser had been found for Flaherty's car. Straining and sweating like he hadn't since reservation days, Rudolf got the washer roped to the back of the car.

"What are we actually doing?" he asked when it was clanking in the basement.

Flaherty grinned. "The impurities wet and sink. The greasy metal floats and we skim it off the top."

"How do we get the grease out without oxidizing the metal?"

"First, we get enough concentrate so we can experiment."

Which took another couple of days and turned the basement into a viscid quicksandy ooze. Ranged about the kitchen were buckets of the metallic granules. Flaherty had punched holes in the bottoms and lined them with cheesecloth. In these strainers the slurry compacted into a waxy sludge. Rudolf was getting tired of beans. Flaherty was getting thirsty.

Rudolf had been checking the mail with increasing desperation, hoping illogically for a royalty check. Hell, even ten dollars for Swedish rights... He heard the put-put of a mailman's scooter and caught the mail as it came through the hole in the door. One envelope looked important.

"Feces!" He threw the letter on the mud-saturated rug and stamped it, chanting half remembered fragments of a Sioux curse.

"You haven't been that alive in days," Flaherty said. He picked up the letter. "What's the Six Nations Benevolent Fund?"

"Goddamn Mohawk!" Rudolf growled.

"Now what's wrong with Indians helping one another?" Flaherty wondered in his transit mix voice.

Flaherty learned of Rudolf's expulsion from the cocktail circuit — of his sudden replacement in Pamela St. Audrey's oriental red Lamborghini. "But sure and you don't take these people seriously?" he asked.

"These people mold public opinion. They could help me — help every Indian if I could just focus their attention."

Flaherty laughed. "You'll play hell focusing their attention. What do these people do?"

"Why, all sorts of things. They're in the arts, they teach, they uh—"

"What does your Pamela do?"

"Well, she's on several important committees. She's active in charity work—"

"I'll put it another way. What does her father do?"

"Mr. St. Audrey? I've only met him once. I think he's — Yes! He's putting up that new building. You know, the architectural showplace that's going to revolutionize everything."

"Now there's a man who's changing the world. And I doubt if he has time for cocktails."

"But he's not interested in liberal causes."

"He sure isn't. Now, about selling this aluminum—"

Rudolf listened, half understanding as Flaherty offered ideas and shot down his own proposals. "If we had a thousand tons it'd be easy. Now scrap buyers only pay half what it's worth but nobody else buys small lots."

Yet when Rudolf loaded the car and drove to an oil-soaked yard where trucks waited before a scale, the cigar-chomping weigher said, "Nope. Get that grease out and I'll give you twenty-nine cents a pound."

When they returned home the mailman had left Rudolf an ad for a potion to restore his flagging virility, and a much forwarded envelope for Flaherty. The Irishman tossed it into the trash without opening.

"Beans?" he asked.

"Not hungry."

"Well now, it's not all that bad," Flaherty said from the vantage point of middle age. "I knew we wouldn't sell it."

"Then why'd we waste all morning?"

"Would you have believed me?"

"No," Rudolf admitted.

"What do we do now?"

"We could melt it. If we had a reducing furnace."

"I've got two dollars and seventy-one cents."

"Hardly enough for a pint of poteen. Better go buy me that anyhow." Flaherty turned on the TV, then ignored it. He muttered something about molecular bonds and began fiddling with a slide rule.

Rudolf sat thinking dark thoughts of the reservation, wishing he could ignore the guitar-twanging delinquent who was making those ungodly noises on the TV.

"I wonder if any bowling alley around here could use a pinsetter?" Flaherty asked.

"Not since they invented machines to do it," Rudolf said sourly.

Another long silence. Then Flaherty screwed a hat down over his balding head. "Take care of the place," he said.

Rudolf inspected the basement. The bacteria needed reseeding. The TV was still blathering when he came back upstairs. Rudolf recognized the moderator of a talk show he had once been on, back before his fall from the liberal cocktail circuit. The man now being interviewed had gray hair and a firm, flabless body. He seemed vaguely familiar. After a moment Rudolf realized it was Pamela's father.

"Mr. St. Audrey," the moderator was saying, "how will your new building differ from other skyscrapers?"

St. Audrey smiled. "We hear of the Iron Age. Actually we live in the Ferro-concrete Age. Everything — dams, buildings, roads, airstrips, missile silos — is made of steel covered with concrete."

"You mean the steel holds it together until the concrete hardens?"

"It's the other way around. Concrete fills the gaps and protects it but there's nothing strong enough for a modern skyscraper except steel — until now. We're going to pour concrete over an aluminum skeleton."

"How will this make your building different?"

"We could make the walls half as thick or we could build it twice as high."

"Which did you choose to do?"

St. Audrey smiled again. "Our building is a compromise. It'll be a hundred fifty stories, not counting the transmitter antennas and copter pads."

"More congestion for Manhattan! How can all these people possibly get to work?"

"Many employees will live in the same building."

Music welled in the background and the moderator hinted that another commercial was in the offing.

Aluminum! If only Rudolf could hang on he was going to be right up there swinging with the big boys. He wondered what Flaherty was up to.

### *CHAPTER 3*

He didn't find out what Flaherty was up to until four hours later. It was approaching midnight when there came a firm knocking on the door. Rudolf remembered that kind of knock from reservation days. It was the knock that comes from a fist firmly attached to an arm that disappears up a uniformed sleeve: A knock firm in its conviction that the knocker is on the side of the angels, crushing crime, correcting corruption, making goddamn sure no Indian ever gets a piece of the action. Rudolf sighed, put on his inscrutability, and opened the door.

"Do you know a Francis X. Flaherty?" the cop asked.

"Yes."

"He's sick. Will you take care of him?"

Rudolf's panic was so sudden he had no time to wonder if he was concerned for Flaherty or for the ruin that faced him without Flaherty's know-how. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"Drunk," the cop said, and poured Francis Xavier Flaherty through the front door.

Rudolf managed a fireman's carry and got the burly Irishman atop his cot. Flaherty was mumbling incoherently.

"Where did you get the money?" Rudolf asked.

Flaherty emitted a death rattle which Rudolf, on sober reflection some days later, decided was just a snore. He felt Flaherty's pulse. The Irishman was breathing, but his faint pulse suggested it might not be a continuous process. Rudolf flapped about making coffee. Finally he got Flaherty sitting up and forced him to drink.

"You're gonna kill yourself," Rudolf warned. "How much did you put away?"

"Double shot," Flaherty said weakly.

"A what?" Then Rudolf remembered about livers and the way they come apart from years of drinking until an old drunk can hold progressively less each day. He wondered if Flaherty would live long enough to get the aluminum operation paying. He took a firm resolve to hire a bright young geneticist to backstop the Irishman as soon as possible.

"I had a double shot," Flaherty repeated. "I felt funny after lifting all that stuff. Guess I shouldn't have gone back the second time."

"What stuff?"

"In the car. You'd better go drive it home." After ineffectual fumbles toward a shirt pocket Flaherty gave up. Rudolf removed a paper from the Irishman's pocket. It was a receipt for nineteen dollars from Ace Welding and Surplus.

"What have you been up to?" Rudolf asked.

"Sold blood. Wasn't enough so I went down the street and sold some more."

Rudolf's attitude underwent a sudden readjustment.

"Lie still," he said. He scrounged about the kitchen and found bouillon cubes. He mashed up a handful of cooked beans and spooned the thickened mixture into Flaherty. In moments the Irishman revived.

"I'll be okay," he said. "Key's in my pocket somewhere. You better get the car."

"Where?"

"That place on the receipt. I got to feeling dizzy so I had a drink next door."

"You're lucky you didn't die in the drunk tank."

"Aye lad," Flaherty agreed. "But it helps if you're Irish."

Rudolf finished spooning soup into him and made him comfortable. Then he locked up the house and started walking. It took him an hour to find the car and five minutes to return home. Flaherty was snoring in the same position Rudolf had left him. His pulse was stronger now. Rudolf pulled the blanket over him and went out to unload the car.

There was a piece of thick-walled pipe two inches in diameter and a yard long. There were shorter pieces of pipe small enough to slide inside the first. There was a large truck jack and several I-beams welded into a scissors. Rudolf got it inside the house, checked Flaherty again, and went to bed in his own cot, wondering what all the junk was for.

When he awoke, Flaherty was already banging around, setting up the gadgetry he'd bought with his life's blood. Flaherty was chanting his usual cheerful blasphemies. He was still shaky but Rudolf guessed he'd be all right. He tried to concentrate on the apparatus he was helping Flaherty set up. Finally it dawned on him that there was nothing basically different between this mass of welded I-beams and the cheese press that had gathered dust in one corner of the reservation school since some do-gooder had discovered that beef cattle do not willingly give milk.

They stuffed the thick-walled tubing full of waxy sludge. Flaherty swung the hydraulic jack into position. Rudolf began pumping. They had to remove the follower several times to add more sludge. Finally the waxy mass refused to compress any more. "Are we done?" Rudolf asked.

Flaherty shook his head. He began unbolting and reassembling the scissors in a different way. Now the jack would travel less distance and exert more pressure. Rudolf wondered whether the beams would bend first or the tube would burst.

What happened was wax. Hot and smoking, it poured from the tube. While Rudolf continued pumping Flaherty tried ineffectually to catch the drippings in a dishpan. Most of it ended up on the floor. There was a puff and the press was enveloped in oily flames.

"Don't stop!" Flaherty yelled. He splashed water, soaking the already sodden rug to prevent the fire from spreading. Finally Rudolf could pump no more.

When the last flame expired, leaving an odoriferous ghost of its passage, Flaherty tossed water on the press. They began gingerly disassembling the steaming press.

Rudolf had supposed the compressed slug of metal would be stuck tighter than an allotment check in the BIA office. To his surprise it fell out of the tube.

"Shrinks faster than steel when it gets cold," Flaherty explained. The sample was solid and shiny. "Pressure cold-welds those granules into some kind of molecular bond as long as there's wax to exclude oxygen," Flaherty said.

"Too bad we can't sell the wax too."

"Wait till we can afford better equipment."

The scrap dealer gave Rudolf an odd look but he bought their metal. "Where you getting this kind of scrap?" he asked.

"Secret process." Rudolf filled in a lengthy form. "Why all the questions?" he asked.

"Cops are on us all the time."

"How come?"

"Everybody works in a machine shop finds a way to steal. This way the fuzz can check back when somebody wonders why he's doing twice as much business and selling half as much scrap."

Rudolf finished filling out the questionnaire and accepted his eighty-nine dollars. He rushed around to Ace Welding and Surplus where Flaherty was supervising construction of a bigger and better press.

Their next load brought five hundred ninety dollars. Flaherty appropriated the five hundred and got off once more at Ace Welding and Surplus. Rudolf took the remaining ninety dollars and stopped at the supermarket.

That night over steaks Flaherty painted glowing pictures of their future. "Have to get out of here," he said. "Dig any more and the whole house'll collapse. But please, dear boy, next time you're in the store ask the gombeen man for a bottle of Tullamore Dew."

"Do we move to the tropics?" Rudolf asked.

"Not yet. Find another house or a farm. Need lots more money before we can face the big boys."

With the improved press they did better. The back yard was turning into an increasingly deeper and slimier pit. Blocks of wax were accumulating. Flaherty's venerable vehicle sprung its springs permanently. They acquired a new pickup. "Need it anyway when we move," Flaherty said.

Rudolf was tempted to call Pamela St. Audrey but sadly, he realized his new affluence still brought him nowhere near her level. One of these days he was going to throw a really big party; invite all those dip-drecks in the liberal cocktail circuit and rub their noses in it. He might even invite that Mohawk. He wondered what the exstructural iron worker was doing these days. Still living on charity?

There was the flut-sput of a mailman's scooter. Rudolf no longer expected anything but he could not control his writer's reflex. He caught the load of junk as it came through the slot. There was another much forwarded envelope for Flaherty. The Irishman tossed it into the trash without comment. There was one for Rudolf from the reservation school where he'd grown up.

It was a begging letter. Rudolf tossed it into the trash with Flaherty's. The next letter was short and to the point. "Didn't you pay the rent?" he asked Flaherty.

Flaherty's jaw dropped open. "Begorra!" he said in the brogue he could turn on or off. "'Twas the day I needed all that welding on the new press."

Rudolf sighed. "I'll take care of it tomorrow," he said. "Soon's we sell some more. That damn pickup cleaned us out."

"Aye," Flaherty said. "Might as well get on with it."

They were piling dishes in the sink when the knock came. Rudolf glanced at Flaherty and knew the Irishman also recognized that kind of knock. "Have you done anything illegal?" he asked.

Flaherty shook his head. "You?"

Rudolf opened the door.

"Mr. Rudolf Redwolf?" The cop was young and still wore the icily correct academy look that doesn't wear off until several uniforms have been puked threadbare.

"My name is Rudolf."

"Is your last name Redwolf?"

"Last names are a honky invention."

"There've been some complaints," the young cop began.

"About what?"

"You've been selling a lot of scrap metal."

"That's illegal?"

"That depends on where you got it."

"Is somebody missing some?"

"I'll ask the questions," the kid cop said, not quite as masterfully as he would have liked.

Rudolf reflected momentarily on the moral advantage that comes from ownership of a new pickup plus the knowledge that there's more where that came from. "Am I under arrest?" he asked.

"Well, uh no. Not yet."

"Then bugger off." Rudolf closed the door firmly in the cop's face.

"That wasn't very kind," Flaherty said. "I wonder who sent him."

"I'll give you one guess."

"Maybe," Flaherty said, remembering the scrap buyer. "But methinks this is only the beginning."

They were both in the back yard next morning when Rudolf heard the extra loud chime he'd wired up to overcome the noise of machinery. Flaherty looked at him. They turned off the washing machines

and went to answer the door.

The stranger was alone. He was about Flaherty's age and had the same dissipated look. Rudolf wondered if he was an IRA member.

"I'm looking for a Mr. Francis Xavier Flaherty, a geneticist of some renown," he said. Before Rudolf could bar him, the stranger had his foot, then himself, inside. "Oh, there you are," he said.

"Took you long enough," Flaherty said dispiritedly.

"Who is this?" Rudolf asked.

"Name's Riordan," Flaherty said in his transit-mix voice. "Come to drag me back to the brothel."

"Well now," Riordan said placatingly, "you can't say they've been less than generous."

"That I can't," Flaherty said. "And if there's a cool corner in hell I hope you get it."

"Doing well?" Riordan asked.

"We're eating."

"When are you coming back?"

"I'm not."

"You signed a contract."

"Which *you* violated."

"If it's a question of money I think they'll be amenable..."

"Not only would your principals not be amenable," Flaherty sighed. "They have neither the mental nor the moral equipment to understand what could buy me. Now finish up your snooping and get out."

Riordan shuffled embarrassedly on the mud-soaked carpet. "I guess there's nothing more to say," he said.

"We understand each other perfectly." Flaherty closed the door and locked it.

Rudolf looked at him. "I don't like to pry," he finally said, "but is there something in your past that can throw a crimp into our business?"

Flaherty poured coffee and sat. "I'm a genetic engineer," he said. "It's not the biggest field in the world."

"Who's this guy, Riordan?"

"Used to be one of New York's Finest. Now he's a private eye."

"Who has you under contract?"

"The government."

Rudolf blanched. Every Indian knows the catastrophes that result from putting an X on the White Father's paper. First, he supposed, would come some kind of a cease and desist order, followed by a baker's dozen of injunctions. Somebody would freeze their bank accounts. Somebody would ship him back to the reservation.

Then Rudolf grinned. The scrap business was geared to winos picking up change for another bottle. Scrap dealers paid cash. Abruptly Rudolf remembered they would be forwarding Xeroxes to the IRS. He'd have to find an accountant and see about making quarterly estimates. But that could wait another week or two. First they had to pay the rent. He looked at Flaherty. They went into the back yard and began shoveling muck into the row of washing machines.

"Not directly," Flaherty said over the hum of machinery.

"What?"

"The government didn't have me under contract directly. They do it through one of those fronts that have college kids so uptight these days."

Suddenly Rudolf guessed what it was all about. No wonder Flaherty was a bitter drunk. "They had you working on biological warfare?"

"Something like that. Once we make some money I want to get back to my own research. Humanity *needs* a high tolerance yeast."

"You're from Ireland," Rudolf said.

"Clever of you to notice that."

"What I meant was — uh, well..."

"I know. It's a reservation too."

"How do you figure that?"

"Where else could a grown man waste two thousand hours out of his life studying religion when he might be learning something useful?"

"I could name you two places within ten miles."

"Aye." Flaherty spat and redoubled his efforts with the shovel. "I suppose I should be thankful. 'Twas meditating on the Immaculate Conception that first got me thinkin'. Now there was a bit o' genetic tinkering for yez. Poor sod only had half his chromosomes. No wonder he got nailed up."

That evening they had a load of metal ready but they decided to wait till morning. Rudolf and Flaherty agreed that they ought to buy some clothes, clean up, and have an evening out. Then they settled again for what the refrigerator would yield. They were tired. Also, both men were obsessed with the feeling that something was going to happen soon. And the more money they had the better prepared they would be.

"About that contract," Rudolf said. "Do you know a good lawyer?"

"I know a lot of bad ones."

Rudolf sighed and turned on the news.

"... Increasing concern over thousands of dying fish in the upper Hudson. Slowly, the source of pollution is moving downstream. Despite massive efforts by special ecology teams, no poison has been detected. A spokesman for Nader's Raiders said..."

Rudolf switched channels. Nothing but news everywhere. This time the commentator wore his quizzical, flying saucer smile as he talked about "... more flashes, mysterious detonations, and a very slight rise in background radioactivity. Despite some of the more hysterical claims, few people believe Russian submarines are operating in the Hudson. When asked if the US was experimenting with something that flashes, makes loud noises, and possibly kills fish, a navy spokesman said, 'No comment'..."

"Just what we need," Rudolf growled, "another war and somebody snatching our process in the name of patriotism."

There was a knock on the door. Rudolf looked at Flaherty. This time both knew it wasn't a cop. When Rudolf opened the door it turned out to be the agent who'd rented them the house. He was a small man with an epicene fussiness of dress. He took one look at the mud-soaked carpet and rolled his eyes skyward.

"Sorry about being late with the rent," Rudolf said. He fumbled in his pockets, then looked hopelessly at Flaherty. Neither of them had the money. Christ almighty! Rudolf thought. Tomorrow morning I can collect a thousand dollars for that metal and tonight I can't come up with two hundred fifty. "I'm sorry about the rug too. We'll pay for any damage."

"That won't be necessary," the rental agent said.

"Oh?"

"I'm not here for the rent. It is my unhappy duty to inform you that the house has been sold. The new owners wish immediate occupancy. Be out of here by tomorrow and no charges will be filed."

"Charges! What kind of charges?"

The small man pursed his lips. "Malicious and wanton destruction of property."

"I said we'd pay for the rug."

"Operating a factory in a residential zone without permits," the agent continued.

"You knew we rented this house to grow mushrooms," Flaherty said mildly. "Did you expect us to get a crop and move out in a month?"

Suddenly defensive, the little man said, "I don't own the place. I'm just following orders."

"So was Adolf Eichmann," Rudolf grunted.

"Now about lawsuits," Flaherty said, "if we were to go to court and explain how your personal misrepresentation forced us to lose a crop... And surely, my dear sir, you know the laws on eviction as well as I and my young law student colleague."

The little man was in full retreat. "I'll be back," he said. "I'll have to speak with the new owners."

"Don't rush off," Flaherty said. "Who are they?"



"I can't tell — I mean, I don't know."

Flaherty smiled. "It's all right," he said. "I already know. Just tell them it didn't work. We'll take our full thirty days after we've been properly and legally served with a notice of eviction. And what's probably worrying your new owners much more, you can tell them we'll have the place spic and span. I might even say immaculate."

"But they don't want —" The little man suddenly decided not to say what they didn't want.

"I know they don't," Flaherty said, still smiling. "But it'll be no trouble at all. We'll have the place clean, shining, and germ-free."

Clearly unhappy, the little man left.

"Now what was that all about?" Rudolf asked.

"The deep-dyed dastards!" Flaherty stormed.

"Who bought the place?"

"Can't you guess?"

"Not really."

Flaherty began dismantling the press. Mystified, Rudolf began helping. "'Twas Riordan," Flaherty finally growled in his transit-mix voice. "Him scuffin' his embarrassed feet around! That blatherskite wouldn't be embarrassed if you caught him robbin' the poor box."

Rudolf pictured the private detective's moment of mortification before he succumbed to Flaherty's sneers and departed. "I don't get it," he said.

Flaherty faced the Indian. "Like I said. It's a small field. Don't you think every geneticist knows the Flaherty?" He surveyed the rank of washing machines that lined one wall. "Worn out. Next time we see what we can do with sand and gravel equipment."

"Have we got enough money already?" Rudolf asked.

"Wave a couple of thousand around and we can get anything on ninety-day credit. It isn't like when you're really broke."

"But you said somebody else'd end up in the saddle."

"If we borrowed money. But we won't. We'll buy some decrepit little sand pit that's worked out clear to the clay bottom — providing it's the right kind of totally useless clay. Within a week we'll have it paid off."

Rudolf had a visceral feeling that it wasn't going to be that easy. "If we're on our way up, what are we so afraid of?"

Flaherty grinned. "Run the pickup around back. Only thing worth taking is the big press. We'll abandon the rest of the junk. Too small for us and useless to them."

"Aren't we going to stick around and fight it out like you said?"

"Hurry up with that truck."

Rudolf ran the pickup around and helped take apart the big press they'd just built. Even in pieces it was going to make quite a load. They needed a bigger truck already.

"Have to take a day off soon and see a patent attorney, too," Flaherty added between grunts. They struggled with the heavy I-beams and finally the press was in the back of the sagging pickup. "Anything else you want to take?" Flaherty asked.

Rudolf picked up some of his personal gear and his aging TV. "Aren't we coming back?" he asked.

"No. Help me with the sledge hammer."

"The what?"

"Smash every bit of machinery we leave."

"What for? It isn't worth anything."

"Of course not. I want it to look like we panicked."

"Didn't we?"

"Not quite. Hop to it."

Rudolf began slamming at the small press they had used at first. He wondered just what the hell he was doing. Flaherty flailed mightily with a pick and punctured the washing machines they had been using for the flotation process. Finally the shambles was complete.

"I don't see what you gained," Rudolf said. "Anybody can tell what the machines were. What're we hiding?"

"Last call. We're making a fast exit."

Rudolf checked the house to see if he'd left anything. Suddenly he remembered the incubator. He got it and climbed into the pickup.

## *CHAPTER 4*

Finding a worked-out gravel pit took less time than Rudolf had expected. Flaherty fought Hudson Valley traffic for an hour, then turned off on a secondary road. Within minutes they were passing through a nineteenth-century village. "Wonder how the developers missed this one?" Rudolf said.

A mile past the village Flaherty backed the pickup into a large building and they grunted the press out.

"How'd you know about this place?" Rudolf asked.

"Been shopping since the first letter came."

"Why?"

"If the post office finds me, can Riordan be far behind?"

It was nearing daylight when Flaherty drove back to the village and pulled up in front of a small white house. He produced a key and they unloaded personal gear to an audience of twitching window blinds. The house was furnished. Rudolf picked up the phone and heard a dial tone.

Late that afternoon they returned to the gravel pit. Rudolf set out sprinklers and sowed culture. There was a skiploader, conveyor belts, sand sifting machinery, and a dump truck. Six days passed in frantic work, squeezing sludge through their flaming press. Aluminum piled up.

"When do we sell?" Rudolf asked.

Flaherty finished locking up for the night and they got into the pickup. "You know what'll happen when that metal hits the market?"

"We'll be target for tonight."

"How we fixed for money?"

Rudolf grimaced.

"Six days," Flaherty reflected. "Damn near too long."

"Too long for what?"

"Remember friend Riordan scuffin' around like an embarrassed kid?"

Rudolf nodded.

"If you'd peeked out the mail slot you might've seen him stuffin' his shoes in a plastic bag."

"I don't get it."

"State of the art, me bhoy. People know me and my work. Christ almighty lad, within five years somebody would've done it even if our slimy friend hadn't come along."

"If everybody knows what we're doing, why are we hiding?"

"What do we have that nobody else has?"

"They know we're making aluminum and if Riordan's stolen a culture—" Suddenly Rudolf stopped.

Flaherty grinned. "By now Riordan's shoe scrapings have died. They'll lay that to accident. Our house's new owners are culturing mud trying to figure why it all dies. Truth is, I'd like to know meself how to program that self-destruct into a gene."

"We can't hole up forever. We're broke."

"Aye. Now this is what we might try..."

At 3:00 A.M. Rudolf drove the groaning pickup through the village and out onto the toll road to North Bergen. He arrived at the scrap yard minutes before opening time.

"Haven't seen you for a while," the weigher said.

Rudolf agreed.

"Still living in the same place?"

Rudolf grunted.

The weigher looked over his load of shiny aluminum slugs. "Where you getting all that stuff?"

"I've got a busy day ahead of me."

They finished weighing. The dealer looked speculatively at Rudolf. "My cash hasn't been delivered. Have to give you a check."

"I'll wait."

"Could be quite a while." At that moment an armored car turned the corner and entered the yard.

"I'll give you half in cash. Got to take care of my other customers."

Rudolf began loading metal back into the pickup.

The weigher dithered and flapped, balancing profit against the displeasure he would incur by letting Rudolf get away. "Nobody turns loose that kind of money without knowing where this metal comes from," he warned. "If it's hot I'm stuck."

Rudolf continued loading.

"All right, all right!" The weigher counted out eighteen hundred dollars.

Rudolf shook his head. "This is five nines metal."

"What?"

"Ninety-nine point nine hundred ninety-nine percent pure. I can take it straight to the labs."

"How much do you want?"

"Double."

Rudolf had the metal back in the pickup before the other man resolved a three-cornered dispute between conscience, common sense, and a bargain. "Look," he said, "I'll phone the bank and have the cash waiting for you."

"Nobody stops payment on small bills," Rudolf said.

"You want thirty-six hundred dollars and me to take all the risks. I'll give you three thousand."

"All right."

The weigher counted out eighteen hundred dollars from his cash drawer. He opened the bag from the armored car and counted out the rest in new twenties.

Rudolf was pocketing the money when he suddenly stopped. "I've got a thing about clean money," he said. "Give me all new bills without any funny little marks on them."

Wordlessly, the weigher exchanged them. Rudolf signed the receipt and drove off the scales, planning ways to make that sonofabitch wish he hadn't screwed this poor Indian out of six hundred dollars. From the mirror he saw the weigher frantically dialing.

It was too much. Rudolf slammed the pickup into reverse and tore rubber. He burst into the office while the weigher was still on the phone. "Who you calling in such a hurry?" he asked.

"Look, I don't want any trouble I — please, HELP!"

Rudolf saw the handbill in front of the phone: \$250 REWARD If anyone offers to sell (there was a picture of one of their slugs). Call this number immediately.

It was a New York number.

Rudolf took the phone from the scrap dealer's nerveless hand. "I don't have my scalping knife," he said icily. "But when the police get here you'll wish I'd settled for your hair."

"Who you think I'm calling?"

"Who do *you* think you're calling?"

The scrap dealer realized he was not going to die immediately. He wiped his face and thought a moment. "You're right," he said. "Nobody said 'police.'"

"What did you tell them?"

"I — I described you and your truck."

"You just loused up six months worth of investigation." Rudolf picked up the phone and dialed a long distance number. "Lt. Flaherty?"

"Now who the hell?"

"This scrap dealer in North Bergen got his neck in the noose. You'll have to send a few men to make sure they don't kill him."

"Rudolf, is that you? What's going on?"

"Right, Lieutenant. He blew the whole thing wide open. Sure you wouldn't rather take him in?"

"Are you in trouble, dear boy?"

"Yes, it could get hairy but you're right. Can't take the poor man away from his business. Better get those men over here quick though. The organization's got a head start."

"Rudolf, is somebody listenin' in?"

"Right, Lieutenant. I'll call you later."

The scrap dealer was a quivering wreck when Rudolf left.

A half hour later Rudolf had sold the pickup back where he bought it for another whopping loss. His bulging pockets were attracting stares. In a service station rest room he stuffed bills into envelopes addressed to Mr. Raymond, to Mr. Fuller, and to "occupant" at their white clapboard house. He emerged from the rest room and mailed an envelope. Two blocks down the street he mailed another.

The flyer with the picture of their funny metal had a New York number. Rudolf wondered who they were and if they had a local man on the job already. He had read enough spy and die novels to absorb the rudiments of front tailing, back tailing, all the elaborate shuffle and relay systems. The only thing he couldn't figure out was if anyone was actually following him.

Then suddenly he noticed a miniskirted blonde ahead of him. Some girl he'd glimpsed five blocks ago? Surely there wouldn't be two long-haired blondes exposing great grabbable areas of thigh in the same pale coral panty-hose... But wasn't a tail supposed to be inconspicuous? Depended on what kind of tail, Rudolf guessed.

He turned two corners in illogical directions and there she was again. Sonofabitch! She saw him and started walking faster. Rudolf decided to follow and see what happened. The blonde was heel and toeing it now, flashing her crotch with every step.

Striding behind her in his pigeon-toed Indian trot, Rudolf realized he looked more like a temporarily unhorsed member of a raiding party than an habitue of the cocktail circuit. How long since his last haircut? How long since his last presentable outfit had been impregnated with muck? He had nearly caught up with the girl when she stepped into an intersection. The signal was not working but a cop in the middle raised his hand, stopping Rudolf dead while the blonde walked across.

She stopped to talk with the cop. The cop shrugged and shook his head. The girl gestured angrily. They rapped for another moment then she walked on. The cop shifted stance to let another handful of pedestrians across. "You there, hold it!" he said to Rudolf.

"Yeah?"

"That girl says you're following her."

"What girl?"

The cop pointed at the micromini'd blonde with the long straight hair, now a half block up the street.

"Nice scalp," Rudolf mused. "Tell you who she was?"

"No."

"She tell you who I am?"

Again the cop admitted his ignorance.

"My name is Lo. Also known as the Poor Indian. My hobbies are libel law, the legal aspects of harassment, and writing angry letters to police commissioners. Do you wish to arrest me or to cease and desist from hampering me in the pursuit of my private and lawful business?"

"I hope you catch her," the cop growled. "You're made for each other."

A block further Rudolf encountered a used car lot. Still wondering if the blonde would show again, he ducked into the rear of the lot and pretended to be interested in a car.

"Well now, could I interest you in a fine automobile?"

Rudolf thought a moment. With the pickup gone he and Flaherty needed something to get to the gravel pit. "How much?" he asked.

"That little beauty is a real steal at only a hundred ninety-five dollars."

Rudolf's hand was moving toward his pocket when he realized it wouldn't look right. "Let's hear it run."

After a short drive Rudolf and the salesman agreed that a hundred forty cash was somewhat more of a steal. Twenty minutes later Mr. Redman had a receipt and bill of sale. He stopped at an Esso for gas, oil, and a map, then headed west, ninety degrees off a true course home.

After an hour's hacking through New Jersey Rudolf was sure he wasn't being followed. He stopped to consult the map. And heard a helicopter!

He diddled the outside mirror, trying to look without getting looked at. Before he could twist the rusting bracket, the chopper was visible through the windshield. It continued westward, plugging along a straight line. When it had disappeared he got out and inspected the top of his car.

It was an ordinary blue Fordor. Circling back to the turnpike he belatedly discovered it had a working radio. He tried for music and caught the tail end of a news shot: "Worsening tensions as today's emphasis shifts from hijackings to territorial encroachment. Alaskan fishermen applied to Congress for Letters of Marque to arm their boats and fight their own war against Russian trawlers who foul nets and ruin the fishing grounds.

"Meanwhile mysterious flashes and detonations accompanied by massive fish kills make their way slowly down the Hudson. Mystified ecologists detect no poison. Despite reports of a submarine in the Hudson, Navy officials remain silent."

For some moments Rudolf had been afflicted with an undefined nervousness. Suddenly it focused in his rear-view mirror as he realized that beige Plymouth had been hanging in there longer than was statistically necessary. Rudolf booted his clunker. It puffed smoke and moved out. The beige Plymouth peeled off a couple of lanes westward.

Paying the toll, Rudolf killed the engine. "Flooded," he said. "It has to sit a few minutes."

The toll collector signaled, and a pickup with a foot-wide wooden bumper pushed him to the edge of the thru-way. Rudolf waited for the beige Plymouth to quit stalling and drive on. After a minute and a half it did. He waited ten more minutes before starting. The next time he looked in the mirror the Plymouth was there again.

Rudolf considered using the blonde's gambit at the next toll booth. But she had been attractive and female. An unshorn Indian in need of a bath might not make out so well.

He couldn't outrun the Plymouth. Crashing into it would bring cops and complications. He ground along at a steady sixty and the Plymouth kept a decorous distance. He took an exit ramp and wandered through traffic, then back into the thru-way. He was damn near into Pennsylvania.

Near the next toll stop lounged three longhairs wearing castoffs Rudolf remembered from reservation days. He stopped. Two had flowing Buffalo Bill mustaches. "Heading for the coast," one said. "How far you going?"

"Depends. I have an interesting proposition."

The tall one put a protective arm around the girl.

"That's not my bag," Rudolf said. "You carrying anything heavy?"

"Just a little grass, man."

"Can you stand a bust if you toss it out?"

"We're clean."

"I'm going to give you this car."

"Yeah? What's the catch?"

"In return for your jacket and big hat and leading that guy as far as you can away from here, I'll sign it over."

"What guy?"

Rudolf pointed back at the Plymouth.

"Fuzz?"

"Husband."

"We take a bust they'll say we twisted your arm."

"No case unless I prosecute. You might even pick up some bread for false arrest."

The three reached some silent agreement.

"Do something to block the rear window," Rudolf said. As he traded seats with the man in front Rudolf grabbed the floppy hat and put it on. After a couple of wobbles the new driver settled down and Rudolf helped him out of his fringed jacket. He shed his own mud-caked mohair. He glanced back and saw the pair in the rear were no longer blocking the window. They had dropped their dirty Levis and were doing what comes naturally. The Plymouth was temporarily boxed in a snarl of cars. "Speed up," Rudolf said. Moments later he crouched beside an exit ramp, waving a thumb as the beige Plymouth rocketed by.

Rudolf walked up the exit ramp and hailed several taxis before one stopped. "Take me to a clothing store," he said. The driver gave him an odd look.

He got more odd looks as he deposited the floppy hat and fringed jacket in a trash can. Coming out of the Penney's in a new twill jacket and trousers, he was less conspicuous. A cop directed him to the bus depot.

The bus routes had been designed after the circulatory system of an amoeba. There was no way from here to home. Finally he caught a local to the next town east and spent most of the night transferring from local to local, catnapping into recurrent nightmares of being chased by some traitorous totem animal.

Near dawn, he was deposited in the bedlam of the 42nd St. Terminal in New York. He looked for an unoccupied phone. By now Flaherty would be chewing up the furniture. Just as he was reaching the head of the line at a phone booth the PA system blatted "AARDVARK, HIPPOGRIFF, UNICORN, LECITHIN, DRY MILK SOLIDS, RNA & DNA." Rudolf sprinted and was first aboard. He studied other passengers, looking for a remembered face.

The bus meandered up the Hudson, stopping and waiting for reasons known only to the Maker of Schedules. It was 5 P.M. before he finally arrived, gritty eyed and grungy, at the white clapboard house. Flaherty, he supposed, would still be out at the gravel pit.

Rudolf sighed and stuck his key in the door. He'd made it — home free. All he had now was to decide whether to shower or eat first. Maybe he should have a drink.

Before he could finish unlocking the door, it burst open. Pamela St. Audrey stood there with an expression of improbable delight on her lovely face. "Darling!" she shrieked, "I thought you'd never get here!"

## CHAPTER 5

Pamela St. Audrey here! Rudolf decided he was hallucinating. Perhaps those hippies in the back seat had prodded his subconscious into remembering his own celibate status. Icy cool, ever with-it Pamela seemed just a tiny bit drunk.

Rudolf blinked gritty eyes. Pamela *was* here. Pamela *was* drunk.

She wasn't nearly as drunk as Flaherty.

"Me bhoy!" the Irishman said with an expansive wave. "This lovely lady's been waiting all day for you."

Rudolf sat in the nearest chair. The room was littered with new twenty-dollar bills. "This isn't happening!" Rudolf mumbled. But he knew it was. So far he guessed only one envelope had been delivered. If he could just get his hands on the others before this berserk bogtrotter papered the town...

"What brings you here?" he asked Pamela. Goddamn, what was wrong with him? He'd lived and dreamed for the day he'd see Pamela St. Audrey again. Now that she was here he wished she'd go away

or turn herself off long enough for him to get a bath, a shave, a few hours sleep — long enough for him to sponge up Flaherty and wring him out into his bed.

"Darling, you've been hiding," Pamela pouted. "And you never told me you knew Dr. Flaherty!"

The wild Irishman was pouring his glass full of the active ingredient without fillers or diluents. He prepared highballs for Rudolf and Pamela. "Well now," he said expansively, "it's been a long time."

"You never told me you knew Pamela," Rudolf said.

"Ah well, things can slip your mind." Flaherty raised his tumblerful of straight whiskey. "To science!" he said.

Bemusedly, Rudolf raised his glass and sipped. "Have you been waiting long?" he asked Pamela. As she turned to answer Flaherty raised his glass again.

Rudolf had seen enough drunken Indians not to be a boozier himself. Already he knew one sip was too much for an empty stomach. "I've got to have a shower and a change," he said. "You stay down here and charm Flaherty for another ten minutes."

Even more than a bath Rudolf needed time to think. Was Pamela part of the plot? No, that was crazy! Where was that goddamn Mohawk who'd supplanted him in Pamela's oriental red Lamborghini?

At the stair landing he looked back. Pamela was wearing a maxi that somehow managed to be more provocative than all the microminis he'd seen on her. And that drunken lout of an Irishman leaned over her, staring down a décolletage that more than made up for the long skirt.

While the tub was filling he shaved scant Indian whiskers from lip and chin, then slid in and began soaking bus rides from his bones. There were footsteps on the stairs. Thank god, he thought. Now I can have a private word with Flaherty. But when the door opened it was Pamela.

"Oooooo!" she squealed. "That looks goooood!"

Rudolf remembered the times he had almost undressed Pamela St. Audrey — all the times when a telephone, a knock on the door... He wondered if her ecstatic squeal was for the hot bath or for his undraped virility standing at ease. Before he could rise to the occasion she handed him a drink and disappeared. Moments later Rudolf was dressed and downstairs. "Where's Flaherty?" he asked.

"Said he'd be back in half an hour," Pamela cooed.

*Out to paper the town with my money!* "You still haven't told me how you got here."

Pamela stretched and smothered a ladylike yawn. "I drove. The Lamborghini's in back."

Before he could rephrase the question Flaherty came staggering through the door. "Well now," he leered, "no doubt you children found ways to amuse yourselves." He spilled twin sacks of groceries on the table. "Keep your seats," he continued. "The Flaherty is about to alter some protein."

Finally steaks and assorted delicatessen were on the table. Flaherty produced another bottle. White wine, Rudolf noted.

"What brings you here?" Rudolf tried again.

"The Six Nations Benevolent Fund."

*I might have known it!* "That thing the Mohawk runs?"

"Yes, Arch is in charge."

"Where is good old Arch these days?"

"Darling, you and Dr. Flaherty simply must come out to Northumber for the weekend."

"The fabulous country seat of the St. Audreys! We'd be delighted." Flaherty bowed.

Rudolf looked up quickly but the Irishman's guileless eyes glistened with total sincerity. Rudolf wanted to beg off, plead urgent work — anything.

"Been working too hard," Flaherty continued. "Need a weekend in the country."

Was Flaherty too besotted to guess the hell Rudolf had had coming home? "Who's going to watch the place?"

"I suspect it's being well watched," Flaherty said.

"And you—" Christ! Rudolf couldn't leave this irresponsible lush alone here. And if the wild Irishman went off alone would he ever return?

"Please, darling," Pamela urged.

Rudolf gave a noncommittal mumble. Goddamn booze on an empty stomach!

Dinner progressed with Pamela and Flaherty becoming progressively more smashed. Rudolf shunned the white wine when the second glass Flaherty poured tasted of Tullamore Dew. "What's this weekend at Northumber?" Rudolf asked.

"Everybody's coming. It'll be fabulous."

"Drink up, lad. You're only young once."

Rudolf's pockets were bulging from loose bills he'd picked up every chance. Sooner or later Pamela was going to remember that goddamn Mohawk charity and he wanted his money beyond grabbing distance.

Pamela was dissolving. Suddenly he realized she was drinking Tullamore Dew neat from the wine glass Flaherty kept filling. "Oh my!" she said, "really, I—" She stood and her chair fell backward.

Rudolf guided her upstairs and put her on his bed. Goddamn Flaherty! Once he got the rest of that money picked up and put away... When he came downstairs again Flaherty slouched on the couch, drinking from the bottle.

"What the hell goes on the instant I disappear?" Rudolf asked.

"We're going to a party. Ah, can't you smell it?"

"What?"

Flaherty pointed at Rudolf's bulging pockets. "The sweet smell of success!"

"I thought you didn't care about money. Anyhow, you wouldn't call it that if you'd been through what I have."

"Sure and you can't hold your liquor."

"You're the one that's drunk."

"So I am, lad."

"How do you happen to know Pamela?"

"Did some work for her father once."

"What've you been doing all day?"

"Your young lady friend gallantly accompanied me on a tour of the gravel pit. She ruined shoes and pantyhose slogging about in the muck. She stumbled and managed to muddy herself from head to foot."

This didn't sound like supercool, ever with-it Pamela. As usual when he had a drink, Rudolf felt an older mentality reassert itself over his ivy league veneer — a sullen memory of old swindles and broken promises. He caught a glimpse of his glowering face in the mirror. *Is this the face that launched five thousand copies and got reviews in Time and Life?* "What's she doing spying out here?"

"Now dear boy," Flaherty soothed, "Let's be charitable and say she's being used by someone who knows of her connection with you."

"That goddamn Mohawk?"

Flaherty grinned drunkenly. "Is he the one who loses if the price of aluminum drops and he's already signed contracts at the old rates for his wonderful new building?"

"Mr. St. Audrey? You're just making this up!"

"Of course. You think I'm a mind reader?"

It was easier to believe than Rudolf cared to admit. "But Pamela wouldn't—"

"She's not a dutiful daughter?"

*Dutiful daughter.* Hadn't heard that one since school days on the reservation. Somehow it didn't seem to fit Pamela.

Flaherty showed signs of running down. Rudolf got him to bed and instantly the Irishman was snoring. Rudolf was tempted to toss bed and all out the upstairs window but this was the man who'd peddled his life's blood to get them started. Rudolf sighed and went downstairs again. He picked up the worst of the mess and checked the room for loose money. He found Pamela's overturned purse behind a couch — cigarettes, keys, combs, perfume, change, odd metal gadgets he sensed had something to do with hair. He picked up a lipstick and the cap fell off. Slimy muck dribbled.

He inspected the lipstick. The innards had been removed, converting it into a tiny flask. Suddenly Rudolf realized his booze elicited suspicions, that sullen reservation mentality was taking better care of him than all his ivy league sophistication.



His eye fell on the half filled bottle of Tullamore Dew. Not bad stuff, really. He poured a glassful and trimmed it with 7-Up. Sipping, he tried to remember the Sioux chant for bringing disaster upon an enemy. He had it almost right by the time he finished the whiskey.

Sweaty and sticky. Take another shower. Shucking clothes on the way, he realized it was too much work to stand up so he filled the tub again. He was still chanting when the door opened. *Good god, I've woken Flaherty!*

But it was Pamela. Belatedly Rudolf remembered how she could turn on watching Indians ethnicking their way through these chants. He wanted to say, "Now that you're up, bugger off!" But some corner of his mind kept saying "Look, she's taking her clothes off!"

"How'd you get here?" he asked.

Pamela St. Audrey was the kind of redhead who commonly inhabits gatefolds in expensive men's magazines. Studying her matched set of pink-tipped mammaries Rudolf knew he ought to toss this conniving bitch out head-first. But an older glandular wisdom suggested something else first.

"Darling, I've told you. The Lamborghini's parked in back." Pamela was climbing astraddle him in the tub. Rudolf felt himself rising to the occasion. "How'd you find us?"

"Rudy, you just *disappeared*. I was frantic. I got Daddy to hire a detective." She leaned forward. Rudolf raised his head to buss her brisket. Then he remembered the muck in the lipstick.

Back in the good old days an occasional kiss had been the size of it. Even Pamela's kisses had been decorous affairs planned with an eye toward preservation of hairdo. What would happen to her elaborate coiffure in all this steam?

So she'd been looking for him.

"Took you a while," Rudolf said.

There was a velvety rub of skin where she sat astraddle him. He found himself nuzzling wet udders. Jesus, why had he taken that last drink? He blinked and realized Pamela was a natural redhead. Freckles in the oddest places. "*Carpe diem*" he muttered, and released the water with his foot.

"What?"

"Ciceronian Sioux for 'Get it while you can.'"

Pamela wriggled mermaidishly and Rudolf grew a handle by which she lifted him out of the tub. They were involved in a tent-sized towel before he thought to ask, "Was his name by any chance Riordan?"

"What? Oh, the detective? I don't know."

Rudolf's legs were tangled in the towel. He stumbled backward into his room and Pamela came down atop him more solidly than one might expect from such a fragile creature. Finally he kicked the towel free. "What's so interesting about a worked-out gravel pit?" he asked.

"Sweetheart!" Pamela explained.

Rudolf thought the matter needed clarification but things were coming to a head. They cantered briskly for several minutes without moving more than a foot or two. Rudolf was back on the cocktail circuit.

When he awoke next morning Rudolf knew he had planted his seed in Pamela's shapely garden. Now why wasn't he happy? Slowly, he remembered the badgering and cross examination he'd subjected Pamela to in between. He'd been drunk! Had Pamela? Would she remember? Was she even here? Had he really told her that no matter how interestingly placed her freckles, her ass was going out that door come morning?

Rudolf felt the precursor of a headache that promised to be murderous. He opened his eyes very cautiously, half hoping Pamela would be gone.

She sat naked beside him, smoking. Pamela really didn't need clothes. Once again she wore the armor of her permanent supercool. Rudolf opened his eyes wider and the pain was so intense that he groaned.

"Yes?"

Rudolf could feel the icicles. "Look," he began, "I'm sorry. I was drunk. I didn't know what I was doing." Through alternating waves of remorse and nausea Rudolf suddenly perceived a family resemblance between Pamela and her father. Funny how he'd never noticed that ramrod erectness

before. "I know! I took advantage of you. I'll—" Rudolf clambered from the bed and battled another fit of remorse. He staggered into the bathroom and faced his reflection in the bottom of the john.

When he had showered and brushed his teeth Pamela still sat insulated from the world in her supercool, making no effort to hide twin skijump shaped protuberances.

"Sorry," Rudolf said. "I thought you'd be—"

"You might go down to the Lamborghini and get my overnight case."

Clambering back upstairs he heard the shower. He left the overnight case on his bed and went mournfully downstairs to see if anything could purge him of a headache and repentance. After the way he'd worshipped Pamela from afar how could he have treated her this way?

There was an "oops, sorry" as Flaherty leisurely backed out of the bathroom. "Sorry I'm not thirty years younger," the Irishman amended as he bumbled downstairs. "Well lad, I trust you enjoyed yourself."

Rudolf groaned.

Flaherty seemed no worse than usual for this time of day. Filling the air with cheerful blasphemies, he began making coffee and peeling potatoes. "With a bit of luck we'll find an egg. Where's the whiskey?"

Rudolf groaned again.

"Now lad, it's never as bad as that." Flaherty flipped on the TV and killed the sound of a soap opera.

"How would you know?" *Ruined* was such an old-fashioned word. Yet it was the only one Rudolf could think of. Not Pamela, he concluded. But he'd certainly ruined his own hopes of ever planting his seed in that lovely garden again.

Flaherty found a fresh bottle.

"No!" Rudolf groaned. Was he going to have to ride herd on a drunken Flaherty too? He started to get up but his head throbbed with such psychophractic fury that he had to sit again. When he looked up Flaherty was putting a glass before him. The soap opera ended and the news came on. Flaherty turned up the sound.

The drink tasted of whiskey, tomato juice, and tabasco. Rudolf felt better immediately. Pamela appeared momentarily at the head of the stairs. "Good morning, everybody," she said. "I'll be down soon."

Rudolf discovered he was drunk again. "What time of day did she get here?" he asked.

"About noon."

"Spend the whole afternoon snooping around?"

"Lad, what makes you Indians so suspicious?"

"Five centuries of trafficking with Europeans. Will you please stay off the sauce for a while?" He told Flaherty about the muck-filled lipstick tube.

"She fell down several times."

"You weren't so forgiving when Riordan scuffed his shoes on our carpet."

"Dear boy, you don't really know if your lady friend's spying. And if she is, what difference does it make?"

It made a great deal of difference so far as his relation with Pamela went. Why did Flaherty have to be so irritatingly cheerful? Even Pamela's good morning was entirely too cheery.

Flaherty skidded a cup of coffee in front of him. "Great weekend for relaxing." He pointed at the TV where a man before a weather map was saying, "... Another eye-smarting day in prospect as the Regional Pollution Control again clamped a lid on open burning."

The weather man disappeared and another commentator said, "Meanwhile the mystery submarine works its way downriver, giving sleepy towns their first excitement since the night boat to Albany stopped running. Thousands of dying fish..." Flaherty turned it off.

"How're we going to get to Northumber? I had to ditch the car."

Flaherty thought a moment. "We could use the truck."

Rudolf gave a cracked laugh at the thought of arriving at the superposh center of the cocktail circuit in a dump truck. Then he decided it was just the touch that might reestablish him one sneer above the rest

of them. He'd been worrying about what to wear. Screw them! Wear the mud-stained clothing he'd been using to make money. His happy reverie of the ultimate put-down was interrupted by an ululating shriek ranging from grating to hypersonic. Finally Rudolf realized it was Pamela.

When he got upstairs and forced open the bathroom Pamela stood in the middle of the floor, pantyhose bagging inelegantly. She was still screaming.

Flaherty burst in. He got his arm around her and began emitting the steady stream of blarney Irishmen use to calm women and horses. Finally he got her downstairs into the kitchen and sipping a drink.

"It came right up and touched me!" she was repeating.

"You mean the — uh. The plumbing's old. Sometimes it backs up," Flaherty soothed.

"It wasn't water," Pamela wailed. "It was sticky, slimy. It reared up out of the bowl like a—" she shuddered and sipped again.

"Now now," Flaherty said, "you've had a bad night. Sometimes I see things too."

"You sodden sot!" Pamela shrieked, "I'm not an alcoholic. It was *there!* I *saw* it!"

Flaherty looked at Rudolf. Rudolf bounded upstairs and closed the bathroom door. "Tuchi!" he hissed. "What the hell are you doing here?"

## CHAPTER 6

There was no answer. The water in the john remained quiescent. Rudolf poked with a long-handled brush and decided it really was water. The plumbing in this old house had been known to give an occasional disconcerting belch. Perhaps after last night Pamela had been overwrought. She was, after all, a delicate, sensitive person.

With Flaherty doing the lion's share, it still took half an hour to convince her that it was all in her mind. But by the time they were eating breakfast Pamela was almost gay, thanks to more draughts of Irish Tranquilizer. Flaherty glanced at Rudolf. "Sure and there was nothing up there?" he whispered.

Rudolf shook his head.

When the first mention of dump truck threatened to unravel all of Flaherty's calming Rudolf surrendered. They crowded into the oriental red Lamborghini with a thoughtful and slightly anaesthetized Pamela slumped in the middle.

Halfway there she revived enough to turn on the tape deck. There emerged a monotonous chanting and thumping in some language Rudolf didn't recognize. Mohawk? Christ, as if he hadn't heard enough owlscreaching back on the reservation! He stood it for a minute, then shrieked a war whoop and bits of the disaster-to-enemy curse. Pamela started from her lethargy. "He's off key," Rudolf said. "It hurts my ears!"

Impressed with such esoteric sensitivity, Pamela flipped a switch and the tape was replaced with news. "... thousands of dead lampreys and hagfish as the unknown poison makes its way toward the mouth of the Hudson along with persistent rumors of — a submarine? A man from Mars? Witnesses could agree only that mysterious booms and flashes accompany the fish kill."

Pamela turned it off.

Rudolf found the exit ramp and switched to another turnpike, studying the rear-view mirror and wondering if it was just his paranoid imagination or was that blue VW really following him?

"What's a hagfish?" he asked.

The Flaherty roused from his study of the scenery. "Cyclostome," he said. "Related to the lampreys."

"Thanks for clearing that up."

Flaherty laughed. "The hagfish waits till a big fish is hooked and can't move."

"I don't think I want to hear this," Pamela said.

"Slimy little brutes," the Flaherty continued. "Tentacles round their mouths. Cut open a shark and he's hollow, full of drowned hagfish. They go up the anal vent."

Pamela looked straight ahead with compressed, whitened lips.

"You're an ichthyologist too?" Rudolf asked.

"No, lad. I was a fisherman."

They arrived at Northumber. The baronial magnificence of the St. Audrey country seat was a mixture of English medieval and Hollywood silent. Rudolf had never been certain which was which but he was always impressed. They went past a gate house up a looping driveway and were greeted by a huge butler who smiled and yassued as if he had never heard of black power.

In the drawing room Rudolf saw the cocktail crowd still arguing theology, about how many clients could dance on the pinhead of a case worker. A well-constructed young woman wearing something vaguely maid-mod offered him a drink from a tray. *My god*, Rudolf thought, *it's only noon!* From the corner of his eye he saw Flaherty accept a glass. Rudolf took a sip of his own and resolved to carry it around the rest of the day. Somebody had to ride herd on the wild Irishman.

He looked around for a friendly face. There were people he knew but none seemed to know him. Then somebody clapped a hand over his shoulder. "Hello, haven't seen you around lately."

It was a long-haired man dressed in very expensive mod clothes which did not quite conceal the fact that he was too old to wear them. Rudolf remembered him vaguely as having something to do with the media. He found the dark-haired, vaguely Indian looking girl beside him far more interesting than all the long-haired man's studied elegance. "I've been busy," Rudolf said, and let his eyes wander back to the girl.

"That's nice." Longhair smiled, his eyes darting nervously in search of bigger game. "What've you been up to?" he asked.

"Axe murder," Rudolf said. When there was no reaction he continued, "Got tired of the wife's nagging. Kids were a drag so I adopted a goat and took up animal husbandry."

The dark-haired girl betrayed the hint of a smile.

"Really?" Longhair said. "Sounds interesting. Hope you sell a million copies." They drifted apart and Rudolf was fating a pouty, pigeon breasted woman whose wig had slipped enough to reveal a fringe of iron gray hair.

"Oooooooooohhhhh," she began, "you must be the Indian Pamela was telling me about. Tell me, is it difficult to play the sitar?"

"I don't know," Rudolf said. "I'm not that kind of Indian."

"Your English is very good. Have you been here long?"

"Several generations."

"That's nice. Did you fly or come by ship?"

"We walked."

"Oh?" She was still frowning when a cigar followed by a barrel caught Rudolf's arm. "Been wanting to talk to you all day," the barrel said.

"I just got here."

"I know, I know. Now, about that color spread, we can do it bleed; but a gatefold — man, do you know what those things cost?"

"Do it any way you want," Rudolf said. "I rely implicitly on your expertise."

Across the room a knot of people parted momentarily. The Mohawk glanced up and met Rudolf's eyes. He smiled and for the barest flicker Rudolf saw canary feathers stuck between his gleaming teeth. The crowd closed again, leaving Rudolf to wonder what that goddamn Mohawk was doing here. He looked around for Flaherty. The wild Irishman was helping himself to another cocktail from the mod-maid who was trying not to giggle while he made a production of admiring her matched set.

Pamela had disappeared. The Flaherty looked up from his ogling and caught Rudolf's eye with an unreadable expression. Rudolf wondered how drunk he was. He also wondered what was going on back at the gravel pit. If Pamela and Riordan both knew...

Pamela appeared at the head of the curving staircase, looking so exquisitely virginal in a white

cocktail dress that Rudolf found it difficult to believe he had disported himself last night with this fragile flower. A hush crept over the room as heads turned. There was a cheer and applause as she descended the staircase. Royalty, Rudolf decided, could not have done it better. "Rudy, darling!" She crossed the room to kiss him. "I've finally found him!" she exclaimed to the gawkers.

Rudolf wondered if a white man would be suspicious. That sullen, reservation mentality was taking over again, trying to guess what these bastards wanted from him this time. It couldn't be money. They all had more than he did. From the corner of his eye he saw that goddamn Mohawk, now stripped of his circle of admirers. The canary feathers were no longer visible in his teeth. Neither were his teeth.

A scowling, out-of-place man wearing a pepper-and-salt suit and the harassed look of an accountant on a movie set meandered about, conversing with no one. Rudolf wondered where he had seen him before, then he saw the Flaherty throw a smoldering glance and remembered. It was the foot-scuttling detective who had tracked them down. Riordan!

But Pamela St. Audrey still led him on a triumphal tour around the drawing room. Silently, Rudolf thanked whatever gods held jurisdiction that she seemed to have forgotten last night's drunken inquisition. He still carried the glass in his hand, waiting a chance to substitute it for an empty.

The goddamn Mohawk gave Rudolf a hearty handshake and a non-ornithophobic grin as Pamela thrust them together. Before Rudolf could maneuver for a killing blow Pamela had swept him on to a gaggle of tweedy types busy regaining their academic freedom.

"You're of the involved generation," one said to Rudolf. "How would you end the war?"

"Dam the Mekong," Rudolf suggested. "When the country's neck-deep in water, transport every native who opts for capitalism. Build a tube to bring down enough Yukon water to turn Arizona into a rice paddy."

"But what about the cactus?" an ecologist cried.

"Transplant it to the Boeing parking lot in Seattle."

"How about the Indians?"

"Well," Rudolf sighed, "in every war somebody has to lose."

Pamela led him to a closed door.

"Where are we going?"

She gave a mysterious smile. They proceeded down a hall and she opened another door. Suddenly Rudolf realized he was being pushed into the traditional smoke-filled room. "What the hell's going on?" he asked. But Pamela was gone.

There was a single overwhelming air to this room. Each man radiated power like a miniature nuclear reactor. Unlike the media clowns out in the front room, Rudolf had never seen these men. Then he realized he had seen one. Pamela's father was smiling at him.

"Been wanting to talk to you for some time," St. Audrey said, his man-of-distinction image coming across undiluted. Turning to the others, he said, "Gentlemen, I give you Rudolf Redwolf, the young man I was talking about."

In the back of Rudolf's mind was the memory of a vacuum cleaner salesman who had covered the reservation, unworried by any lack of electricity. "Have a cigar," Mr. St. Audrey was saying. Though Rudolf had been in and out of Northumber for months, this was the first complete sentence he had ever gotten from Pamela's father. The old man had done little to disguise his contempt for Pamela's liberal friends and causes.

Investment banker types were shaking one of Rudolf's hands. He had a brandy snifter in the other and a cigar in his mouth. *Christ*, he thought, *if I were white I'd look like li'l Abner!*

"... Organizing a new company," Mr. St. Audrey was saying. "We want you."

"Why?"

St. Audrey laughed. "Didn't I tell you he was sharp?" he said admiringly. "To put it bluntly, we need an Indian."

"You've got one out in the front room."

St. Audrey laughed again. "With just about enough brains to stand in front of a cigar store," he said. "I can be just as frank as you. As long as we're getting a token Indian I'd rather have one who knows

when to open his umbrella. He's out."

Rudolf laughed. "Couldn't happen to a nicer guy. But what kind of company? Why do you need an Indian? And why me?"

St. Audrey closed a fist. "Building and construction supplies." He straightened one finger. "A man to negotiate with a predominantly Indian union of high rise steel workers." He straightened another finger. "You've written about the Iroquois who make up the bulk of the union and my daughter thinks you know what you're talking about." He straightened the third finger.

"Is this company set up especially to supply material for that fancy new building you're putting up?" Rudolf asked.

"That's right, son."

*Already a member of the family!*

"What kind of a partnership are you offering?"

"Full," St. Audrey said.

"How many partners?"

"There are, uh — eight of us, counting you."

"How much is each partner putting up?"

St. Audrey smiled. "You'd have to ask my accountant for an exact figure."

"How about an inexact figure?"

"About a million apiece."

"And I get an equal partnership without putting up anything?"

"Well, uh, naturally we'd expect you to contribute something. An assignment of future profits should take care of the legal aspects."

Between the smells of brandy and cigars Rudolf detected a faint odor of fish. "Your building is going together with aluminum girders instead of steel. Do you want me to negotiate the Structural Iron Workers *in*, or do I negotiate them *out*?"

There were startled hems and haws while Rudolf drew a breath. "Or," he continued, "is this whole gig just to con me into assigning my rights to a process somebody hasn't been able to steal?"

"See!" St. Audrey cackled. "I told you he had a head on his shoulders."

Rudolf felt like using St. Audrey's smug smile to put out his cigar. These fine-haired sons of bitches were admitting it, laughing and smiling as if it were perfectly proper to screw him out of his one chance ever to get rich. Custer, he decided, must have had a smile very like Mr. St. Audrey's.

Rudolf wondered where the old canard about Indians having poker faces had started. He couldn't hide his contempt for this horde of barefaced pirates. Homicidal fury welled until he didn't dare speak.

St. Audrey patted his shoulder. "We gambled and we lost," he said.

Rudolf drew a breath, counted to ten, and tried to think beautiful thoughts. The only thing that came to mind was the superbly engineered curve of Pamela's posterior. "Did your daughter know why she was leading me here?" he asked.

St. Audrey laughed. "Pamela's not business minded. She probably assumes it's the usual prospective-son-in-law inquisition."

*In front of a bunch of bankers?* In the back of Rudolf's mind sirens were screaming and bells clanging. Marriage to Pamela! He tried to speak normally.

"Why should I join your company?"

A balding man with a Bernard Baruch pince nez cleared his throat. "There are legal aspects you may not have considered," he rumbled. "Dr. Flaherty is under contract. Anything he discovers is legally ours."

"You're welcome to anything Dr. Flaherty discovers."

"Come now," St. Audrey laughed. "You don't expect us to believe it's your discovery!"

Rudolf smiled back. "Shanghai the good doctor," he said. "Lock him up with truth serums and transmission microscopes. Dump a few millions down the drain. While you're at it, run another search and see if I was stupid enough to apply for a patent. Working from the full knowledge that this Indian has had experience with the white man's paper, give one good reason why he should share his private bonanza with thieves and highwaymen."

"I told you he was smart," St. Audrey gloated. It was almost as if he were on Rudolf's side. There was puffing of cigars and shaking of wattled jaws. Finally St. Audrey interrupted the debate.

"The main reason you should join us," he told Rudolf, "is self interest. We could play mutually destructive games of suit and countersuit, drag it through the courts for years, and only the lawyers would win. I prefer to avoid that. Not just because we both lose, but because the third party who gained might not have the country's best interests at heart."

"Spare me the commie menace," Rudolf said. "I'm busy fighting the godless capitalists."

"We're not fighting," St. Audrey protested. "We ask you to join us. Name your own price."

"In return for what?"

"Protection. The government, for instance, might get ideas about security. If you want horror stories, check out how much Einstein or Oppenheimer ever made out of nuclear power. Go it alone and you'll end up outside watching us, or somebody far more ruthless, spend the money that could have been yours."

"Isn't that what you were planning to do to me?"

"Not exactly," St. Audrey said. "We financed Dr. Flaherty. Don't you think we're entitled to a return on our money?"

"You didn't finance me."

"And you didn't tell us this discovery was yours."

Suddenly Rudolf realized these pirates had a point. "Suppose I go along."

"Full partnership, a full share of the profits."

"Who runs the show?"

"A majority vote, naturally."

"Seven against one?"

St. Audrey shifted uncomfortably. "You might put it that way."

"I'd like to put it another way. How about a corporation instead of a partnership? Say, fifty-one percent of the voting stock to the man whose process made the whole thing possible?"

"I told you he was smart!" St. Audrey didn't sound so happy this time.

The door opened and Flaherty stood blinking owlishly, trying to focus.

"This is a private meeting!" the man with the Baruch pince nez snapped, and tried to close the door.

"Not that private!" Flaherty said belligerently, and charged into the room. "Dear boy, what're these gombeen men doin' you out of? Maybe if you took your trousers off right now you wouldn't feel the draft so bad on the way home."

"I'm not sure," Rudolf said. "But they seem to think I'm responsible for your past liabilities."

For a drunk the Flaherty was surprisingly quick on the uptake. "When I walked out, dear boy, I left my laboratory and my notes intact. Since *they* misrepresented, I see no legal or moral impediments..."

"Enough," St. Audrey said. "Let the dead bury the dead. One or both of you has a valuable discovery. Neither of you has capital. Draw up your own agreement. If it's not too outrageous, we'll sign."

Rudolf looked at Flaherty. "You've dealt with these people," he said. "Where's the hook in that?"

Flaherty grinned drunkenly. "Git a flit gun full o' holy water and see how many of them turn to cinders."

Rudolf guessed he'd have to do without the wild Irishman's help. What *was* wrong with an offer like that? Surely it was as ironclad as — as any treaty made with an Indian. But the Flaherty was off and running.

"Just phwhat is it your riverences are buyin' for all those golden promises?" he asked.

The pince nez type who'd tried to close the door huffed mightily. Rudolf cleared his throat and shot pince nez a glance that stopped him in mid-huff. There was a moment's gabble then St. Audrey took over again.

"You have a process. We want to buy it."

"Oh, aye," the Flaherty said. "You want to buy it."

"Supplies of clean, hydro-electric power are limited." Flaherty was speaking clearly now, with no

trace of drunkenness. "With every available river dammed more thoroughly than your riverences' souls, future needs must be met with nuclear or fossil fuels, both of which pollute."

He paused and peered from beneath shaggy brows. Rudolf wondered why none of St. Audrey's golden horde seemed anxious to meet the wild Irishman's gaze.

"Now as civilization shifts from steel to aluminum, a process to extract that latter without electricity, and without belching noxious fumes into the air, would benefit mankind immeasurably, wouldn't it?"

The drunken fog seemed to descend on Flaherty again. He paused after his rhetorical question, staring at St. Audrey's men until he had extracted a grudging "yes" from each.

"Now," he continued, "we're all noble minded gentlemen, working selflessly for the good of humanity and the future of the planet. Sure and there's nothing wrong with making a profit on the way. Shan't muzzle the ox, eh?"

There was a flurry of happy noises. Rudolf grew more puzzled by the minute.

"Now," Flaherty resumed, "whin we write up this agreement, we'll have the usual delay clauses and penalties just in case the process isn't working full steam within, say ninety days?" He gazed about the room with such soulfully trusting eyes that Rudolf could not understand why nobody would look at the Irishman.

Rudolf felt to see if he still had his pants.

"What kind of penalty clause did you have in mind?" St. Audrey asked.

Flaherty thought a moment. "What would you say the process could make us — me and this dear boy — over the next twenty years?"

St. Audrey was remarkably sick looking for a man discussing potential profits. "Hard to say," he fenced. "Inflation, so many factors."

"In round Figures," Flaherty insisted.

"Maybe a billion."

Rudolf thought he had heard wrong. Then he thought he was going to faint. If a million was a thousand thousand and a billion was a thousand million — did anybody aside from governments actually have this kind of money? He wanted to take it and run but the Flaherty... Was the wild Irishman crazy? Maybe all that booze over the years... As if in a dream Rudolf heard Flaherty continue:

"Now it's just a formality, of course, since we're going to rush into production as soon as we can. But just assuming something goes wrong and this dear boy is denied the fruits of his honest toil... Shall we put in a penalty clause specifying delivery of five hundred million in cash or negotiable securities if our new corporation is not producing aluminum and paying this dear boy a million a month within ninety days?"

The silence was glacial. St. Audrey studied his associates' faces and they exchanged silent messages.

"It would take longer than that just to design the plant," St. Audrey complained.

"Oime a reasonable man," Flaherty said. "Make it six months."

The silence continued.

Looking at Rudolf, the wild Irishman said, "Well, since we're all honorable, well-intentioned gentlemen, let's make it a year."

"Wouldn't you be just as happy with a guarantee of a million a month minimum as of now?" St. Audrey asked.

Every fiber of Rudolf's being wanted to scream *Yes! I'll take it! Gimme the paper to sign!* But Flaherty's look warned him. Rudolf struggled for possession of his soul. Flaherty was a drunk. Flaherty was crazy. But Flaherty had something on his mind that Rudolf couldn't even guess at. Rudolf looked at the golden horde. Not a red nose or blotched vein among them. Would one of them, he wondered, sell a pint of his blood to raise capital for Rudolf? As if in a bad dream Rudolf heard himself saying, "I rely implicitly on Dr. Flaherty's judgment."

The silence had been glacial. Now it approached absolute zero. After a moment St. Audrey shifted and cleared his throat. "Then I guess there's nothing more to say."

Suddenly Flaherty looked very drunk again. Rudolf got his arm around him and they exited, leaving glaring, frustrated money-makers behind them.



"Rudy, darling!" Pamela had been lying in wait. "What did Daddy say?"

"Good-bye."

"What?" Pamela's shock was unfeigned. "But Rudy, I worked so hard to bring you together—"

"Sorry about that," Rudolf said. "Dr. Flaherty isn't feeling well. Could you call us a taxi?"

"But I — oh! Why don't you take the Lamborghini?"

"It's too rich for my blood," Rudolf said. "I'd only have to bring it back."

"I'll come with you. I'll get one of the limousines so we can all..."

Rudolf felt that sullen reservation mentality descending on him again. He remembered Pamela's hollowed-out lipstick and the sample of muck. "I'm sorry, Miss Capulet," he said, "us Montagues got no business in these hallowed halls." It was going to be painful excising Pamela St. Audrey from his life but Rudolf guessed he'd have to. "Just show me the phone," he snapped. "I'll call my own taxi. And if Daddy plans sending any more spies, tell him trespassers will be violated — just like the last one."

All the way to the station Rudolf remembered how Pamela's face had slowly changed from puzzlement to outrage.

## CHAPTER 7

Flaherty was really out of it. Rudolf tried to feed him coffee while they waited in the bus station. Finally he let the Irishman doze on a waiting room bench. The bus began loading and he had to half carry his somnolent partner aboard. Halfway home and at some ungodly hour of the after-dark Flaherty revived enough to ask for whiskey.

"No way," Rudolf said. "First you tell me why I'm not collecting a million a month as of this afternoon!"

"You could have accepted. I didn't tell you not to."

"But you... oh, horseshit! Will somebody please tell me what's going on?"

"Standard Oil."

"What?"

"Haven't you ever heard the story about the guy who invented something that makes a car run on water?"

"You mean that tired old bull about suppressed inventions?"

"If they actually intended to go into production, why did they balk at a delay clause?"

"But why?" Rudolf wailed. "We could all make money and better the world while we were at it!"

"They," Flaherty said pointedly, "are already making money."

"But..."

"They're already overextended. They've contracted for aluminum at the going rate and you expect them to introduce a new process and undercut themselves?"

"Overextended? How do you know these things?"

"It's in the paper."

"I've never seen it."

"It's on that pageful of fine print. Like anything else in the white man's world, you have to learn how to read a stock quotation."

Mentally Rudolf recited the disaster-to-enemy curse upon the professor who had talked him into an English major. Why couldn't he have learned something that would let him make a living?

They transferred to another bus. *What the hell am I riding buses for?* Rudolf wondered. *I've got a pocketful of money.* But he realized buses would be as quick as anything he could arrange this time of night. Finally they were in a decrepit, hick town taxi for the last twenty miles home. The Flaherty was feeling better now, tired from the long ride but not as bedeviled by thirst.

"There's another thing about million-dollar-a-month salaries," he said.

"Taxes?"

"I was thinking of the other inevitability."

"Death? You don't think they'd kill us!"

"Not as long as we have the magic and they don't," Flaherty murmured with a glance toward the driver behind his plate glass.

"But they're businessmen. They're not gangsters."

"There's a difference?"

There was an astonishingly loud noise and the window on Flaherty's side of the cab shattered inward. The Irishman was facing Rudolf so the particles didn't get in his eyes as the bullet passed through the cab and pushed out the window on Rudolf's side. The driver laid a streak down the road. "Goddamn city hunters!" he yelled. "Ain't got a brain in their heads."

Rudolf brushed glass from his chest. He had never been shot at before. He decided he didn't like it. "Hunters?" he said. "I thought it was against the law to hunt after dark."

"Is," the driver said through the grille. "They're jumpin' the gun. Be daylight in another ten minutes."

Rudolf looked at Flaherty who shrugged. Rudolf suddenly realized he might go through the rest of his life without ever knowing whether it had been careless hunters or...

The house had been ransacked so neatly that Rudolf had trouble believing it but finally the sum total of things put away not quite where they usually were convinced him. "Got to get out to the gravel pit," he said.

"We'll fry some prawnies and bacon first."

"But they might have gotten away with something important!"

"Only one thing's important. Considering how we depend on that one little gadget, I think it's time I got back to work."

"On what?"

"Suppose it gets stolen — or quits working?"

"What do you need?"

"A transmission microscope."

"We've got money now. Go ahead and buy one."

Flaherty laughed. "Dear boy, a transmission electron microscope fills a fair-sized room and costs one third of the national debt."

Rudolf began peeling potatoes. "So what do we do?"

Flaherty put bacon in the skillet. "I've some suspicions about the nature of the problem," he said. "I can bungle a bit with an optical microscope but sooner or later I'll have to get inside a chromosome."

They breakfasted glumly, trying to counteract a night on buses with overdoses of coffee. "Who do you think shot at us?" Rudolf asked.

Flaherty shrugged. "Have to see if it happens again."

Rudolf found this unappealing. "Were they trying to kill us or scare us?"

Flaherty shrugged again. "Like every Irishman, I'm only descended from kings. You're from the mighty hunters. What could you hit from a distance, moving fast, and in the dark? You know," he added, "we've all kinds of loose money around this house. Whoever searched the place didn't touch it but now somebody knows..."

"But a bank—"

"St. Audrey's golden horde could tie us up so many ways..."

Rudolf thought a moment. "Traveler's checks?"

The Flaherty smiled. They went about the house gathering up bills. While they had been gone the rest of the manila envelopes had been delivered. "Have to go out to the gravel pit," Rudolf said. "I mailed some there."

"Aye," Flaherty agreed. "Time to get back to work anyway."

They went out to the dump truck and Rudolf wrenched open a door. There was a man stretched out on the seat with a pistol in his hand. At first Rudolf thought he was dead. Then the muzzle moved to point straight at them.

The man straightened and got out. Walking casually with one hand in his pocket, he herded them back inside the kitchen. "The money was here all the time," Rudolf grouched. "Why didn't you just take it and clear out?" There was something vaguely familiar about this gunman. Rudolf tried to remember where he'd seen him before.

"Around here you have to get in line," the bandit said. "And I wanted to see you anyway."

Suddenly Rudolf recognized him. "You're one of those longhairs I gave the car to!"

"It isn't long any more."

"What happened?"

"Some apple-knocking sheriff held us for a week while a bunch of out-of-town heat kept pumping."

The sink was running over again and water was puddling all over the floor. "Now what the hell—?" Rudolf began.

The bandit waved them to one side and closed the door. While Rudolf stared, he stepped into the puddle and went skidding. His gun hand waved wildly. The gun went off. It clattered across the floor and went off again. Rudolf suspected he would be permanently deaf. The bandit sat in the middle of the floor looking shocked and sick. "Jesus!" he said. "Somebody could get hurt!"

Flaherty scooped up the pistol and did something to the safety. Absently, Rudolf noticed the wet was already retreating as the linoleum dried. He checked the kitchen faucet. No water was dripping.

Flaherty found a chair and sat, still aiming the pistol at the deflated bandit. "Shall I kill him now or do you want to torture him?" he asked.

Rudolf wondered if the Flaherty was in any condition to hold a gun. "Only if he doesn't talk," he said.

"I'm talking," the hippie insisted. "I'm telling you everything just like I told them."

"What's everything?"

"Nothing except that you cats are onto something big and there's a half dozen different dudes out to burn you."

"Different?"

"While I was out there waitin' for you, two guys pass-keyed the back door and spent a half hour inside. As soon's they were gone two more did the same. They hurried out the front just as another guy was going in the rear."

"What'd they look like?"

"Like a million other plainclothesmen. Now that last guy—" He went on to describe Riordan.

Rudolf looked at Flaherty for inspiration and found none. "What happened to your two friends I gave the car to?" he finally asked.

"They split as soon's we got out."

"How'd you find me?"

"One of those out-of-town dudes let something slip."

"What'd they want to know?"

"How long I'd known you, where we met, how many others in on it?"

"In on what?"

"Near's I read it you guys hit an armored car and they're tryin' to buy it back without a lot of noise."

Flaherty laughed. "Didn't it strike you as just a trifle foolhardy to get mixed up in something like that?"

Looking at his pistol in the Irishman's hand, the would-be bandit soberly agreed.

"Where'd you get the gun?" Flaherty asked.

"I was goin' through the car t'see if maybe they left a little stash — just a couple of joints — and I found it between the cushions. Is it yours?"

"Did it never occur to you that somebody else might know it was there — maybe the man who 'let slip' where my young friend is?"

The short-haired man was looking sicker by the minute.

"Offhand," Flaherty continued, "I'd say you're set up for the high hurdle once the gentlemen who're shooting at us finish the job. You have a weapon, a motive, and an opportunity."

"Jesus!" the hippie moaned.

Rudolf looked admiringly at the Flaherty, wishing he had a mind that could see things like that. But it was scant comfort to know people — prospective inlaws — were shooting at him. Maybe he should have accepted the golden horde's offer...

"Why did you come here?" Flaherty asked.

The young man squirmed. "I was heading for the coast, broke and happy, until this Indian cat came into my life. The least he could do is lay some bread on me."

"How much?"

More squirming and soul searching.

Rudolf pulled fifty dollars from his pocket and tossed it. The bandit's face lit up. "I'll split," he promised. "You'll never see me again."

"Do that," Flaherty said. "As soon's we're dead they'll pick you up."

"Jesus!" the young man wailed. "What can I do?"

Flaherty checked the safety and tossed the pistol back into the hippie's lap. "You might learn how to use that," he said. "You'll have to notice who comes in or out of this place. If you're busted I never heard of you, so don't go murderin' the Fuller Brush man."

The young man picked up the pistol gingerly. "Jesus!" he murmured. "Me a bodyguard!"

"It's your body," Flaherty said. He produced another fifty dollars. "Get some clothes that'll keep the locals off your back."

"It's what semanticists call a double bind," Flaherty said as the would-be bandit exited. "Damned if you do and double damned if you don't. I muchly doubt if a rent-a-cop would have the kind of motivation that young dipshit has for keeping us healthy. Meanwhile, dear boy, you'd best gather up the money before we have another visit."

"Right," Rudolf said. "But I'd like to see what made that water so slick our young friend slipped in it."

"Ah," the Flaherty said. "So you noticed that too?"

"Tuchi!" Rudolf called. "We're alone. You can come out now."

Nothing happened.

"Maybe we're imagining it," Flaherty said.

"Pamela too?" Rudolf felt a pang at the realization that he would never again plant his seed in Pamela St. Audrey's gorgeous garden.

They stared at the sink for several moments. When nothing happened Rudolf gathered up the money and they got into the dump truck.

The gravel pit had been thoroughly gone over too, but the envelopes full of mailed currency were intact. Wondering how many culture samples had been stolen and how many biologists were quietly going nuts trying to figure why the culture refused to live longer than eight days, Rudolf drove back to the village bank and bought traveler's checks. He drove on to a larger town and bought more, spreading his purchases around banks and travel agencies in a faint hope of not attracting attention.

It was afternoon when he got back. Flaherty was still fiddling around in the laboratory he had rigged up out at the gravel pit. "Nothing new on the aluminophage," he said, "but I think I'm onto something with the high tolerance yeast."

"That's a great help. How's the crop doing?"

"Ready for sowing. You got the—" Suddenly Flaherty stopped himself and pantomimed caution. He made hand-to-ear gestures until Rudolf realized the place was bugged.

"The house too, I suppose?" Rudolf asked.

"I wouldn't doubt it."

Rudolf went out to the pit. Flaherty had scraped up the top two inches of muck with the dozer blade on the truck. Rudolf was reaching in his pocket for the incubator when something caught his eye. He

looked again. Nearly a minute passed while he moved aimlessly about, twisting his head this way and that but not taking his eyes from a certain spot. Finally he was rewarded with another glint. He wondered if it was the reflection off binoculars or a telephoto lens. Disgustedly, he went back into the lab. With his mouth to the wild Irishman's ear, he whispered his discovery.

They stood silently staring at each other while Rudolf felt an idea germinating. "Let's go home," he said out loud. "I'll do it tomorrow morning."

"I do wish to the holy St. Potluck that this benighted bailey had a restaurant," Flaherty groused as he prepared an evening meal. "Dear boy, what're you doin' with that feather duster?"

Rudolf raised a finger to his lips and shook his head. They ate silently, wanting to talk but remembering the bugs. "I suppose you've found one," Rudolf said.

"Aye. They're so damned small you'd never find thim all."

"There're companies that'll clean them out for a price."

"Aye," the Flaherty gloomed, "but whose price?"

They sat over empty plates and finally last night's bus ride caught up. "I've had it," Rudolf said. "Good night."

"Good night," Flaherty said absently.

Rudolf was performing solemn rites enthroned when he felt something cold and clammy contact an extremely sensitive area. For an instant he was tempted to shriek louder than Pamela, then he got control of himself.

"Tuchi!" he exclaimed. "What're you doing here? Was it you making all those bangs and killing the fish? I thought you'd be gone by now." Rudolf finished raising his half masted pants. "By the way," he continued, "a lady doesn't grab a gentleman there."

"A gentleman doesn't swindle a lady with adulterated aluminum," Tuchi said exasperatedly. "My ship's drive is clogged. It will take months to repair. I must have the—"

"Shhhhhhh!" Rudolf suddenly remembered the house was bugged.

"Don't shush me!" Tuchi snapped. "Thanks to you I'm stuck here! In a month's traveling your waterways I have found pike, perch, horse mackerel, crawfish, hagfish, minnows — everything on this polluted cesspool of a planet shares one characteristic: They all find me irresistible. I've been gouged, chewed, bit, pecked, sucked, nibbled, and gummed. Nothing that swims, flies, or crawls can refrain from trying to eat me. Now I want that—"

"Quiet, for Christ's sake!" Rudolf begged, "You'll have the golden horde here in minutes!"

Tuchi's triangle-spaced black dots reared up through the seat of the john. "Now!" the alien threatened.

There was a pounding on the door downstairs. "Already!" Rudolf moaned. "If *they* ever find out you exist you'll never see home again," he assured the alien. "This house is bugged — wired for sound. They're listening to everything we say."

Flaherty was growling blasphemies in his transit-mix baritone as he bumped and stumbled down the stairway. Rudolf heard the door open. There was a moment's muffled conversation, then Flaherty called, "Dear boy, there's a young lady here who'll just die if she doesn't see you."

"Oh Christ!" Rudolf moaned. He was torn with the desire to see her again, to get her upstairs and... But Pamela St. Audrey's arrival just now had to be more than coincidence. If she saw Tuchi again — if the golden horde ever discovered where Rudolf had gotten the process... Then he calmed slightly. Tuchi didn't have another incubator. Rudolf still held the only one in this solar system. He intended to keep it, no matter what the cost.

The voices were growing louder. Good god! Rudolf thought, he's bringing her upstairs! Hastily, he zipped up his trousers.

"I want it back now!" Tuchi's three-dotted face reared higher. Flaherty pounded on the bathroom door.

"Lady to see you!" he boomed.

"And they talk about wild Indians!" Rudolf muttered.

Tuchi was starting to flow up over the edge of the seat. Suddenly Rudolf wondered how the alien had killed all those fish. "Be right with you," he yelled. Breathing a silent prayer, he flushed the toilet.

## CHAPTER 8

There was a sound which was to recur in nightmares for the rest of Rudolf's life as water rose to the brim of the bowl, then suddenly disappeared, taking an outraged extraterrestrial with it.

Rudolf checked his fly and studied his face in the mirror. He braced himself and tried to smile as he opened the door.

There was nobody there. Finally he realized he had only imagined Flaherty was bringing her upstairs. He went down to the living room where the wild Irishman stood, bending gallantly over a well-rounded bosom in the moderate décolletage of a traveling suit.

It wasn't Pamela St. Audrey's. Rudolf stared a moment at the dark-haired, vaguely Indian looking girl on the sofa. Finally he realized he had seen her yesterday at Northumber.

"Any axe murders today?" she asked.

Rudolf gave a guilty start and wondered if flushing the toilet had done the alien any permanent damage.

"Don't ever let Lars take your picture," the girl warned, "unless you want to be immortalized picking your nose."

"Who?" Then abruptly Rudolf realized she meant the aging longhair in the mod threads. What the hell was this girl doing here — as if he couldn't guess!

"I'm Lillith Lasky," she said. "I'm with *Life*."

"I don't believe it!"

She began fumbling in her purse.

"Anybody can fake credentials," Rudolf said. "I just don't believe your name's Lillith."

"My father believed most devoutly in God's malevolence," Lillith explained. "That's why he named me for a lady who lived prior to the time God started looking after us Jews."

Rudolf stared blankly at the Flaherty. "There seems a thread of some dark theology here," the Irishman said.

Lillith smiled. "As my sainted father puts it, 'How could I squander so much hatred on something that doesn't exist?'"

"As your sainted father *puts* it?" Flaherty echoed. "The poor man *is* dead, isn't he?"

"No. He just turned Mormon."

Rudolf wondered if the golden horde's tentacles reached *into Life*. He could feel that sullen reservation mentality closing in again.

"You're news," the girl said. "And I'm just the first of the thundering herd."

"Just what we need," Rudolf growled.

Lillith shrugged. "You can let us take wild guesses or you can play it cool."

"How?"

"You must have some axe to grind. Maneuver and manipulate. Use the news to tell it your way."

For a man who had had some experience with the media Rudolf decided he had been remarkably obtuse. "What would you like to have?" he asked.

"A story about an Indian who's making it the white man's way."

"Who sent you?"

"Would you go for the one about girl reporter's first big assignment?"

Rudolf snorted.

"No, I didn't think you would. Actually, I can do more for you than you can for me."

"Sure," Rudolf said sourly. "You brought us God, taught us how to bow our heads in prayer. When we looked up the land was all gone."

"Save it for the WASPs," Lillith said. "I'm a minority too."

"I *am* a WASP."

"Oh?"

"A Wild-Assed Sioux Prick."

Lillith laughed delightedly. "Can I quote you?"

"Why not? But really, I'm beat. Can't it wait till morning?"

"Sure. My camper's parked outside. Oh, by the way, this belongs to some weirdo out in the bushes." She tossed a pistol into Rudolf's lap. Remembering the last time it had bounced, Rudolf made a valiant try for the chandelier. "Relax," Lillith said. "I unloaded it. Can I use your bathroom?"

"Most assuredly," Flaherty said.

"Be back in a minute." Lillith disappeared out the front door.

Rudolf looked at Flaherty. Flaherty looked at the gun. "May as well lock it up before that idiot blows his toes off," he sighed.

Moments later Lillith Lasky reappeared in a dark blue robe and carrying a small case of the tools women use to prove they are not men. Suddenly Rudolf realized horrendous possibilities. "You can't — I mean, uh, be careful," he finished lamely.

Flaherty gave him an odd look as Lillith disappeared up the stairs.

"Tuchi," Rudolf explained.

"She's back?"

With one ear cocked for a scream, Rudolf told Flaherty what had happened.

"I see," the Irishman said gravely. "Not much point in watching our talk if the poor slime's blown the gaff like that."

"What's going to happen?" Rudolf asked.

Flaherty shrugged. "You shouldn't have traded that canoe."

"Now you tell me."

"I told you then."

"I know." Rudolf thought a moment. "You said once that it was just a matter of time before somebody else works it out. How long do you think it'll take?"

"Dear boy, if I knew that I'd know the answer to the problem."

"What is the problem?"

"They die." Flaherty pursed his lips. "No lad, that's not all the problem. It's the energy exchanges. Somebody's taking money out of the bank without putting any in."

"I don't get it."

Flaherty sighed. "You were going to be an engineer once. Do you know what 'heat of formation' means?"

"It's been a while. Isn't it the energy that goes into or comes out of a chemical reaction?"

"Aye. Now, d'you know what the solar constant is?"

"How can it be constant? Wouldn't it vary with latitude and weather and all kinds of things?"

"Aye, down here it would," the Flaherty agreed, "but the solar constant is the amount of radiant solar energy received normally at the outer layer of the earth's atmosphere. It averages about one point ninety-four gram calories per square centimeter per minute."

"I'll take your word for it."

Flaherty was on his feet now, pacing back and forth. "The higher the heat of formation, the more stable the compound. This is just another way of saying it's easier to turn wood into ashes than it is to turn ashes back into wood. One way you're taking energy out and the other way you're putting energy back in. Now, what kind of compound would have a low heat of formation?"

"Something unstable, I guess."

"Right. When you find a compound with a low heat of formation it usually takes a lot of roundabout

steps to make it. Some compounds even have negative heats of formation."

"Like nitroglycerine?"

"See lad," Flaherty exulted, "you're not totally ruined by a liberal arts degree! Now alumina," he continued, "is very stable. It's an ash formed from the burning of metallic aluminum in oxygen."

"A high heat of formation?" Rudolf guessed.

"Considerably higher than the solar constant."

"Oh." Rudolf began to see the problem.

"Our aluminophage can only get energy from the sun. It's not getting enough to do what we see it doing. Now where's the extra energy coming from?"

"The good fairies?" Rudolf asked.

"They're all busy out on Fire Island."

"I just thought of something."

"Yes, dear boy?"

"Every time we make aluminum we must be making new oxygen to put back into the atmosphere too."

Flaherty stopped his pacing to stare at Rudolf. "You turned down the pirates of the golden horde and you didn't know that?"

"Yes."

The Flaherty shook his head. "Why didn't you accept their offer?"

"I've been asking myself all day," Rudolf said.

The wild Irishman turned his back and blew his nose. "You're braver and stupider than I thought," he said. "But in the end I suppose man's salvation will always depend on love."

Rudolf was puzzled. Though he had been around whites ever since a surly individual had kidnapped him and taken him off to a reservation school, Rudolf had always regarded whites as stolid, poker faced dolts who either had no emotions or no skill in expressing them. Yet the wild Irishman was obviously in the grip of some strong feeling.

"There's only so much free oxygen around our suffering planet," he said. "Sure and they'll tell you plants replace it and algae and chlorella and all the amber waves of grain and the Amazonian jungles and — it's all bull!"

"You mean plants don't absorb carbon dioxide and exhale oxygen?"

"Oh, aye. They do that. Each plant emits exactly enough free oxygen to take care of rotting or burning that plant when it's dead."

"Then how do we ever get ahead?"

"Well," the Flaherty explained, "in small ways we're still doing it: Peat bogs, for example, where the dead plants pack down but don't oxidize; wood built into houses that don't burn down. Back in the carboniferous era we were going great guns but that was before our kind started burning the coal and the oil faster than the plants can make it. In two hundred years we've bound up all the oxygen the forests of the carboniferous era managed to liberate in sixty million years. How much longer d'you think we're good for?"

"I don't know," Rudolf said. "I guess it doesn't look good."

"Oh we'll survive," Flaherty continued. "Those of us who can afford it. Gods help the poor sod who drinks up his welfare check instead of buying enough air to last him over the weekend."

"You think it'll come to that?"

"There're places now where it's dangerous to breathe. In twenty years wealthy people will live in airtight houses — or maybe a plastic roof over their grounds. They'll live twice as long as the poor sod who has to compete with the smokestacks for what's left."

Flaherty was on his feet again, waving his arms. "That's why I'll not deal with the golden horde!" he shouted. "Each time I've come up with some little thing that might delay disaster they've sat on it, lost it, or suppressed it. This one is too big. Aluminum — shit! You want to get rich on aluminum, go ahead. I want air to breathe. Every time we make aluminum we make air. And I'll not have St. Audrey choking every poor man to death!"



From the top of the stairs came applause. Wrapped in her blue robe and with her hair in a towel, Lillith Lasky came downstairs slowly. Suddenly Rudolf remembered Tuchi. "Nothing uh—" He decided to shut up. Obviously Tuchi hadn't showed or this dark-haired young woman would not be so happily applauding Flaherty's outburst.

"How much did you hear?" Rudolf asked.

"I came in during the carboniferous era."

"Sure and you don't look a day over a million," the Flaherty said.

Rudolf wished he could say clever things like that.

"Is it true?" Lillith asked.

"What?"

"That you're making air?"

"Yes."

"How do you do it?"

"Please," Rudolf said. "A man has to have some secrets."

Lillith's look made Rudolf suddenly wonder if he had looked at the golden horde with the same expression. "All right," he said. "Tomorrow you can get a picture of me doing it."

Next morning they rode out in the dump truck. Rudolf got a satchel out of the back. "Something I have to do in the clean room," he said, heading for Flaherty's lab. "Be out in a minute."

"What's a clean room?" Lillith asked.

Flaherty was still improvising explanations about special clothing and precautions not to introduce contamination when Rudolf came out again. Flaherty stared but said nothing.

Rudolf wore a loin cloth improvised from an old bleeding madras jacket. Around his head, wrists and ankles he wore the mortal remains of a feather duster. He had painted his face and body in stripes and designs half remembered from cowboy and Indian movies. He carried a baton with feathered knobs at each end. Staring, Lillith asked, "Is that a coup stick?"

Rudolf shook his head angrily and put a finger to his lips. "The power has descended upon him," Flaherty extemporized. "If he spoke t'you now you might come to harm."

Lillith looked sharply at the Irishman. Rudolf went out to the gravel pit. He began jumping and howling what he could remember of the disaster-to-enemy curse. Scampering up and down the pit, squeezing the incubator in one end of the coup stick, he added codicils for the Mohawk, Mr. St. Audrey, and the rest of the golden horde.

Lillith recovered enough to whip out cameras and go to work. It was turning into work for Rudolf too, jumping and prancing up and down the pit until the incubator had sprayed every portion. Finally, sweating and trembling, he was finished. Too out of breath to speak, he hurried past Flaherty and Lillith into the lab where he discovered the paint wouldn't wash off.

Feeling stickier by the minute, he got back into his clothes.

"Can you talk now?" Lillith asked when he came out.

"As soon as I get my breath."

"What were you doing out there?"

"Magic."

"Praying to some god?"

Rudolf was making up an answer when Flaherty interrupted. "No, darling girl, there's a difference between a wizard and a priest."

Rudolf wished he had a cup of coffee.

"What's the difference?" Lillith asked.

"A priest traffics with his gods — begging, bribing, making covenants, sucking around for blessings or favors."

"So what does a magician do?"

"He *compels* the gods and other natural forces to do *his* bidding. 'Tis a very different attitude, the business of finding the right words, the magical spell that *makes* nature do what you want."

"What's so different?"

Flaherty grinned. "The primitive magician evolved into the scientist. The priest evolved into the welfare worker."

"Do you actually believe all that hokum out there?"

"It works," Rudolf said.

"But—"

"True," Flaherty improvised, "It's mostly hokum. But somewhere amid all that hokum the dear boy is doing something right. We're experimenting, eliminating one thing after another to find out just what it is that really makes aluminum."

"But dancing and feathers—?"

"Try growing aluminum without them," Rudolf said. Mentally he added, *or with them.*

"Can I see inside the clean room?"

Rudolf looked at Flaherty. Flaherty looked back. "Why not?" Rudolf said.

While she was photographing Flaherty's workbench and some slant cultures and petri dishes he had set up Rudolf quietly removed the incubator from the feathered coup stick and substituted a bag of salt, ashes, and various pollens to confuse whoever might steal the coup stick and wonder about the hollow. Properly his medicine bag should have been made from a buffalo scrotum but, this being New York State, Rudolf had used a baggie.

He flipped a switch and started the machinery they had adapted for the flotation process. At the other end of the building smoke billowed as Flaherty demonstrated the press where they separated metallic ooze into aluminum and wax. Rudolf caught himself looking as Lillith, in shiny black hotpants, draped herself over a girder for an angle shot. "You don't look Jewish," he said when she returned to his end of the building. He never did figure out what she was laughing at.

Finally the day's work was over and they were driving back to the house. "Any progress?" Rudolf asked.

"The high tolerance yeast looks more promising," Flaherty said, "but not our other problem."

Rudolf glanced at him, wondering if Flaherty would have more to say if they were ever alone again. How long was Lillith Lasky of *Life* going to hang around? Watching her climb down from the dump truck he realized it was, in a way of speaking, nice to see her go. He found himself comparing her dark competence with Pamela St. Audrey's elegant unproductivity.

Lillith had spent the entire day watching them work, taking pictures, trying to understand a process so simple that she intuited there had to be something she was not being shown. They were pulling into the driveway when she said, "Did you know somebody's out there with a Big Bertha?"

"How do you know?" Flaherty asked.

"My own telephoto lenses make excellent telescopes."

"What's a Big Bertha?" Rudolf asked.

"It's an obsolete telephoto complex — looks like a length of stovepipe. They used to put them on a Graf-lex to cover football games."

"Did you see his face?"

"Yesterday at Northumber. He's a sour bulldog in a pepper-and-salt suit."

"Riordan!" Flaherty growled.

"Tomorrow I'll dance some rain onto him," Rudolf promised.

Lillith was still regarding him in thoughtful silence when they went into the house. The toothpick Rudolf had propped up was knocked over. He sighed and pointed. Flaherty raised his brows in shaggy acknowledgement as he began peeling potatoes. Rudolf checked the freezer and wondered what else they were going to eat. It was silly to waste time cooking but this village was too small to support a restaurant and he gagged at the prospect of TV dinners.

Lillith disappeared into her camper and came out with an apron and a load of groceries. "Everybody out of the kitchen!" she warned.

"Is this kosher?" Flaherty wondered as he inhaled clam chowder.

"Like ham on Friday," Lillith said.

"My people used to eat no kind of fish," Rudolf remembered. "They belong to the Underwater

People."

Lillith gave a malicious smile. "Aren't you afraid this'll spoil your dancing?" She was nonplussed when Rudolf suddenly appeared worried.

Fish reminded Rudolf of what might be waiting upstairs in the bathroom. He looked at Flaherty. The Irishman glanced at the stairway and Rudolf knew they were thinking the same thing.

He was beginning to like Lillith Lasky. She was intelligent, competent, and very neatly packaged. But he wished most devoutly she would go away — at least until he could decide what to do about Tuchi. Watching Flaherty perform sleight of mouth tricks with boiled scrod, Rudolf concluded that Lillith was also a very competent cook. He wondered if Pamela could cook. Somehow, when he was with Pamela the subject never seemed to come up.

"How many days does it usually take you to get a story like this?" he asked.

"I'll be out of your feathers in another day or two," Lillith said. "What are your plans, assuming you don't let St. Audrey gobble you up?"

"Like Dr. Flaherty says, every time we make money, we make air."

"So you'll go it alone?"

"We have little choice." Rudolf looked at Flaherty. "Should we tell her about the cab last night?"

"They've served notice on us. We may as well reciprocate," the Irishman said.

When Lillith had heard about the cab windows getting shot out she asked, "Wouldn't it be nobler in the mind not to let the secret die when you do? It might prolong your lives if somebody knew killing you couldn't stop it."

"I've been poor long enough," Rudolf said. "Besides, we have to find what the process *is*. I can just see the golden horde dancing a spell."

Once more Lillith gave him that look that made Rudolf suspect he was fooling nobody but himself. He tried not to yawn and made a botch of it.

"Me too," Lillith said, and got up.

Still yawning, Rudolf went upstairs to the bathroom. There was a man stretched out on the floor. Finally Rudolf recognized the would-be bandit Lillith had taken the gun away from last night. He had thought the short-cropped hippie was dead when he had first seen him stretched on the seat of the dump truck. This time there was no doubt in Rudolf's mind. Their bodyguard was as dead as it is possible for two halves of a body with a missing mid-section to be.

Rudolf stood for an instant in frozen horror. The halves were seared so neatly the body had not bled. He remembered the reports of fish kills. Then abruptly he realized what had killed this unfortunate young man had probably been intended for... He slammed the door and rushed down just as Lillith, once more in her blue robe and with her hair in curlers was starting upstairs. They landed in a tangled heap at the bottom.

"Don't go up there!" Rudolf said.

"Why?"

"I, uh — there's, uh—"

Flaherty came to the rescue. "Toilet plugs up sometimes," he said. "Makes an awful mess. You'd better not count on using it for a while. Doesn't your camper have—?"

"You think I'm going to panic at a little raw sewage?" Lillith asked. "Let's unplug it." She marched determinedly upstairs. Rudolf scrambled to his feet and chased her. "Don't! It could be dangerous!" By the time he was within grabbing distance Lillith had opened the door.

She gasped, then turned to face them. "Who was he?" she asked.

"Out!" Rudolf yelled. "Close the door!" He pulled her back and slammed it. With Flaherty in front and Rudolf behind they rushed her downstairs.

Flaherty produced Irish Tranquilizer from some hidden reserve and poured three glasses. Sipping hers neat Lillith said, "From the flap he must be as big a surprise to you as he was to me. Do you have any idea who?"

"You took his gun away last night," Flaherty said.

Suddenly Lillith's calm cracked. "Then I — if he'd had his gun..."

"It wouldn't have helped," Rudolf said.

Though primarily a photographer, Lillith was no novice at interviewing. By half truths and bland assumptions that she knew more than she did, it took her ten minutes to get the whole story. Belatedly Rudolf remembered the bugs. He turned on the TV.

"So the feathers and dancing are just window dressing?" she persisted.

"For Riordan out there with his Big Bertha or whatever you called it."

"And this — this Thing that gave you the incubator is what's been making all the bangs and killing fish?"

"She's learned to kill something besides fish now," Flaherty said. "I wonder what that poor sod was doing up there."

"When Miss Lasky here fired him as bodyguard," Rudolf speculated, "he must've decided to pick up whatever he could and split."

Flaherty checked desk drawers. "You're right," he said.

"Anything missing?"

"Nothing worth taking. Just mussed up again. Poor sod never did anything right in his life."

"Including dying in our bathroom," Rudolf said. "What'll we do with him?"

"Call the police," Lillith said, then frowned. "No, of course not. The golden horde would see that we never got out."

"We?"

"I'm an accessory after the fact unless I call the police right now."

"Maybe you'd better," Flaherty said.

"Not on your life," Lillith snapped. "My poor relations are addicted to breathing too. And I'm poorer than they are."

"Where do we dump the body?" Rudolf wondered.

They lapsed into a profound silence, each thinking his own thoughts. Flaherty reached for the whiskey again. "No way," Rudolf said firmly. "We need all the brainpower we can get."

"I'll make coffee," Lillith said. Still in her blue robe and with her hair in curlers, she went into the kitchen.

Rudolf and Flaherty were staring disconsolately at one another when they heard a knock. Suddenly Rudolf remembered the house was probably still bugged. "That'll be the fuzz," he said.

"They'll have the back covered too," Flaherty said. "No use prolonging it." He got up and opened the door. It was Pamela St. Audrey.

Rudolf didn't know enough about women's clothing to be able to describe what she was wearing but the effect on his glandular system was instant and overwhelming. "Rudy," she began, "I don't know what happened yesterday but you can't just... Rudy please, can't I come in?"

So overpowering was the effect of this red-haired vision that for an instant Rudolf actually forgot about the corpse upstairs in the bathroom. He tried to remember why he had thrown her over — something to do with a hollowed-out lipstick and stolen culture samples, hadn't it been? But surely nothing so purely and seductively virginal as Pamela St. Audrey could be beyond forgiveness...

Sinking into a bottomless pit of gonadal gullibility, Rudolf suddenly remembered. Why, he wondered, had he ever bought that car and gotten mixed up with those hippies in the first place?

"Pamela," he muttered, "I'm sorry. I can't see you now. I'm — something important has come up."

"Rudy, you're not going to get away from me that easy. If I have to chase you and make a fool of myself, then I'll just have to do it."

Hair still in curlers and wearing her blue robe, Lillith Lasky stuck her head through a doorway. "Some honeymoon!" she said in a raucous squawk. "You gonna stand there gabbin' all night?"

Pamela stiffened, staring in disbelief. Then abruptly the starch went out of her. "I'm sorry, Rudy," she said. "I wish you the best of everything. I'll never bother you again." She turned and walked off into the darkness, leaving Rudolf with the numb realization that he had actually seen tears in her eyes.

He was still staring into the darkness when Lillith came and closed the door. "Sorry, lover," she said, "but we had to get rid of her somehow."

Rudolf guessed the dark-haired girl was right. But he also knew he would never forgive her.

## *CHAPTER 9*

How, he wondered, had he ever imagined Lillith attractive?

"Well," she said briskly, "we've got to get rid of a body."

"With the house bugged and infra-red cameras every time we open the door?"

"It does present a problem." Lillith wiggled her fingers until Rudolf realized she wanted a typewriter. He got his portable out of its battered case.

"Camper may be bugged too," she typed while Rudolf and Flaherty peered over her shoulder. "Help carry things. Act like they're heavy."

They followed her out into the dark and began emptying cameras and recording equipment out of a trunk-sized chest. Grunting and heaving, they got the empty chest inside the house. Ten minutes later they carried it out again, grunting in earnest this time. "I'll see how these come out," Lillith said loudly. "If I need more I'll be back in the morning." They watched her drive away.

Back inside the house Rudolf began having fidgety second thoughts as he reviewed how easily Lillith had insinuated herself into their operation. And she had disarmed their "bodyguard" with much less flap than he and Flaherty had managed, doing the same job. Could she and the bodyguard be... That, Rudolf guessed, didn't make sense unless the golden horde's own employees were expendable too. But... He wondered if the whole thing had been a charade to get her in their house and in their confidence. After an hour he typed, "Is she on our side?"

Flaherty shrugged. Rudolf took the note and the one Lillith had written and shredded them. He looked for some place to dispose of the shreds and found none. Dithering about with a handful of shredded paper he remembered something else he had neglected to do. He stuffed the paper in his pocket and got a broom. With Flaherty behind him, he went upstairs and poked the broom cautiously through the bathroom door.

"Tuchi," he called, "are you there?" He advanced another step, waving the broom in front of him. Whatever had cut the would-be bandit in two didn't chop up the broom. Rudolf wished he knew something about Tuchi's weapon. Maybe it only affected living matter.

There was no alien in the bathroom. Nor was there any blood. But Rudolf suspected it would be a long time before he sat on anything connected with a sewer system again. Tuchi had fit inside that bathtub-sized hole Flaherty had excavated around the spring. But with an infinitely stretchable body... He wondered if the alien could stretch thread-thin and miles-long to monitor them both here and at the gravel pit. There was no sewer out there but there was a sometime creek that flowed down the valley toward town and only the gods and the country board of supervisors knew what cross connections might exist.

How, Rudolf wondered, had the alien found them? The incubator must be emitting some signal. Rudolf suddenly had a new worry. If the incubator was transmitting on any recognizable frequency, the FCC snoopers would soon be out to see what was polluting the airwaves. Downstairs again, he typed out his worries to Flaherty. The Irishman raised his shaggy brows in acknowledgement but offered no solution.

"Oi'd give thirty percent of me immortal soul for a drink," he said. Rudolf sighed and handed him the bottle.

Flaherty was pouring himself a drink when they heard a car pull up. Moments later Lillith Lasky walked in. "Pictures didn't come out," she said. "I'll have to take them all over again." She went to the typewriter and wrote, "Followed all the way. No chance."

The Irishman put down his glass without drinking. "I was afraid of that," he said. "Sunlight sheens off

that muck till a light meter goes crazy. We may's well go back now and you can do them all with artificial light."

Remembering the bugs Rudolf guessed a poor excuse was better than none. They locked the house and got into the camper with Lillith. At the gravel pit Rudolf opened the doors to their windowless building, then closed them when Lillith had backed inside.

Flaherty began piling blocks of wax from the aluminum press in a corner of the sheet iron building. They piled the mortal remains atop the wax and buried it in more wax. Then Flaherty began building an igloo of loose bricks. Finally, they led a vent pipe from the top of their makeshift oven to where the forge normally vented out the side of the building. They strung hose from the forge blower to the bottom of the oven.

He stuffed an oily rag inside and lit it. Within moments the bricks were glowing dull yellow at every crack. Rudolf wondered if the short-haired man had ever possessed a name, a mother, or any of the normal accoutrements of humanity.

The wind was blowing down the valley, wafting a plume of oily smoke toward the village. Rudolf stepped outside to study it. The night was clear and the breeze imperceptible. He caught a momentary odor that made him decide never to eat roast pork again. Instead of rising, the smoke was curling down along the ground, rolling across the muck pit toward the swamp.

"Everything all right?" Flaherty asked when he came back inside.

Just as Rudolf was nodding they heard sirens approaching. Flaherty looked at Lillith. They both looked at Rudolf. "I didn't even know this village had a fire department," Rudolf said. "What do we do now?"

"We go for the high jump if we can't stall them another half hour till he's cooked off," Flaherty said.

"How do you stall an amateur fireman when he's finally got a chance to use his axe?" Rudolf asked. He asked himself how he had ever gotten mixed up in disposing of a body.

Lillith smiled. "You need the proper equipment," she said. "First, both of you take your shirts off."

"Why?"

"So they won't all wonder why I took mine off." Lillith began removing her baggy sweater. Beneath it she wore the scantiest of bras. When she removed the bra there was no noticeable sag. Rudolf wondered if the firemen would be as distracted as he was. He looked determinedly away and began chinking gaps in the brick igloo, willing the fire to burn hotter, faster.

Lillith tossed a jacket over her shoulders and went out to the gate where sirens were subsiding with wistful little moans.

"What're we supposed to be doing here when they come in?" Rudolf asked.

Flaherty looked back from where the lissome, dark-haired Lillith had just exited on her delaying mission. "Play it by ear," he said. "Don't say anything till she gives us a clue."

They worried about the furnace, stuffing mud into the leaks and trying to help the flame along. Rudolf glanced at his watch. It had been fifteen minutes since they lit the pyre. The fire seemed to be growing hotter. He had been afraid the wax would melt and run out across the floor and set the whole building afire but the Flaherty had apparently known what he was doing. The forge blower hummed. The fire roared. Flaherty pulled the blower hose from one side and poked it through a hole he had jimmied into the loose bricks on the opposite side. Rudolf plugged the first opening. "Got to keep the heat even," Flaherty said.

"Of course we're polluting," Lillith said in a loud voice. "But it's for a good cause. We're conducting experiments with high temperature incineration. How's the smoke now?"

Lillith was back inside, surrounded by volunteer firemen. She wore skintight hot pants and an ornament in her hair. The firemen were paying no attention to Rudolf and Flaherty.

"Smoke?" one finally asked. "Oh yeah. By the time we got here there wasn't any. What was that stink?"

"A week's accumulation of garbage," Lillith said. "We're working on ways for the homeowner to put it all back in his own front lawn, bones and all. You know what a big thing organic farming is these days."

"Yeah," a fireman said admiringly. "They really are big."

Rudolf didn't think they were big at all. But he had to admit they were a nicely matched set. He turned and saw the Flaherty was also appreciating the view. In a weird way he supposed it made sense for the three of them to be stripped to the waist in this heat. Some of the firemen were becoming so inured to the sight of Lillith's ski-jump protuberances that they began sneaking glances at what Rudolf and Flaherty were doing.

Lillith put on a thoroughly professional performance of suddenly realizing she was half naked. "Oh!" she shrieked, and crossed hands over her firm young frontage. The firemen's attention was once again riveted while she hunted frantically for something to put on. Finally she found Rudolf's jacket again and managed to put it on in a concealing fashion that Rudolf found more eye-catching than the blatant nakedness of a moment ago. So, apparently, did the visiting firemen.

The fire was roaring less now. Rudolf guessed the wax was burning up. He looked at his watch. Forty minutes since they had lit it off. *Sonofabitch*, he thought, *She's stalled them almost half an hour.*

But the firemen were interested in the brick oven now. Crowding around, they began asking uncomfortable questions like, "If it's a home incinerator, where's the opening to load it?"

"This's just an experimental model," Flaherty explained. "That's why we did it at night. Didn't want to bother you gentlemen with a lot of smoke. Did you see it clear in town?"

"No. We got a phone call. Wasn't it you?"

Rudolf wished he could feel the heartiness Flaherty was giving to his laughter. "That'll be old Riordan," the Irishman said. "He's an industrial spy from an outfit that's tryin' to steal our patents. Has a regular observatory set up over there in that swamp. Kind of dry right now. I don't suppose I could encourage you boys to burn off that grass before it turns into a real hazard?" The Irishman wiped sweat from his beetling brow and turned innocent China-blue eyes toward the firemen. "Seems t'me it might be a good thing for a man to have a little run for it as long's he goes around turnin' in false alarms and makin' foine decent family men with jobs and all get up and go chasin' around in the middle of the night, losin' their sleep, scarin' their poor lovin' wives half t'death. Sure and the dirty spalpeen that'd do a thing like that... Ah, if only I could leave this important experiment for a moment and git me hands on..."

For a moment Rudolf thought it was going to work but the firemen were still too interested in Lillith's chest expansion. "Still too wet to burn," one said.

The fire was nearly out by now. Rudolf wondered if the corpse would still be recognizable. The flame guttered out as the last of the wax was consumed. Rudolf turned off the blower and they stood regarding the glowing igloo expectantly. "Gonna look now and see if it burned up?" a fireman asked.

Rudolf gave a guilty start, then realized the fireman was talking about a week's collection of garbage. It would be natural for garbage to have bones in it. Rudolf prayed none of them would be instantly recognizable. The bricks were still glowing. "Have to wait till it cools completely to give it a fair chance," Flaherty said, obviously hoping the firemen would lose patience and go home. Lillith cooperated by buttoning her jacket. It was no use. These men had been routed out of bed for the first time in months and they weren't about to go home until they had poked and probed through that clump of glowing bricks. Rudolf mentally chanted the disaster-to-enemy curse for Riordan. He wondered if there was any patron saint for corpse burners.

They stood about shuffling their feet like small boys at a weenie roast. Finally the bricks had cooled until Flaherty could wait no longer. Rudolf sneaked a look at his watch. It had been an hour and four minutes since they had lit it off. A Fireman poked tentatively at the loose brick igloo. Abruptly, it collapsed, sending up a cloud of dusty ash.

Lillith caught Rudolf's eye and pointed at her teeth. Flaherty saw the gesture and nodded imperceptibly. With a half dozen firemen poking through the mess Rudolf hoped they could find and palm any teeth that had survived the holocaust.

Finally, after ten nerve-twanging minutes the firemen were gone. There had been no teeth and only two calcined stumps of thigh bones that the Flaherty had stamped into unrecognizable powder before any fireman could develop notions of anatomy. They scooped up the sifted ashes and scattered them atop their crop of growing aluminum. Flaherty dragged out the hose and watered them down.

Lillith picked up her bra and blouse and for one happy moment Rudolf thought she would take off

the jacket to put them on but she didn't. "What I need right now," the dark-haired girl said, "is a drink." Rudolf suddenly realized he could use one too.

Riding home he knew he had involved the young victim in all this. His conscience should be burning holes in some dark and secret corner of his duodenum. Maybe tomorrow he would worry about it. At the moment all he felt was tired.

"I wonder if he was English?" Flaherty said.

"Why?"

"Fee fie fo fum."

Rudolf tried to remember the next lines. "I smell the blood of an Englishman. Be he live or be he dead, *I'll grind his bones to make my bread.*"

It was almost daylight. They grumped about the house and talked about going to bed but nobody made the first move. "Business as usual, I'd think," Flaherty finally said. Rudolf thought this over and agreed.

Lillith still had her hair in curlers. She poked about the house looking for her instant femininity tool box and finally found it in a corner. "Either of you seen a cigarette case?" she asked. "I remember I put it in the kitchen for a minute."

"Was it valuable?"

Lillith shrugged. "Might hock it for twenty dollars."

Rudolf frowned. "What was it like?"

"Size of a cigarette pack. It was black with silver trim."

Rudolf bounded upstairs. Peering cautiously in the bathroom, he saw it in a corner behind the john. He stretched a broom through the doorway and hooked it. The cigarette case was covered with slime. He picked it up with a handkerchief and brought it back downstairs, uncomfortably aware of something the same size and shape in his pocket. "Now we know why it happened," he said.

Lillith grimaced as she touched slime.

"That hippie steal it?" Flaherty asked.

Rudolf nodded. "And Tuchi thought it was something else."

"Twenty dollars for his life," Flaherty mused. "He should have quit while he was ahead." Rudolf and Lillith put fingers to their lips.

"I think," Rudolf said after a long silence, "that you'd better forget about your high tolerance yeast and concentrate on a... Goddamn these bugs!" he flared, "This is no way to live!" He looked at Lillith. "You know anybody?"

The dark-haired girl frowned a moment, then picked up the phone. She dialed eleven digits and a moment later said, "Sid, could you do some exterminating for some friends of mine?"

There was a moment's cryptic talk, then she said, "He'll be here in four hours."

Flaherty was as sleepless as the rest of them. At dawn he gave up and drove out to his lab. "Somebody ought to be minding the store," he said. Lillith combed out her curlers while Rudolf made more coffee. She wore tight hot pants and a loose baggy sweater. Between idle goatish fantasies Rudolf wondered what they were going to do about Tuchi.

The incubator was in his pocket. But with private armies trooping through house and gravel pit, where else could he hide it? One thing Rudolf resolved never to do was carry the incubator into the bathroom. Remembering the way the would-be bandit had slipped, he wondered how safe the kitchen was. Tuchi could be literally anywhere! She traveled through streams, up sewer pipes. How about fresh water pipes?

Lillith had wiped the slime from her cigarette case *cum* lighter. "Won't work," she said.

"Checked the fluid?"

Moments later she handed the open case to Rudolf. Its innards were shattered and congealed into strange new shapes as if everything had melted, flowed for a microsecond, and then frozen again.

"It figures," Rudolf said, "Whatever—" Abruptly, he remembered the bugs. He went to the typewriter and wrote, "Whatever cut him in 2 was heat ray, hot enough to cauterize. You noticed no bleeding?"



Lillith nodded. Wondering what he could do with this information, Rudolf picked idly at the case-lighter. Its plastic shattered and he held the innards, a tiny metal frame smeared with bits of melted plastic components. He flexed the metal and they flaked away. For such a thin piece of metal it was surprisingly rigid. He tried again to bend it and odd bits about modules of elasticity and tensile strengths surfaced from his long forgotten engineering courses. This sheet of aluminum couldn't be much thicker than — he got a razor blade and quickly learned which was the hardest.

There was a knock on the door. A crewcut type in thick glasses asked, "Is Miss Lasky here?"

Lillith appeared making shushing noises. The stranger began walking around the house with a frequency probe. It was about the size of a table cigarette lighter and had a selector switch on one side. A bulb lit up. He moved to where the bulb got brightest and pulled what looked like a golf tee from behind a door molding. He pulled a transistor radio from his pocket and started it playing softly on the kitchen table beside the spike mike.

An hour later a dozen bugs were scattered across the table top, each listening to a different sound source. One cassette was emitting sighs, gasps, and grunts that caused Rudolf to look embarrassedly into space when Lillith caught him analyzing the faint line dividing the sacred from the profane inside her hot pants.

Standing a dozen feet from the collection of mikes on the table the stranger said, "I think the house's clean now. Want me to do anything else?"

Lillith looked at Rudolf. "The gravel pit?" she asked.

Rudolf nodded. "Lillith can watch the house and make sure they don't plant any more here."

"No need as long as you keep them convinced these are working," the crewcut man said.

Rudolf guided the debugging expert out to the gravel pit. Flaherty was bumbling about growling happy blasphemies in his transit-mix basso as he fiddled with a microtome. "Think oime onto something," he said, then suddenly he saw the crewcut stranger.

Rudolf put his finger to his lips and Flaherty went back to his slicing. Crewcut waved his wand about and uncovered golf-tee shaped microphones. He repositioned them near the noisiest part of their machinery.

Flaherty was bouncing about the lab with such cheerful abandon that for a moment Rudolf thought he had gotten into the sauce again. But there was a purpose to the wild Irishman's bustle. "See these?" He waved what looked like tiny shavings in front of Rudolf.

"What are they?"

But the Flaherty suddenly remembered the crewcut stranger. Rudolf was also uncomfortably aware of proliferation. In less than twenty-four hours they had acquired Lillith Lasky. He wondered if Sid would become a permanent fixture too.

"That clears up your problem for a while," the crew-cut Sid said. "But I should come back once a week just like any other bug exterminator. You want some alarms?"

"Do you have any that'd keep all these people out?"

"Nothing can stop a patient and determined pro. I'll be back next week."

"What'm I into you for?"

"Plenty. You'll get my bill." Sid shook hands and drove away.

"What were you showing me?" Rudolf asked.

"Bits of gelatin potted in epoxy resin," Flaherty said.

"Very interesting."

"It's how you get an aluminophagic bacterium to hold still while you slice him thin enough to see through."

"What do they look like?"

"Remarkably indistinct. Now that I've done everything that can be done with an optical microscope, I need a quick look through something better."

Rudolf tried to remember the term Flaherty had used. "A scanning microscope?" he asked.

Flaherty shook his head. "They're nice for three dimensional views and you can look at thicker specimens but they'll only go up a thousand diameters or so — not much better than a good light

microscope if you get a phase contrast — even a flying spot type for that matter."

"I'm sorry I asked."

Flaherty laughed. "The thing you're talking about and the ones I'm talking about work the same way. They send a light beam or an electron beam zapping back and forth just like a TV camera. The image is built up out of millions of yes-no decisions as to whether this particular spot is light or dark. They're fine for automatic blood counts or sizing paint pigments but I've got to see inside a chromosome.

"A transmission electron microscope takes the whole picture all at once, like a camera or a human eye — no scanning. It can go up to a million diameters — actually see an atom in some cases. But the specimen has to be thin enough for an electron beam to shine through. And you run into other problems."

"Like what?"

"Electrons aren't that much smaller than what we're looking at. It's like throwing tomatoes at a man in front of a wall. You get a silhouette where they don't hit the wall but it's kind of fuzzy. And if you leave your specimen in too long or crank the voltage up too high you blow it to pieces."

"I can see another problem," Rudolf said.

"Oh?"

"Where are we going to get a transmission electron microscope?"

"All I need is about fifteen minutes with one to verify a few suspicions."

"You're evading the question."

"Not really. Let's go home now."

They turned off lights and machinery. Rudolf gave the aluminum bed a quick look and, satisfied it was growing on schedule, got into the dump truck with Flaherty.

Lillith had a meal nearly ready when they returned. "Any problems?" Rudolf pointed upstairs.

Lillith shook her head. "But if you think I'm going to use that bathroom again you've got another think coming."

Murmuring absent-minded blasphemies, Flaherty retired to his room with a bucket of warm water. Some time later he descended freshly shaven and bathed, wearing the suit he had last worn the day Rudolf turned down a million a month.

"You didn't sleep at all last night," Rudolf said. "You're not going out now are you?"

"I had a nap in the lab."

Rudolf ate absently, wishing he could afford a house where he dared use the bathroom. "How much per day is a million a month?" he asked.

"Thirty-two thousand, two hundred fifty-eight dollars, six and four-tenths cents," Flaherty said promptly.

Rudolf gasped. "You're a human computer too?"

"No, dear boy. I've been waitin' for you to ask that question."

"Where're you going?" Rudolf asked.

"Off to see a nearsighted friend," Flaherty said gaily. "If I'm right our worries are over."

"We'll be independent of the—" Habit inhibited Rudolf from mentioning the incubator. His hand in his pocket suddenly remembered the piece of scorched metal from Lillith's cigarette case. "See what you can make of this while you're at it," he said, and explained what had happened.

Flaherty shrugged and put it in his pocket. "No doubt you two young people will find ways to amuse yourselves," he leered, and departed, leaving Rudolf squirming in such an agony of embarrassment that he firmly resolved the only thing ever to develop would be Lillith Lasky's pictures.

"Mail," she said when they were alone.

Rudolf sorted the handful of junk, trying not to look at Miss Lasky's trim terminus as she washed dishes. Was there anything she didn't know how to do? One letter had a postmark from the tiny reservation town where Rudolf had gone to school. "Dear Alumnus—" It was a begging letter.

"Christ!" he mumbled.

"You say something?" Lillith asked from the kitchen.

"No." Rudolf crumpled the letter and turned on the TV.

Wearing his flying-saucers-and-other-silly-season-nonsense grin, a network commentator was

saying, "Whatever its origin, has finally flushed itself out into the ocean where it goes unnoticed among the countless pollutions emitted daily from Greater New York."

Rudolf wished he dared tell the commentator where it had really gone.

"... Another eye-smarting day predicted as the Regional Authority again confirms its ban on all open burning. Experts predict..." Rudolf switched to another channel and got more news. This time he finally realized he was looking at the fast-rising skeleton of St. Audrey's new building. Rudolf counted on his fingers trying to figure how long it had been since he and Flaherty had begun their unlikely partnership.

He wondered what the wild Irishman was up to. So many things could go wrong: He could have his pockets picked; he could be lured into a bar and have his brains picked; he could, Rudolf realized, actually be kidnapped by the golden horde. Rudolf wondered again about the blast that had disfenestrated their taxi. Maybe he should have signed with the golden horde. Working from the inside maybe he could have convinced St. Audrey that something had to be done quick. Then he remembered Flaherty had tried to work from the inside. How long, he wondered, had Flaherty had a drinking problem?

"I hate to bring this up," Lillith said, "but men and women — even us minority groups — all have one thing in common."

Rudolf gave her a look of bleak inquiry.

"What are we going to do about a toilet?"

Rudolf tried to concentrate. Whatever bisected the would-be bandit had not cut the rest of the house in two. Either its effect was limited or Tuchi had cranked down the range. Rudolf was not enthusiastic about staying where one murder had already happened, but logic told him that wherever he went the alien would not be far behind. The incubator had been in Rudolf's pants pocket, beside his bed in the upstairs. If the alien had not been able to get it from there...

Which put Rudolf back where he had started. Tuchi had a heat ray. But he did not know its range. The one thing he knew for sure was that nothing would ever get him back inside that bathroom again.

Lillith was looking at him. "Isn't there one in your camper?" he asked.

"They took it out to make room for photographic equipment."

Rudolf went out into the back yard where an awning was flapping itself to pieces in the winds of procrastination. He came back with a plastic bucket fastened to the end of a pole made from the stiffening rod of the awning.

"What's that other piece of rope for?" Lillith asked.

"Tripping line."

"Not elegant, but I guess it's practical."

A short time later biology's non-negotiable demand had Rudolf on one end of the pole and a plastic bucket on the other. Dumping it into the john without spilling was remarkably like trying to land a twenty-pound fish on four-pound tackle.

The problem was complicated when the tripping line became snagged beneath the seat of the john. Mumbling curses in Sioux and English, Rudolf raised the bucket to free it. There was a blue flash and a sound like a concussion grenade going off inside a coffin. In reconstructing the incident later Rudolf was sure he would have dropped the bucket anyway but he was spared that misadventure by the abrupt disappearance of bucket, contents, tripping line, and the last eighteen inches of the pole.

## *CHAPTER 10*

Downstairs Lillith poured him a slug of Irish Tranquilizer. "You can't say you didn't know it was loaded," she said.

Rudolf said nothing. The trap had been set to make him lose his head suddenly and irrevocably, had

he been rash enough to sit enthroned. He went upstairs again. Poking with the pole, he learned the field was roughly a yard across and centered over the john. Sometimes it snapped at his pole and other times it did not. He couldn't deduce what triggered it.

Finally, disgustedly, he took a great whipping whack at it and was once more rewarded with the blue flash and doomsday bang. Downstairs he studied the end of the pole. It was the common commercial grade of aluminum used for TV antennas and lawn furniture. Now the end he had whipped through the field was converted to that same superhard compound as Lillith's radio. He wondered if Flaherty would remember to analyze it.

Lillith sat across the room wearing her blue robe as if she still expected him to perform some magic that would let her take a bath. Though the robe covered far more than the hot pants she had worn all day Rudolf found his eyes drawn perversely to gentle swells and almost-seen outlines. She sat demurely, legs coiled beneath her, reading an ancient *Life*. It never occurred to Rudolf that Lillith was giving him the business.

The phone rang. When a man asked for Miss Lasky he handed it to her. Lillith uncoiled like a contented cat. She listened at length, trying several times to get a word in. Looking at Rudolf, she raised eyebrows in despair. "All right," she finally said.

"What's going on?" Rudolf asked when she had hung up.

"Riot at Johns Hopkins. Bunch of longhairs say they're vivisecting or some damned thing."

"You're going? Won't it be dangerous?"

"I'll be back as soon's I can," Lillith promised. She bustled about picking things up and finally was ready to go. "Don't look so woebegone," she said. "Really, I will be back." And Rudolf stood in the doorway wondering if his naked need had been so obvious. Why else, he wondered, would she have kissed him?

He tried to forget about the superbly engineered photographer and concentrate on another female in his life. There must be some way to make peace with Tuchi. There was one very simple way. But where, Rudolf wondered, would he be without the incubator? Back on the reservation, that's where!

Suddenly Rudolf realized there was a way. He went back upstairs to the bathroom door. "Tuchi," he called, "I can't give you the—" He still couldn't bring himself to say incubator out loud. "I can't give you the thing you asked for but I've plenty of pure aluminum now. I'll give you all you want. Tuchi — are you there?" There was no answer. Rudolf poked with the aluminum pole and burned off another inch. He tried several more times but there was no answer from the alien.

He turned on the TV and hunted for the late evening news. As per Lillith's report angry longhairs chanted slogans around a vaguely Greek templish building which he learned was the Johns Hopkins medical center. The police didn't seem too excited. Nobody else paid any attention. Men in white coats bustled in and out carrying books and briefcases, occasionally turning to glance self-consciously at the camera. One burly, bushy eye-browed man in a white lab coat and carrying a bulging manila envelope stopped at the head of the steps. He faced the camera, waved and smiled. Rudolf could have sworn it was Flaherty.

There was the unmistakable sound of the dump truck. A moment later Flaherty entered. "How did you do it?" Rudolf asked. "Did you fly?"

"Do what?"

Rudolf pointed at the TV where longhairs still milled, shouting angry slogans.

"Everything comes to him who waits," Flaherty said. "But it comes quicker if you plan ahead."

"You arranged a riot just so you could get in to use a microscope during the commotion?"

"Remember, I did my postgrad in rioting in Ireland. Someday one of those kids can tell his grandchildren he was on the side of the angels," Flaherty said, "though I muchly doubt if he knew it at the time."

"But you showed your face. Why did you have to wave to me?"

"Dear boy, I wasn't waving at you."

"Oh!" Rudolf guessed the Irishman was thumbing his nose at the golden horde for some devious reason.

"What'd you learn?"

"Now I know how to program a 'die' command into a double helix."

"I'd be more interested in a culture that didn't die," Rudolf said.

"Now where would we be if we developed one and some of our curious friends got hold of it? Anyhow," Flaherty continued, "we've got other fish to fry."

"A fish damn near fried me while you were gone."

Suddenly Flaherty noticed they were alone. "Where's the lovely, lissome Lillith?" he asked.

"Off covering your riot."

Flaherty laughed.

"What's more important than a culture that doesn't die?" Rudolf asked.

Flaherty tossed him the scrap of scorched metal from Lillith's lighter. "This'll get you as rich as the aluminophage if you learn how to make it."

"Like this?" Rudolf asked, and handed Flaherty the end of the awning pole.

"What happened?"

Rudolf told him. "Why is it so important?" he asked.

Flaherty found Tullamore Dew and poured a drink. "I couldn't begin to explain the crystalline structure," he said, "but they're extremely long, extremely regular. Now what does that hint to you?"

"I never got that far."

"Superhard, superstrong, superductile. If St. Audrey could get his hands on enough of this he could build a mile-high building with inch-thick walls. The difference to architecture is the jump from a straw hut to the Great Pyramid!"

"Just what we need," Rudolf grouched, "more goddamn buildings!"

"If people are going to breed like yeast somebody has to build the tanks to hold them."

"You want to sell this to St. Audrey?"

"I was thinking more in terms of giving it to him."

"We are on the same side, aren't we?"

"Aye," the Flaherty agreed. "Think of the fun he could have tryin' to figure out how it's done. Why, it'd fair put him off the track of the aluminophage."

"Suppose he does find out."

"It's done by instantaneous heating followed by equally instantaneous cooling."

"That's impossible."

"With the present state of the art it's something more than impossible. But I'm not opposed to letting the golden horde spend themselves into a hole learning that."

"Is that why you waved to the camera?"

"It's also why I didn't strip the film out of the scanning microscope's recording camera."

"You left a picture of the true-breeding aluminophage!"

"I said *scanning* microscope," Flaherty said. "I made damn sure the camera wasn't working when I looked over my specimens in the *transmission* microscope in another room."

"What'd you learn that makes you so happy?"

"Remember how I told you it was impossible — the way there was more energy coming out than went in?"

"Yes."

"Well, the little buggers don't live eight days and then die. They only live four hours."

"The wit of your remark utterly escapes me."

"'Tis the damndest thing y'veer saw," the Flaherty marveled.

"I haven't seen it."

"Oh aye. Darwin would have such an intellectual orgasm the poor man's brain would run out his nose."

Rudolf sighed.

"Instant evolution."

Sooner or later the Irishman would start talking sense, Rudolf decided. All he had to do was wait.

"'Twas the 'true breeding' that put me off," Flaherty continued. "Tuchi, poor slime, probably wasn't deliberately misleading, but mental set has a lot to do with how you approach a problem. I went at it as if true breeding were right and proper."

Rudolf wondered if any of this would ever be understandable.

"The way this species gets around the limitations of the solar constant is by *not* breeding true." The Irishman laughed. "How a man gets entangled in semantics. A bacterium's math is different from ours."

While Rudolf stared in mute despair the Flaherty drew a breath, poured another drink, and got under way again. "Two equals one. That's sexual reproduction: infinite possibilities of mixing genes for greater variety. Sex was the greatest invention ever. Animals evolve thousands of times faster than they did with budding or fission where one splits into two and there's never a chance of combining strange genes just to see if the little bugger's going to be yellow or brown or kinky-haired."

"I receive a distinct impression that you're trying to tell me something," Rudolf said.

"I am. Our aluminophage reproduces sexually."

"I'm happy for them."

"They live four hours, eat a bit of alumina, carry it partway toward reduction, then they copulate and die."

"Why must people always go to extremes?" Rudolf wondered.

"The next generation doesn't breed true. They've evolved just far enough to take the partially reduced alumina and bring it a bit farther toward reduction to pure metal. Then they die and their offspring are different enough for the next step. Darwin and Huxley would have come unglued."

"How do you move an electron from a tight low-energy orbit to a wide high-energy orbit in steps?" Rudolf asked. "I thought it was like a quantum jump."

"As you told the young lady about the feathers," Flaherty said, "It works." He scratched his bulbous nose and thought a moment. "Maybe they build up some kind of leverage, generation after generation, until finally that electron snaps out." He poured another drink.

"You've stated the problem quite nicely," Rudolf said. "Now what can we do about it?"

"Understanding the problem is ninety percent of solving it," Flaherty said. "Any mail?"

"Begging letter for me. Another special delivery for you."

Flaherty tore his into shreds without opening it. "How about our feelers?" he asked.

"There's a paint company thinks they can use the ooze without us going to the bother of pressing it. Could turn into a good thing."

"How much are they interested in?"

"About three times as much as we're producing."

Flaherty smiled. "We shall soon be faced with the happy problem of where to store all our money."

"D'you suppose the golden horde could tie up a deposit in a Swiss bank?"

"Given time they could do anything. We might spread it around a bit; put some in Mexico."

"Are you kidding?"

"Peso's sounder than the dollar," Flaherty said. "Those Europeans who make snide remarks about banana revolutions have all had wars and devaluations since the last Mexican bank failed. And they pay ten percent."

"Where do you learn these things?"

"On that page in the paper that poor people never read."

"Do you think we should incorporate or go public or whatever they call it?"

"I'd rather wait a while... till I've worked out whether we can do without the one indispensable article."

Rudolf told the Irishman about his unsuccessful offer to Tuchi. They went upstairs to the bathroom door and Flaherty spent ten minutes loudly cajoling an empty toilet bowl. Finally they gave up and went to bed.

Rudolf checked the crack under his doorway and chinked it with newspaper. How thin could Tuchi spread herself across a dry surface? He had a sudden flash of brilliance and went downstairs for a can of Drano, then sprinkled the dry caustic crystals along the bathroom door threshold.

Life settled into a routine of hard physical labor which was endurable only because they were piling up money in denominations Rudolf had never believed existed. He had employed a firm of New York accountants whom the Flaherty had guaranteed to be at odds with the golden horde and the nagging problems of bookkeeping and quarterly estimated returns were being taken care of. Rudolf wanted to hire labor to expand but Flaherty convinced him it would be impossible to hire help that could not be rehired by the golden horde.

"But they're sneaking in here still, stealing samples and photographing us from every angle," Rudolf protested.

"True." Flaherty turned up his transistor. Nowadays each carried one going full blast on different stations when they had to talk out in the open where Riordan's parabolic mikes could pick up a whisper from a half mile. Inside house and lab they had antibug jammers to gum up the low frequency FM spike mikes that Sid removed once a week.

"The high tolerance yeast looks better every day," Flaherty said over the squawk of radios.

"Damn the yeast! I want a true breeding aluminophage so we can give something back to somebody." Despite antibugging precautions Rudolf could not bring himself to mention the incubator.

"Same problem," Flaherty said. "When I solve one I'll have the other."

"When will that be?"

"About yesterday, I'd say."

"Well good! Let's get with it."

The Irishman shook his head. "I know how. That's enough."

"But..."

"But if I do it, some of our nocturnal visitors might pick up a sample." Flaherty shrugged. "Doesn't really make a damn t'me but you won't have your monopoly anymore."

"Is it something I could understand — learn how to do it if you told me?"

"Oh aye, I think so." Flaherty frowned at the effort of speaking over the tinny squawks of transistor radios. "Later," he said. "Whin we can do without all this."

They drove home. Though Rudolf had made nightly appeals Tuchi had not reappeared in the John, but an occasional probe with a pole showed her trap was still there. Rudolf had studied the Drano crystals sprinkled across the threshold and wasn't sure whether the alien had attempted crossing. Things were going well. Too well. Weeks had passed and they had not heard from the golden horde. There had been no inquiries about a missing hippie. There had been no word from Lillith. And as she had promised, Pamela had gotten out of Rudolf's life.

Nearing the small white house in the village, Rudolf saw a black Cadillac. "Here comes trouble," he said. While they were parking the dump truck a man got out of the Cadillac. It was Mr. St. Audrey. He looked worried.

"We still have nothing to talk about," Flaherty said.

"Mr. Redwolf, please," St. Audrey said. "Someday you may be a father too."

"The possibility has occurred to me," Rudolf said, "but could you connect it up a little better?"

"I want to talk to Pamela — at least know if she's all right."

"Why ask me?"

"She isn't here? When she left I thought she was moving in with you."

Rudolf felt a sudden visceral wrench. He looked at Flaherty. The Irishman looked blankly at St. Audrey. "Haven't seen her for weeks," he said.

St. Audrey's matinee idol facade collapsed. He was shorter, grayer, and older. He staggered. Rudolf caught his arm. They led him inside and got him on the sofa. Flaherty poured a drink. Moments later St. Audrey seemed better. "Sorry," he said.

Rudolf remembered his last glimpse of cool, ever with-it Pamela as tears started and she walked blindly off into the night. "Why did you wait so long to look for her?" he asked.

St. Audrey sat up and pulled himself together. "We've had our differences," he said. "But remember, I invited you into the firm and into the family. I thought she was in safe hands."

"What made you change your mind?"

"Something in the front seat of my car. Would you please bring it?"

Rudolf crossed the street to the Cadillac and found a new *Life*. Walking back he thumbed through it and saw:

*A Sioux makes it big the white man's way.*

There was a two page spread of Rudolf prancing up and down the gravel pit in paint and feather duster. Between other pictures of Flaherty and himself operating machiner in the plant Rudolf learned how he had singlehandedly stayed the golden horde. Though no one mentioned St. Audrey, the references to a millionaire syndicate putting up a revolutionary new building left small doubt which bunch of badasses were spying on him, hampering him at every turn.

By the time Rudolf was back inside the house he learned that Lillith, in order to preserve security around an experiment in progress, had masqueraded as his bride to discourage a beautiful but nameless red-headed snooper. "You have no idea where she is?" he asked.

St. Audrey shook his head.

"When did this magazine hit the stands?" Flaherty asked when he had seen the article.

"Yesterday. I suppose subscribers got it earlier."

"Just about any minute now, I'd guess," Flaherty said.

St. Audrey looked up. "You may be right," he said. "I hope so."

After several minutes of inconclusive talk their arch-enemy departed, taking with him their promise to call if Pamela showed up.

"You really think Pamela will come back here?" Rudolf asked.

Flaherty shrugged. "Do you care? Considering that you look like a freshly boated flounder, I can only surmise that you do. Dear boy, you have my sincere sympathy."

"Where do you suppose she is?"

Two evenings later Rudolf was still wondering when the phone rang and St. Audrey said, "You know, young man, my original offer is still open."

"Your what? Where's Pamela? You've found her?"

"Pamela? Oh yes. She was in Bermuda. Came back yesterday."

Suddenly Rudolf realized nothing had really changed. He had kicked Pamela out of his life. He had no cause for complaint if she stayed kicked. "You, uh — what were you saying?"

"I'm sending a messenger with some papers," St. Audrey said. "Look them over carefully before you give me a yes or no."

"Now what was that all about?" Flaherty asked.

Rudolf explained.

"By the way," Flaherty said, "what happened to that pole you were using to spring the trap?"

"It got so short I threw it out."

"Where?"

"Backyard somewhere."

Flaherty got a flashlight and went outside. "Not there," he said when he came in.

"You were going to give it to St. Audrey anyway."

"Aye, that I was. Maybe it's better this way." Flaherty hummed and mumbled to himself. "Be prepared for something when the messenger gets here," he finally warned.

"What?"

"I wish I knew."

"You said that stuff was important."

"It is. It's also useless."

"How come?"

"State of the art, dear boy. We're making aluminum because the general level of technology makes the time ripe."

"Isn't this superductile, superstrong junk just a matter of time too?"

"Aye lad. But it'll be some time before somebody has a pocket H-bomb to produce thirty thousand degrees of instantaneous heat and cooling. Besides, it'd only make cities denser and pollution worse. Be



happy making aluminum, air, and money."

Rudolf felt the incubator in his pocket and guessed Flaherty was right. "I wish we could make peace with Tuchi," he said.

There was a knock on the door.

"Here it comes," Flaherty growled, but when Rudolf opened the door he recognized the lean, elderly man from somewhere. Finally he realized it was the village postmaster. "Don't normally make deliveries but since I was on my way home..."

While Rudolf and Flaherty stared the old man dragged a bulging mail sack through the door. "Two more out in the car," he said. "You fellers are gettin' popular. You ought to rent a bigger box."

By the time they had unwrapped dozens of boxes of home made cookies, read an endless number of marriage proposals and less formal propositions, Rudolf was convinced of *Life's* pulling power.

"Here's a begging letter from some Indian school," Flaherty said.

"Throw it away."

"All of them?"

"If I sound bitter it's because I am. My family is long dead of preventable disease. Don't open anything that looks Indian. Just skim the New York City stuff for a royalty check."

"For what?"

"My book," Rudolf said. "I'm still an author."

"You could buy a publishing house now."

Thinking of what he could do to that goddamn Mohawk who'd kicked him when he was down, Rudolf considered it.

There was another knock. This time it was St. Audrey's messenger.

Rudolf knew as much about women's fashion as he did about art. But in each case he knew what he liked. Looking as exquisitely virginal as ever, Pamela was wearing it. "Hello, Rudy," she said.

Flaherty took the large manila envelope she held. There was an awkward silence which Flaherty filled with blarney while pouring drinks. "How've you been?" Rudolf asked.

"Fine." Pamela looked at piles of mail overflowing into corners. "What's all that?"

"Half of it's from women who want to marry him." Flaherty pointed at Rudolf.

"So do I, Rudy."

Rudolf could feel that sullen, reservation mentality slipping over him. Why, he wondered, did he have to be so suspicious? Pamela St. Audrey wasn't a gold digger. Even now Rudolf suspected she could buy and sell him twice a week. If he were ever to join the human race he would never have a nicer invitation.

"When?" he asked.

Pamela's face lit up so wonderfully he knew he would never regret his choice. "Do you really mean it, Rudy? Tomorrow then. Tonight, whenever you want!"

Flaherty shuffled through the papers in the big manila envelope and handed one to Rudolf.

*The bearer is unaware of the contents of this message except in a general way — that we wish closer ties for the common good. The bearer is hereby empowered to make personal arrangements regardless of the ultimate disposition of other matters pending.*

"What does it mean, Rudy?"

"We have Papa's blessing whatever I decide to do."

"And what have you decided to do?"

"As I have previously stated, I rely implicitly on Dr. Flaherty's judgment."

Pamela turned to the Irishman. "What do you think?" she asked.

"Sign it," Flaherty said.

## **CHAPTER 11**

Rudolf dropped his drink. Ignoring its spreading stain on the carpet, he looked closely to see if Flaherty was juiced already.

"It looks like he's come to his senses and would like to breathe as well as the next man," Flaherty said. "I'll have an independent loophole expert look it over, of course, but it's time we stopped playing around in a corner and got this thing going worldwide."

"Is he offering the same terms — a million a month?"

"Better," Flaherty said. "He's agreed to the delay penalty clause."

"This calls for a celebration," Rudolf decided.

"Wonderful!" Pamela said. "Where shall we go?"

"The supermarket," Flaherty said firmly. "There's no restaurant in twenty miles and bedamned if I'd put on a tie tonight anyway." He scribbled furiously and handed Rudolf a list. "You children get this and I'll cook."

Pamela finished her drink with a gulp. Rudolf followed her out to the oriental red Lamborghini, wandering in a happy daze with visions of sugarplums. Flaherty's grocery list included bottles of Tullamore Dew and several varieties of mix. What the hell, Rudolf thought. They'd worked hard enough for this day.

By the time they got back to the house the wild Irishman had a head start. Yet he still seemed competent in the kitchen. "You children enjoy yourselves," he said, leering as if he were expecting a public consummation. Rudolf managed a sickly grin and ignored it. "Mailed the contracts off already," Flaherty parenthesized as he was handing out fresh drinks.

"To St. Audrey?" A scare shot through Rudolf. Then he remembered he hadn't signed anything.

"Our accountants hate your prospective father-in-law's intestinal plumbing. If there's any fine print they'll find it."

Rudolf relaxed and sipped his drink.

"To us," Pamela said. They linked arms and drank without spilling more than a drop or two. Studying her fragile loveliness Rudolf felt protective instincts rising like the spring sap. Lovely, red-haired, nubile Pamela! All this and money too! "To us," he repeated, and they drank again. Abruptly he remembered the hash he had made of things the last time Pamela had dined here. Rudolf put the glass down, determined never again to be a drunk Indian.

Looking like a leprechaun recovering from dyspepsia, the Flaherty bounced in and out of the kitchen refilling drinks. Pamela became so insistent that Rudolf match her glass for glass that a certain native caution made him wonder if that sullen suspicion of reservation days might not be his best friend after all.

But what the hell... If she were planning a swifty she would need her wits about her. Noting the slightly slurred speech, Rudolf tried to remember how many times he had seen Pamela loaded. Whenever he visualized her red-headed loveliness the thought that came to mind was an icy supercool. Pamela might throw herself wholeheartedly into harebrained causes, but the news had never been full of "heiress arrested" headlines.

He remembered the lonely weeks since he had last seen her. It must have been as bad for Pamela. Maybe worse. Rudolf had had the consolation of hard work. What the hell... They were together. That was what counted.

Flaherty's dinner proved edible. By switching full glasses for empties Rudolf kept a grip on his sanity while Pamela and the wild Irishman became progressively smashed. The suspicion crossed his mind that this was all some weird game and that his partner and his promised bride were still silently maneuvering, each hunting for a vulnerable spot. But as the laughter became louder Rudolf decided he was imagining things.

"Rudy, darling, you're not drinking."

Rudolf was tempted to say he knew better things to do with Pamela but one never knew how women would react to a direct approach. He wished the wild Irishman would run down and go to bed. Suddenly he remembered the bathroom. He and Flaherty had become so used to a bucket and a pole they did it automatically but if Pamela should wander upstairs... Rudolf shuddered. While they were drinking

another toast to aluminum and free air he sneaked upstairs and hammered spikes through the bathroom door into the jamb.

When he came back downstairs Flaherty was singing. Even without knowing Gaelic, Rudolf was convinced the song was obscene. With her ladylike aplomb Pamela had not fallen flat on her face in the mashed potatoes but Rudolf saw there would be no problem getting her into his bed. The problem would be to keep her from flowing back out again. He picked her up, struggled with limpness, and felt his back straining. He changed his grip. Exposing great grabbable areas of pantyhose, he got her upstairs with a fireman's carry.

Flaherty was still singing salacious Celtic songs when he went back down. He considered putting the Irishman to bed too, then realized he wasn't far enough gone yet and it might turn into a struggle. Disgustedly, Rudolf drew a bucket of warm water from the kitchen faucet. He went up to his room and began taking a bath.

Pamela, he guessed, must have roused momentarily. She was beneath the covers with only her angelic face showing within a halo of red hair. She moaned faintly but did not open her eyes. Finished bathing, Rudolf went downstairs wearing his towel like a loincloth and emptied the bucket in the sink. The drain was acting up again. He lingered until convinced the water was slowly going down. Flaherty was still singing. Rudolf gritted his teeth and tried to step by. "Dear boy," the Irishman said, "I warned you t'be prepared for something."

"Yes?"

"I — och, never mind."

Rudolf went back upstairs. It seemed to him that he had gone through all this once before. Walking past the nailed-shut bathroom he suddenly stopped. Water was overflowing through the crack under the door. Then he saw the three black dots in a triangle. It wasn't water coming through the door.

"Tuchi!" Rudolf chattered, "I've been trying to get in touch with you — trying to make a deal. Can't we talk this over?"

"The time for talking is past," the alien snapped.

"What do you mean?" Rudolf had a sinking feeling that he knew very well what this angry female meant. He thought of running downstairs but it would take hopeless minutes to rouse Flaherty. And Pamela was right behind his bedroom door. If Tuchi started swinging a heat ray...

"My time has come."

"Time for what?"

"I'm spawning."

"Right now?" Suddenly Rudolf remembered. "Uh — how many did you say it would be?"

"About twenty-five hundred."

"Will they, uh — when you leave will you take them home with you?" Rudolf wondered what earth would be like with little Tuchis slithering about every waterway, poking inquisitive heads up through every sink and john.

"You could have prevented this," Tuchi said. The part of her that had passed beneath the door writhed in sudden conclusion. "There went another seven."

"They come in groups of seven?"

"How else would you spawn?" Tuchi snapped.

"The problem had never occurred to me," Rudolf said. "But we've got plenty of aluminum now — your kind. You can have all you want."

"I've already taken all I want. Do you think I couldn't smell it growing half a continent away?"

"Then what are you doing here?"

"I need the incubator to clean that disgusting mess you sold me out of the drive."

"Oh." Rudolf thought a moment. "I'll have to ask Flaherty." He turned to go downstairs.

"Move and you'll be deader than that snapping turtle a mile upstream that just nipped me," Tuchi promised.

Hearing a faint boom seconds later, Rudolf thought the alien could keep the promise. He hesitated. Pamela was safely asleep. If he could rouse the wild Irishman enough to get an outside opinion...

"Flaherty!" he yelled, "Lady here wants to see you." Moments later his partner came grumbling and stumbling up the steps. "It's Tuchi," Rudolf said.

Flaherty stared, trying to focus, and finally made out the alien's triangular face. "I'd like to use the bathroom," he said. "Couldn't we work something out?"

"She wants the incubator. Can we give it to her?"

Flaherty was suddenly very sober. "There you go with semantics again. Succinctly, can we *not* give it to her?"

"I've been considering it from that angle too," Rudolf said.

Tuchi squirmed and contracted like a salt-sprinkled slug. Rudolf remembered the Drano he had sprinkled across the threshold but surely the alien must have neutralized that somehow. He guessed she was squeezing out another septet of monsters. Turning to Flaherty he said, "You said you'd worked out how to do without it. I guess the time has come."

Somewhere a car started and laid a strip of rubber down a village street. "Goddamn squirrel-brains!" Flaherty parenthesized.

Tuchi was squirming to angle her triangular head toward Rudolf's bedroom door. Rudolf wondered how much longer the alien's patience would last. "All right," he said. "We'll give it to you!"

"I'd be careful," Flaherty began.

"You'd be dead too," Rudolf added.

"The decision is no longer yours," Tuchi said. "Your confederate must cooperate too."

"I'm cooperating," Flaherty said hastily.

"Wait just a minute," Rudolf added. "I'll get it for you."

"That's what you think," Tuchi snapped.

"I will! It's right here in my room." Rudolf hitched the sagging towel up around his waist and stepped back slowly, expecting to be zapped any moment. Giving silent thanks that Pamela was asleep, he opened the door to his room. She had the blankets clear up over her head now. He rummaged through his pants. Where the hell, he wondered, had he put the incubator? He always carried it in his pocket.

Tuchi oozed farther into the room. "You were saying—?" she sneered.

"I don't get it." But even as he said it Rudolf had a sudden horrible suspicion that he had just gotten it. Careful not to waken her, he peeled blankets away from Pamela's head. Then recklessly he snatched the covers away from a bundle of pillows. Pamela was gone. So was the incubator.

"Well now," Flaherty said, "how d'ya like them apples?"

"I do not eat apples," Tuchi said. "Which of you chooses to remain hostage while the other goes to recover my property?"

Rudolf tore off downstairs and out into the street. The Lamborghini was gone. He was halfway into the truck before he realized the futility of it all. Besides, he couldn't just bug out and leave Flaherty holding the bag. He went back upstairs where the Irishman sat contemplating his captor. Flaherty looked a mute question at him.

"I'm waiting for you to say something brilliant like you planned it this way," Rudolf said.

"I'm afraid 'tis not my day for brilliance." Flaherty's ravaged face seemed suddenly much older. "I'll stay," he said. "Good luck."

"You think I can catch a Lamborghini with a dump truck?"

The Irishman sighed. "No, I fancy not. They'll be guardin' Northumber like the Coca-cola formula." Turning to the alien he said, "We throw ourselves on the mercy of the court."

"What does that mean?"

"It means you can kill us quickly or slowly," Rudolf said. "Neither will get your incubator back."

"My patience stretches thinner than I," Tuchi said. "I shall remove small pieces until your amenability increases."

"Ow!" Flaherty yelled, and began hopping on one foot. The toe of his shoe was smoking. Hastily, he began unlacing it.

"Now just a goddamn minute!" Rudolf roared. "You're responsible for that incubator being gone. Don't take it out on us."

"By what exercise in rhetoric do you reach that conclusion?"

"I told you to be quiet. The only reason I flushed the toilet was to keep you from spilling everything to the bugs."

"There are intelligent insects on this planet?"

"Listening devices," Flaherty explained. He had his shoe off now and had stopped blaspheming oftener than once per second.

"Nobody knew there was an incubator to steal," Rudolf continued, "until you made sure the whole world heard about it."

"And the red-fringed specimen who carries the incubator?"

"You have a trace on it?"

"Naturally."

"I can save you some time," Rudolf said, and gave detailed directions to Northumber.

"This Northumber... it has sewers?"

"I guess."

"Hmmm." The alien began shrinking back under the bathroom door.

"Wait a minute," Rudolf yelled, "about that trap — could you show me how it works? I'll make you a nice deal—"

But like a movie of spilled water running backward, the alien disappeared through the crack. Resigned, Rudolf went for the hammer and nail puller.

"How d'ya like them apples?" Flaherty repeated when Rudolf came back upstairs.

Rudolf didn't like them at all. It was hard to decide whether Pamela's deep-dyed duplicity hurt worse, or the knowledge that he had fallen for it. That his money tree was dying came in a poor third. "I thought you had it all worked out," he growled. "Why did you tell me to sign?"

"Would it have made any difference?"

"I could have sent her ass flying home."

"Would you?"

"No," Rudolf admitted. "You're hooked on booze. I'm hooked on Pamela."

"Still?"

"I don't know. Where do we stand on that contract?"

"We haven't signed it yet. Anyway, I doubt if St. Audrey intends to alter the world as he knows it. Now that he has it, the incubator'll quietly disappear. You'll be discredited, a medicine show charlatan. Nobody'll ever believe we were making aluminum in the first place. The only difference is several billion people will die of respiratory disease before cancer or starvation gets them."

"I wonder how we're fixed for money?"

"Dear boy, you'd be a poor relation in the golden horde but you could support a few poor relations of your own without dipping into capital."

A few months ago Rudolf would have been content with the knowledge that he was comfortably fixed, that the specter of an ignominious return to the reservation could never become reality. But now... He had lingered on the fringes of real power. Life would never be the same.

"Did you know Lord Acton never did anything else noteworthy in his life?" Flaherty asked.

"Who?"

"The Sassenach baron who said, 'Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely.'"

While Rudolf was wondering if he were a mind reader the Irishman blew it by adding, "I doubt if men like St. Audrey know the difference between right and wrong."

Rudolf wrenched the last spike from the door. "All yours," he said.

Flaherty hesitated. "Maybe we'd better use the pole to see if..."

"I doubt if I'll ever again feel comfortable close to a sewer," Rudolf answered.

"Aye," the Flaherty gloomed. "The days of happy relaxation have retreated into the mists of memory. Och," he moaned, "the head oi'll have tomorrow!"

Rudolf slapped the bunched pillows from his bed and tried to sleep. Surely there must be other girls as delicately and ineffably beautiful as Pamela. Remembering how he had planned to end this evening,

Rudolf went to sleep wondering if there were such a word as effable.

It was dawning gray when he awoke to a pounding on the door. He heard Flaherty grumbling and swearing in his transit-mix basso and tried to go back to sleep. It was a moment before he realized the Irishman was not answering the insistent knocking. Rudolf crawled into his trousers and stepped outside. Like an inept angler, Flaherty was trying to dump a bucket into the john.

Rudolf stumbled downstairs, kicking aside unopened sacks of mooch letters and marriage proposals. One of these days he'd have to hire a secretary to answer all that crap. Meanwhile it seemed simpler just not to open anything that didn't obviously contain a check. It was a moment before his sleep-beared eyes recognized the dour, bulldog-faced man in the pepper and salt suit. There seemed something vaguely out-of-place about him. "Yes?" Rudolf asked.

"I've been empowered to make certain inquiries about a Mr. John Wilson last seen at this address."

"Never heard of him."

"Young man, short hair. Believed armed, considered dangerous. We have reason to believe he might have prowled this house."

"You're wasting your time," Rudolf said. "I never heard of him." By now he realized that Riordan was sniffing around about the hippie who'd managed to get himself bisected in Tuchi's trap. But surely, even this archaic gumshoe could come up with a better approach. Suddenly he noticed what was different. Riordan wore a false mustache and van Dyck. Rudolf struggled not to laugh.

Flaherty came bumbling downstairs with the bucket. "Needs a stronger pole," he growled, then he saw Riordan. Rudolf saw the sudden focusing of animus and stepped aside just as the wild Irishman emptied the bucket emphatically in the general direction of the fake mustache. "If you're willing to share it, take some home for St. Audrey," Flaherty yelled, and slammed the door.

Rudolf stared. "That wasn't very kind," he said when he could talk again.

Flaherty looked at his empty bucket. "You're right," he agreed. "The least I could do is offer him a full one." He washed his hands and began making coffee. Rudolf thought about going back to bed. He knew he'd never sleep again.

The phone rang. Rudolf picked it up. "Mr. Redwolf?"

"Yes."

"This is Arthur Many Birds, calling in behalf of the Winnebago Home for Orphan—"

"This is an unlisted recording," Rudolf said. "You have thirty seconds to cover your tracks. Please get your return address correct since the post office is finicky about misdirected explosives." While the line was silent he made a beeping sound and hung up. *Good god*, he thought, *it isn't even six o'clock yet!*

Flaherty looked no worse than usual for this time of morning. They ate a grumpy breakfast and drove out to the gravel pit. Flaherty lost himself in his lab and Rudolf began harvesting their last crop. Moments later the Irishman came out of his cubicle waving a test tube.

"Now what?" Rudolf asked.

"The high tolerance yeast! I've got a strain that stays alive in an ambient of fifty percent waste product."

"What does that mean?"

Flaherty abruptly subsided. "Nothing much really, It was a personal goal. I s'pose though that the world'll get excited when I get it up to ninety percent."

Rudolf decided it was going to be one of the Irishman's days for talking in riddles. "Now that it makes no difference anyway, could you tell me how the incubator works?" he asked.

Flaherty wiped his socratic nose and frowned. "I'm probably wrong about Tuchi's, but I know how I'd build one. Sure'n there might not be a laser fine enough to make the hole."

"What hole?"

"Remember, I told you they reproduce sexually, unlike most earth bacteria."

"Yes."

"They can reproduce by fission too. There's an uncomfortable point of theology involved but..."

"Now what would the gods have to do with it?" Rudolf wondered.

"As Virgil once told a young playwright, the only time to introduce a god into the plot is when the humans have gotten it so thoroughly screwed up nobody can find a way out."

"Could you be more specific?"

"Well, the only *deus* we'd ever get *ex* this *machina* would be some spook that could drill a hole or weave a screen small enough to separate the sexual from the asexual form."

Rudolf guessed the Irishman would sooner or later start making sense.

"Tis like birth control — or potatoes in the jungle," Flaherty continued. "Take dogs, humans, any strain that's bred too fine and beginning to lose fertility. As long's they're well-fed they don't reproduce. Do you know how a kennel gets a litter of pups when everything else fails?" Rudolf didn't.

"Starve the parents three to five days before breeding. Take potatoes..."

"What on earth for?" Rudolf wondered.

"Plant them in hot, jungle country and you get beautiful vines. Somewhere in the gene there's a certain dark wisdom that doesn't worry until the first cool night or the first hungry spell suggests that Eden may not be forever. That's when potatoes or humans start making seed."

Rudolf couldn't see what this had to do with aluminum.

"The parent bacterium can't reduce aluminum," Flaherty continued, "but it breeds true. Has to because it reproduces by mitosis — splitting in two. No chance for stray genes to combine. But get it out of low-grade ore — give it just one square meal and it switches over to sexual reproduction. These offspring are much smaller. The incubator might be just a radiation-proof box to discourage mutations. Probably it has some low-grade ore inside just rich enough to let one out of a hundred go sexual instead of splitting. The parent strain stays poor and pure. The sexuals get out through the hole or mesh or whatever into the outer chamber whence we squirt them over the gravel pit."

Rudolf thought a moment. Like everything the Irishman said, it made sense while he was saying it.

"But if only the sexual form gets out of the incubator, how did you ever get the parent strain?"

"Took a squirt fresh from the incubator and sealed it in a test tube — clay with about seven parts per million of alumina. They reverted to the asexual form, soaked up water, and grew several diameters."

"Then we can keep a pure culture going just by starving it?"

"That, I suppose, is why Tuchi warned us not to open the incubator."

"But if it's as simple as that we're still in business!"

"Aye," Flaherty gloomed. "It could be a dangerous business."

"I don't get it."

"If the true breeding strain got loose I'm damned if I'd know how to kill it."

"Who cares? It'll just make more air."

"Aye, dear boy, but you wouldn't have your monopoly any more."

"No, but we can scare the bejeezus out of St. Audrey. What d'you suppose he'll do if we threaten to flood the market?"

"You meant apart from killing us?"

Abruptly, Rudolf remembered their cab ride home from Northumber. He wished he'd thought to ask St. Audrey about that.

"Actually," Flaherty continued, "I'm more worried about them forcing the thing open."

"Maybe it'll have an interlock that'll blow Northumber into orbit," Rudolf said hopefully.

There was a noise down the narrow road to town. Flaherty looked out the door. "Wurra, wurra," he said in that comic brogue he could turn on or off.

"What's wrong?"

"I suspect I shouldn't have waved at the camera after all."

Rudolf looked out. A line of cars was moving slowly toward the gravel pit. They all seemed full. While Rudolf stared, people began getting out. It looked like the usual crowd of long-haired riot freaks. Rudolf wondered what they were doing here. Squinting, he barely made out a placard. It seemed to say something about vivisection. Rudolf could swear he'd seen those same faces on TV the other day when Flaherty had created his little sideshow to use an electron microscope.

"They didn't learn about this place by themselves," Flaherty said. "The golden horde means to do us

in."

"What can we do?"

"Ignore them. Maybe I can think of something before they get mean."

"I hope it's better than your last idea."

Flaherty winced and went back inside the lab. Rudolf followed him. "That south end of the pit's ready for reseeding," he said. "Do you have anything safe that I could use?"

"Give me a week or two to find some half micron filters and..."

Suddenly Flaherty slapped his forehead. "I'll force feed some of the parent stock. They'll all go sexual and you can plant them in a few hours." While Rudolf watched, he drew a drop of liquid, added it to some mud in another flask, and corked it. "Tomorrow you can put this muck in a flit gun and do a dance for Riordan."

Rudolf nodded and went back to scraping up muck with the dozer blade on the front of the dump truck. Outside the fence young longhairs and older ecology minded types marched like obedient sheep, carrying placards denouncing Rudolf as a vivisectionist, a capitalist, and several other things he had always wanted to be. He tried to ignore them as he drove back and forth scraping up the layer of aluminum-rich muck. He wondered what the antivivisectionists thought he was doing.

The demonstrators tired of peaceful picketing. They began chanting, making angry gestures. Rudolf looked around. Off in the other direction was a small swamp of weeds and cattails where Riordan hung out with his cameras and telescopes. If Rudolf had to run it was the only available cover. A determined mob could flush him in minutes. Abruptly, Rudolf realized he was a sitting duck. He drove the dump truck inside the shed and rushed into Flaherty's laboratory. "We've got to get out of here!" he began, then he stopped.

Flaherty was already gone!

## ***CHAPTER 12***

Rudolf stood unbelieving. After all he'd done for the Irishman and now that goddamn drunk had abandoned him! What was he going to do? Rage alternated with despair as he heard the chanting outside. He looked at the dump truck. It had a large dozer blade in front. If he shifted down and took a run at them maybe he could tumble those cars off the narrow road and make a break for the village.

But he'd have to wire the doors shut so the freaks couldn't get at him. And the glass wasn't bulletproof — not even rockproof, he realized. If he ground up a few demonstrators in the process of getting out, what would the law do to him? It might be self defense but if the golden horde had inspired this they could surely inspire judges and prosecutors too. What the hell was he going to do?

He wondered if he could talk to them, reason with them. What was all this randygazoo about vivisection anyway? Maybe if he let them in and showed them there were no animals here... He stepped out of the shed and walked toward the fence where an unkempt young man was exhorting the crowd through a bullhorn. Faces turned toward Rudolf and he knew he could never outshout a bullhorn.

The crowd had gathered into a tight knot facing the gate to the gravel pit. There was no way out. Rudolf decided to wait till the first rock came his direction. Then he would charge through the gate with the dozer blade at knee level. He wondered how many he could kill before they got him.

There was a sudden commotion around the shaggy young man with the bullhorn. After a moment's confusion another uglier man in a tie dyed T-shirt and ill-fitting bell bottoms came up holding the bullhorn. "All power to the people!" he yelled.

"Right on!" the crowd responded.

Rudolf stared. At this distance he couldn't recognize the stranger who had captured the bullhorn but he would know that transit-mix basso anywhere.



The Irishman began an oration on finks and traitors, punctuated with "all powers" and "right ons." When the first speaker surfaced and tried to recover the bullhorn Flaherty kicked him in the face and yelled, "This Judas betrays you. Behold the man who sold his immortal soul for debased coinage! He knows where the vivisection is!

"You there, Indian!" He pointed the bullhorn at Rudolf. "Two men are coming over the fence. Don't kill the misled innocents. Just show them the pens where you're torturing animals."

A pyramid formed and the two observers vaulted over. They came cautiously toward Rudolf. "What do you want to see?" he asked.

The young men had the surprised look of a sleepwalker who awakens *sans* trousers in the middle of the shopping plaza. They looked at each other. "Inside the building," one finally said.

"Be my guest." Rudolf led them through the door saying, "Now in this corner we raise young English majors in sterile conditions. When they reach maturity we sell the hearts, kidneys, and other usable organs to St. Audrey. You know him?" The young men shook their heads.

"Guy that's putting up that new building," Rudolf said. "He lives off in a place called Northumber. You can find it on any highway map.

"Now here," Rudolf pointed at a rusting gravel sieve, "is where we torture puppies in the name of science. If you'd care to capture the vicious freak who sent you on this wild goose chase I'll gladly put him to the rack too. Now in this laboratory," indicating the open door of Flaherty's cubicle, "we deflorate virgins whenever the moon is right." Rudolf led them on a grim tour of the facilities, rubbing their noses in the total lack of any animal life.

"What're you doing here?" one of the freaks finally asked.

"Making a living and minding my own business. What about you? More importantly, who suckered you into coming?"

The two observers went over the fence and sheepishly admitted through the bullhorn Flaherty still held that they had found nothing.

Flaherty did his best to direct their violence toward Northumber but the mob had had enough. One by one cars filled and began driving away. An olive drab sedan with a rooftop bubblegum machine flashing red came tearing up to the gate. "What's going on here?" a deputy shouted.

"You're late," Flaherty said, and handed him the bullhorn.

There was an acrimonious exchange of credentials with the Flaherty refusing to believe they were real deputy sheriffs and the deputies refusing to believe the whole riot had not been of Flaherty's instigation. Rudolf began to wonder if they really were bona fide law officers. He began calculating angles, trying to see if there were some way he could use the dump truck to sweep them and their car away without hurting the embattled Flaherty.

A pickup with camper on the back detached itself from the tangle of exiting cars and crept toward them. Lillith Lasky got out and began focusing a camera.

"Now who the hell are you?" a deputy asked.

Lillith produced her identification. The deputy suddenly visualized himself immortalized *as Life's* embodiment of piggery. He decided to cool it. After a few face-saving growls they got in their car. Then just as they were leaving one got out again with a folded paper. "Almost forgot," he said. "If you're really Francis Xavier Flaherty, this is for you."

"Now what was that?" Rudolf asked when the deputies had left them alone with Lillith.

"Without even looking I'd say it's an injunction against our producing aluminum by a process for which the golden horde's already filed a patent application."

Rudolf hastily scanned the legalistic gobbledegook. As near as he could make it out that made several times today the Irishman had been right.

"What're you doing here?" he asked Lillith.

"My specialty is covering riots," the dark-haired girl said. Turning to Flaherty she added, "Yours seems t'be starting them. Did this one backfire?"

"Darling," Flaherty said, "where I grew up they grant degrees in the subject. Somebody turned this one back against me and it took a while to get them pointed in the right direction again."

"Do you think they'll go to Northumber?"

"Not a chance," Flaherty said. "They'll go home and pretend they haven't been made fools. Och, and it's been a day. Now please, darling, don't tell me you have a surprise for me too."

"Now that you mention it," Lillith said. "I don't know if this'll make the next issue but I thought it might be of interest."

Rudolf stared blankly at an eight by ten color glossy of two young people splashing hand in hand through the surf. He looked at the typewritten caption taped to the lower edge of the print. *Society beauty finds fun in the sun*. After a moment Rudolf realized it was Pamela enjoying herself in Bermuda. And her smirking companion was that goddamn Mohawk!

Flaherty took the picture from his hands. "May's well load up that flit gun. The culture's gone sexual by now."

"That sounds like fun," Lillith said.

Rudolf came to abruptly. "Doesn't that injunction stop us?"

"It may stop us from selling it but I don't see anybody stopping you from dancing right now."

Rudolf was tired of dancing, tired of pretending, tired of everything. He filled a fly sprayer with a watery dilution of the muck Flaherty gave him and tramped glumly up and down the freshly scraped pit floor spraying.

"What exactly would happen if the true breeding strain ever got loose?" he asked when they were driving back to the small white house in the village.

Flaherty shrugged. "There're lots of things with alumina in them. Carborundum wheels might turn to mush and put the razor blade manufacturers out of business overnight. It might even..." The Flaherty yawned and dropped the subject.

Inside the house Rudolf sat and grumped while Lillith and Flaherty exchanged blarney in the kitchen. He turned on the TV, hoping illogically that the news would show Northumber being attacked by peaceniks. Instead he saw St. Audrey's new building nearing completion. Concrete crews were pouring around the clock, working overtime in an effort to make up for their late start. The building was bigger than Rudolf had realized.

Flaherty came from the kitchen smiling broadly, laughing too loud. "Good for what ails your troubled soul," he said, and pressed a drink on Rudolf. Rudolf sipped it. Tullamore Dew with soda wasn't bad at all. Moments later the Flaherty was back. "How'd you like it?" he asked.

"All right. Why?"

The Flaherty grinned. "'Tis home made."

"You? That's all we need now — a bust for moonshining!"

"Ah," the Flaherty said. "Now did I say I distilled it?"

"How else do you make booze?"

"By fermentation."

For once Rudolf was on solid ground. As a boy he had seen enough illicit distilling on the reservation to be familiar with the process. "You can make beer and wine that way," he said. "But the only way you get hard liquor is by concentrating the naturally fermented stuff with a still."

"Aha!" the Flaherty triumphed. "What'd you think a high tolerance yeast was meant to do?"

"Search me."

"Yeasts suffer from the same limitations as all other life processes: No organism can exist in an atmosphere of its own waste products."

"That's the main trouble with our planet," Lillith contributed from the kitchen doorway.

"Yeasts convert sugars into alcohol and carbon dioxide," the Irishman continued. "The only trouble is they die when the alcohol concentration reaches fourteen percent. That's why hard liquors have been possible only with distillation to separate the alcohol from the water."

"I thought you were just working on something to eat up garbage," Rudolf mused.

"I am."

Rudolf looked at his glass. "I'm drinking garbage juice?"

"If I can get the tolerance up to a hundred eighty proof you'll drive your car on it too."

Rudolf put the glass down. "Somehow that seems more suitable." Then suddenly he saw the implications of Flaherty's remark. "With petroleum reserves going to hell and electric cars still just a dream..."

"And alky burns cleaner than gasoline," the Irishman said. "Not near the smog."

"We can make money."

Flaherty's face fell. "Oi'm afraid not," he said. "I was under contract when I started working on this."

"They steal one; we steal one," Rudolf said.

"Though your morality is on a level with Moses' I'm not disagreein' from that angle. 'Tis the legal beagles that'll have't sewed up."

"It's all right for them to steal from us but we can't from them?"

"They have a license," Flaherty said.

Rudolf picked up his glass and sipped cautiously. For garbage juice it didn't taste bad. With his income cut off it might be the only booze he could afford.

"How's the bug situation?" Lillith asked.

"Who cares? We don't have any more secrets."

"I most devoutly hope we have one," Lillith said.

Abruptly Rudolf remembered the corpse they had disposed of. There was a knock on the door. He kicked aside the day's unopened mail sack and went to see what new disaster plagued his latter end.

Four Indians stood in the doorway. One was an elderly man dressed soberly in a somewhat old-fashioned suit. The others were younger and wore their storebought clothing more easily. The older man looked expectantly at Rudolf. "Am I supposed to know you?" Rudolf finally asked.

"Just passing through town," the elderly man said. "Thought we'd stop in and see how you're doing."

"Passing from where to where? This place isn't on the road to anywhere."

The elderly Indian saw the mail bag Rudolf had kicked aside. "You must be very busy these days," he said. "Forgive us for wasting your time." He tipped his wide-brimmed hat and they walked away.

"Who was it?" Flaherty called.

"More moochers." Sipping the wild Irishman's garbage juice, Rudolf suddenly remembered where he had seen the old man. He was the janitor from the reservation school.

"They were Indians, weren't they?" Lillith asked.

"Yeah." Mentally, Rudolf added, *Where were they when I needed them?* He took another sip and wondered what Tuchi was up to.

By the time Flaherty had set the table and Lillith was serving, Rudolf had decided the wild Irishman's garbage squeezings were not bad at all. He poured himself a second glass. Without soda it was even smoother. He tasted the food Lillith put before him. "What's this stuff?" he asked.

"Gefilte fish."

"Don't they have any bones at all?" Rudolf tried to think of something nice to say about the dark-haired girl's cooking but his mind was sidetracked with another thought. Tuchi had been spawning. Everything loved to nibble on Tuchi. What did Tuchi eat? How long before twenty-five-hundred little Tuchis matured and each produced another twenty-five hundred? Remembering Earth's cannibal history Rudolf decided the ensuing period would conform amply to the Chinese curse: May you live in interesting times.

His mind surfaced and he tuned in on Lillith and Flaherty's channel. "... money's the key," the Irishman was saying. "It buys legislators and makes laws. Bankrupt St. Audrey and he'd be a toothless joke."

"How could you do that?" Lillith asked.

Flaherty sighed. "Leverage and a seat on the stock exchange. It'd also take some knowledge of the market."

"Could you—?"

"Not a chance," the Irishman said. "I'm a genetic engineer. I may not know much but oi've learned niver t'play the other man's game."

"But you can't just give up like that!" Lillith agonized. "Poor people need to breathe. It's—"

"I don't wish that poor man any harm," Flaherty said, "but I'd say Hail Marys for Lucifer if St. Audrey's building would just fall down."

"Why?"

"He's stretched thin," Flaherty explained. "Any little slip could dump him lower than Humpty's rump." Rudolf refilled his glass. "You're sure this's refined garbage?" he asked.

"Bottled yesterday noon," Flaherty reassured him.

"How much've you got?"

"Just this bottle here in the house. There's a couple of gallons out at the lab in those plastic bleach jugs. Might be more by morning."

"A gallon should cover the evening quite nicely."

Flaherty gave him an odd look.

"Is it true what they say about drunken Indians?" Lillith asked.

"I dunno," Rudolf said. "Is it true what they say about Jews?"

"Touche." They touched glasses. Rudolf focused with some difficulty. Lillith was wearing her working uniform of hot pants and a navy blue jumper which bulged in the appropriate places. The apron she wore over abbreviated shorts gave an air of indecent exposure each time she turned around.

"Nice to see you go," Rudolf muttered.

He sat brooding at the table while Flaherty and Lillith roused themselves to clear away the wreckage of dinner.

"St. Audrey'll destroy the incubator," Lillith mourned. "It's Earth's last chance to breathe."

Flaherty nodded.

"But isn't there something you could do?" Lillith asked.

"Many things. But the cures might be worse than the disease."

Rudolf roused momentarily. "What could be worse than St. Audrey running the world?"

"St. Audreys have always run the world," Flaherty said. "A fish by any other name would still stink."

Rudolf suspected the Irishman was trying to impart some universal truth but he was too tired to decipher it.

"People who live in glass houses shouldn't," the Irishman continued. "And with modern surveillance you can't even keep your rotten fish in a concrete tank." Bearing pole and bucket, he stumbled upstairs.

Rudolf heard a car go down the village street. Where had he heard that exhaust before? Suddenly Rudolf knew he was hearing an oriental red Lamborghini. The last time he remembered hearing it was an instant before he had been going to return Tuchi's incubator. Now what the hell would Pamela be doing heading out toward the gravel pit this time of night?

Lillith looked up as he opened the door. Rudolf started to tell her what he suspected, then realized no girl as sharp as Lillith would refrain from some shot about whoring off after false gods. "Tell Flaherty I remembered something at the shop," he said. "Be right back."

"Do you think you ought—" But before Lillith could pass judgment on his driving, the dump truck roared off into the night.

Halfway to the gravel pit Rudolf passed a TR-3 parked off the road, two pairs of feet already sticking out an open door. A faint doubt crept into his mind. By the time he reached the gravel pit at the end of the deadend road Rudolf knew he had mistaken some makeout artist's TR-3 for the Lamborghini exhaust.

As long as he was here he might as well bring home another gallon of Flaherty's garbage squeezings. He unlocked the gate and drove the truck into the shed. Fumbling in the dark he finally found the keyhole in the lab door. The concrete floor inside was slick. He took a step and skidded, lighting heavily on the back of his lap.

For one horror-stricken moment Rudolf thought he had stepped on Tuchi or one of her offspring. Then he felt the muck. It must have gotten tracked in here or spilled from one of the Irishman's experiments. Muttering disjointed bits of the disaster-to-enemy curse, Rudolf stepped carefully back to the doorway where he could find the light switch.

There was a path of silversheening mud from doorway to workbench. Rudolf ran his finger through

it. It was just the normal muck that had made them rich. Beneath it he felt rough concrete. He wiped his hands and found the plastic jug. He smelled it, took a sip, and knew he had Flaherty's unpatented garbage juice. It tasted good. He took another drink, then scuffed his foot thoughtfully through the aluminum muck-scum' on the concrete.

Whenever the wild Irishman got a package on he talked in riddles — some sort of mental shorthand that might make sense to another genetic engineer but was a holy mystery to Rudolf. He tried to remember what the Flaherty had said this evening. Somewhere amid all that blarney Rudolf was sure he had heard something important.

He scuffed the muck again and took another drink. As his shoe rasped over rough concrete Rudolf remembered another bit from one of Flaherty's impromptu lectures about bauxite and other alumina ores. He saw Flaherty's pure culture alongside another half empty flask of the sexual variant he, Rudolf, had flysprayed over the empty pit this afternoon. Suddenly Rudolf knew St. Audrey's new building was going to fall down just as the wild Irishman had prayed.

## *CHAPTER 13*

It was important, he realized, to get the right bottle. He needed the sexual culture he had sprayed over the pit this afternoon. Rudolf hefted the flasks. He saw his bleeding madras loin cloth and the wrist and ankle ornaments fabricated from a feather duster. Might as well take them. He tasted the liquid in the plastic bleach jug again. Surely the Irishman was putting him on. Garbage squeezings couldn't taste that smooth.

He locked up the gate. Driving through the village, he knew Lillith and Flaherty would recognize the unmistakable blat of the unmuffled dump truck but... He'd be back before morning and he could tell them about it then. He took another tiny sip.

Soon he was roaring down the toll road for New York. There was surprisingly little traffic for this time of night. Just as he began chanting disaster-to-enemy curses to the tune of "Indian Love Call" it began raining.

Rudolf wiped his eyes and still couldn't see. Finally he remembered to turn on the wipers. It began coming down like a cow micturating on a flat rock. Rudolf drove on through the rain at a stolid forty-five, as fast as the dump truck could go without tearing the governor out by the roots. He wished he'd ignored Pamela's tantrum and driven it to Northumber the day they'd tried to buy him. It would have been fabulous, the end-all of put-downs if only he could have parked a dump truck among all those Cadillacs and Continentals and Lamborghinis. Rudolf sighed.

The toll road divided with one branch heading off somewhere into the wilds of New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Rudolf realized his error at the last minute, swept across a couple of lanes and was rewarded with angry honks and tire squealings. The truck continued its unfaltering forty-five. He wondered if Tuchi had found her way to Northumber yet. The rain lessened and he didn't have to concentrate so hard to keep the loose-steering truck from wandering across more than three lanes.

Cars whizzed past, tail lighting spray into rocket exhaust. Rudolf aimed his missile cityward and was suddenly lost in the by-ways of Van Cortlandt Park. The dump truck cab's rear window was missing. Rudolf felt the chill settling into his bones. He took another slug of garbage juice and extricated himself to cross the Harlem River.

A cop waved and blew his whistle. Rudolf waved back and drove down — what the hell was he doing clear over on Second Avenue? The rain lightened to a drizzle as he mushed doggedly south, ignoring honks and policemen's whistles. St. Audrey's new building was somewhere south of the East Village, he knew, down around 9th or 10th where they had talked for years of clearing out the aging Russian-Polish neighborhood.

Suddenly Rudolf realized he was not alone. Dozens of transit-mix trucks were grinding along, jockeying for position. Rudolf got in line. Drivers waved fists and honked at the dump truck's defilement of concrete mixers. Finally Rudolf focused long enough to see they were all pointing the same way. He veered over to the next block and insinuated himself into another line.

Slowly the line moved through an opening in a board fence. Above the clatter of idling dump trucks he could hear the steady rumble of concrete being poured into hoppers and lifted into the Manhattan sky. He looked up into the dark where buckets were disappearing in the drizzle.

Dump trucks were collecting smashed form lumber, odd lumps of hardened cement, all the leftovers from a building that would enclose more volume than the Great Pyramid. Rudolf crept along the line, looking for a way to get out. He drove under a hopper. The truck shuddered and settled as tons of rubble came crashing into it.

The loader waved him on. Rudolf killed the engine. It refused to start. Hot from all that idling and creeping, he guessed. It would be okay after resting a few minutes to cool off. There was shouting and waving. The truck behind pushed him to one side and the line began moving again.

"Where's your hard hat?" the dispatcher asked when he got out.

Rudolf ducked back inside the cab again. Goddamn was it ever cold out in that rain! He took another gulp of garbage juice. Feeling blindly in the darkness, he found the flask he had bundled inside his bleeding madras loin cloth. He got out of the opposite door where the dispatcher couldn't see him.

"Hard hat!" somebody yelled as he walked toward the crane.

"Lost it!" Rudolf yelled back.

The stranger pointed to a small shack. There was no attendant. Rudolf helped himself to a hard hat and continued toward the crane, his bundle grasped firmly under one arm.

"Hey, you can't do that!" somebody shouted as Rudolf climbed the concrete hopper. It was too late. The bucket was rising into the drizzly overcast with Rudolf standing on the bail, gripping the cable with one hand.

He had never ridden a crane before. He had always assumed it would ride smooth like an elevator. Instead, the hopperful of concrete was ascending in a series of jerks. Rudolf wondered if the height would make him dizzy. There was some anthropological nonsense about Indians being unafraid of heights which the Iroquois exploited to dominate the high-iron trades in New York. Rudolf didn't much believe in sweeping statements. He was thankful that the overcast already obscured the ground. Wrapped in a cotton-wooly womb of mist, he had little chance to see how far up he was.

He felt the bucket sway. Then as the cable flexed it began slowly spinning. Rudolf hung on, gripping his bundle firmly with his other hand. Below him in the bucket were several cubic yards of wet concrete. He hoped he could find a way to step off once he reached where they were pouring.

He gritted his teeth and hung on. From time to time crude spray-painted numbers appeared on the blank facing. How many levels ago had he passed number one hundred?

The bucket slowed with a series of jerks that threatened to dump him in the concrete. He wondered what would happen if he fell in. Would he float or would he be immured like some victim the Romans used to plant in a bridge to ensure a resident spook?

There was a glow in the mist below him. Rudolf felt the wind shift direction. Within seconds the mist dissipated and the glow became a searchlight. Far below him angry ants gesticulated and opened mouths in noiseless, fishlike shouts. Rudolf wondered when one would think to reverse the hoist but at that moment somebody snagged the bail and pulled the bucket inward. "What're you doin' here?" the man with the hook asked. "Personnel lift's over there."

Rudolf gave an apologetic shrug and stepped off. Here in the work area there were lights everywhere. He heard the loud ring of a handcranked field telephone. He hurried toward darkness and discovered he was leaving footprints in fresh concrete. He walked faster, pretending not to hear the angry shouts. Finally he blundered onto solid concrete. He shifted directions and found a dark corner.

In here, out of the wind, Rudolf felt so much better that he decided he might as well do it right. It would confuse things if he got caught. He stripped off his clothes, took the bleeding madras loincloth from around the flask and put it on along with his feathers. Sticking to the shadows, he began dribbling a faint

track from his flask of culture.

It was a far longer walk than he had imagined around the building's outer walls, back to the brightly lit area where men were still pouring concrete. There was a strange drifting sensation. Rudolf wondered if the building was swaying or if he was.

A grate-screach of cable through pulleys warned him. Just in time he ducked around a corner to avoid a dozen well-dressed men in hard hats who stepped off the open platformed personnel elevator. At first Rudolf thought they were plainclothes police or some kind of security force but, instead of deploying to search they huddled in the mist. Minutes later the lift returned with more men carrying mikes, lights, and cameras. Gradually it dawned on Rudolf that the searchlight below had not been aimed at him. He was an inadvertent witness to the topping out, a ceremonial hoopla over the last girder in the building.

No wonder he'd gotten up here without trouble. People had been expecting strangers' and media freaks. He stuffed the nearly empty culture flask into his bundle of clothes and wondered how he was going to get down and out of here.

Down and out. Rudolf found that phrase evocative. He remembered Flaherty's flamboyant gesture at the Johns Hopkins riot. If an Irishman was proud, what was a Sioux? He shivered and took another preventive sip of garbage juice. The grips were aiming lights. Rudolf peered up. The cameras would shoot from down here, emphasizing height and making it all seem very dangerous.

Suddenly Rudolf realized he had left his camouflage coup stick home in the village. He really didn't need it but... He put his hand down in the darkness to see what he had been stumbling over and discovered several leftover trimmings of reinforcing steel in a neat little pile. He found one the right length. It was heavy but it was the best he could do.

He took his shirt from around the culture flask and ripped it into strips. He wrapped the steel bar, covering its length and wadding knobs on each end until it resembled the incubator holder Lillith had immortalized in *Life*. He began a judicious plucking of wrist and ankle ornaments until the reinforcing steel bore a semblance of feathers. Goddamn, it was cold! He took another preventive sip of garbage squeezings.

Rudolf crouched in his hideaway, watching as shivering grips climbed a story higher to act as stand-ins. Cameramen cursed double shadows, rearranged lights, cursed again. Finally somebody spoke into a walkie talkie and the lift came creaking up again.

Half of the golden horde was here! St. Audrey was here. Another man was getting off the lift. At first Rudolf assumed he was one of the Iroquois iron workers. But no high-iron man would wear a business suit up here. It was the goddamn Mohawk!

They moved into position and began the solemn nonsense of laying the last girder which would have to be removed and properly positioned after the ceremony by some Indian who knew one end of a rivet from the other. Rudolf began cautiously working his way around in the shadows. He found a slanting beam and started climbing.

The heavy steel "coup stick" was still gripped in his teeth when he crept into the light. While the mayor of this disaster area and the golden horde exchanged smiles and earnestly scribbled on the white-painted girder Rudolf stood up one level over their heads.

After one startled glance the cameraman moved his lens just enough to keep both Rudolf and the golden horde framed. Rudolf removed the coup stick from his mouth and put his finger to his lips. It was not necessary. The camera crew stared, seeing delightful visions of story-of-the-year awards. Rudolf suspected that in his heart of hearts the cameraman was hoping he would drop a grenade among the solemn celebrators below, providing it could be done without damaging the lens.

He began dancing along the girder, pointing his coup stick toward the four winds, silently mouthing the disaster-to-enemy curse and making baleful gestures at the golden horde busy performing their own magic ten feet below.

The golden horde could face accusations of knavery with equanimity but to appear ridiculous was serious. They grew nervous, sensing that all was not well when the camera crew's smiles began turning into suppressed laughter. Finally one looked up.

Suddenly it was keystone cops as Rudolf danced and thumbed his nose before scampering off into

the darkness with the golden horde in hot pursuit and a delighted cameraman getting all the footage. Then the golden horde abruptly remembered they were more than a hundred stories above Manhattan's granite and the guard rails still not installed.

There was a hurried confabulation of turkey gobblers, then the Mohawk was climbing a girder up to Rudolf's level. Suddenly Rudolf remembered that, no matter what his other faults, the Mohawk had been a high-iron worker before finding a home on the cocktail circuit. He wondered if Pamela's present consort would bother to take him alive.

He wished he'd gone easier on the garbage juice. It was the first time he had ever done any real climbing. No matter how good he might be, the Mohawk would be better.

From the corner of his eye Rudolf could see the golden horde already crowding onto the personnel lift, leaving their pet Indian to do the dirty work. He wondered if the TV crew would fold their tents too, then realized they were waiting with cameras poised to record the final episode.

If Rudolf could just drop down to camera level and get to the lift before the Mohawk found him... Abruptly he realized he didn't know how to run the lift or even if it could be controlled from this level. In any event, it was not here.

The Mohawk was. Walking like a storybook Indian, he trod the girders, looking straight at Rudolf. It was an instant before Rudolf realized the Mohawk couldn't possibly see him in this darkness. But he would soon. Rudolf lowered himself as far as he could from the girder. It was still a respectable distance down to the next level. He took a breath, addressed a prayer to the unknown god, and let go.

Shock came clear up to his shoulder blades but after a moment Rudolf guessed nothing was broken. While the pain was subsiding he wondered if he had energy left to kick himself. Barely ten feet away was a ramp where he could have walked down. The Mohawk was stepping toward it, still staring toward where Rudolf had been a moment ago. Rudolf would never get another chance like this. He climbed the ramp an instant before the Mohawk stretched to straddle the gap from one girder to the next. When the cocktail party assassin was stretched to his utmost Rudolf reached up and grasped him gently in the same place Tuchi had touched Rudolf.

The Mohawk's shriek was so hogcallyingly soprano that Rudolf never understood how the TV crew didn't hear it over the clatter of concrete pouring. The Mohawk lost his footing, swung wildly and teetered an instant. Suddenly Rudolf realized how close they were to the edge of the building. He grabbed the gyrating Indian by the lapels and pulled him back to safety.

While the goddamn Mohawk was voicing his hysterical gratitude Rudolf said, "I wasn't saving your life; I was saving your clothes." He swung the iron coup stick in a brief arc and began undressing the Mohawk. On his way back to the camera crew Rudolf remembered to pick up his own clothes and the culture flask. He didn't think he'd need either on the way home but he'd need his money and driver's license.

As Rudolf had assumed, even for cameramen, clothes make the Indian. As he approached wearing the Mohawk's suit and hard hat a grip asked, "You see him?"

"Over that way," Rudolf pointed as the lift arrived to disgorge some very rough looking types. He stepped aboard the lift. There was a button and a hand-lettered card telling how many rings for up, down, and stop. Rudolf was a quick study.

Riding the bouncing lift down to ground level, he transferred his lares and penates to the clothes he was wearing. He tossed his own clothes onto a scaffolding somewhere near the ninetieth floor and stuffed the culture flask into one of the Mohawk's pockets. As he reached the ground several sirens hinted it was time to get out of here.

Rudolf was cold. It was still raw and blustery, threatening rain again. He wondered momentarily why they had picked such a time for a topping-out ceremony, then realized it had probably been scheduled weeks in advance, the golden horde being as pressed for time as the news media.

The lift gave a final jerk. "What's going on up there?" the spooltender asked.

"Some wild Indian dancing around with feathers," Rudolf said. "They got him though. Better warn the cops to have a straight jacket ready when he comes down."

"Jeez!" the spooltender said.



Rudolf walked off into the darkness, wondering which was the shortest way around the building to his dump truck. Two carloads of police and an ambulance arrived, their sirens barely audible over the clatter of machinery. Rudolf knew he shouldn't but he was so godawful chilled... He took another nip of garbage squeezings.

Finally he found the concrete hopper and oriented himself. The truck's engine had cooled. It started on the first spin. Rudolf heard more sirens and saw police ringing the construction site. It could get hairy if they found garbage squeezings or any kind of bottle in the cab of his truck. Hoping he could drive a straight line through the cordon, he tossed jug and flask through the glassless rear window onto the load of rubble. A cop took one look at his hard hat and waved him on. Rudolf followed the other dump trucks north up Manhattan.

Soon he realized they were heading for the George Washington Bridge. Remembering his last ride through New Jersey, Rudolf shuddered and got out of line. Just as he reached the outskirts of the Bronx it started raining again. Even wearing the goddamn Mohawk's suit, Rudolf couldn't stop shivering. He fished the plastic jug back into the cab and had another precautionary sip of garbage squeezings.

Though fine for the gravel pit, the truck's steering was too worn and loose for the highway. Rudolf concentrated on his driving and tried to ignore the honks and fists shaken at him. Even if he hadn't gone a trifle heavy on the garbage juice Rudolf doubted if he could have driven the groaning monster much straighter.

Periodically cars and smaller trucks cut in on him but so far none had flashed red lights. Rudolf ground steadily onward through the rain. An hour passed and he noticed that one small camper kept reappearing, cutting in on him.

By the time he reached the outskirts of New Haven Rudolf was plagued by a tiny nagging suspicion. An hour later in downtown Hartford he realized not even New England's endless duplications of place names could produce this kind of coincidence. He was a hundred miles into the wrong state.

The camper reappeared. It cut in on him; trying to force him off the road. Rudolf barreled serenely onward, secure in the knowledge that in any game of highway "chicken" dump trucks hold all the aces. That was why it was doubly annoying when he was finally stopped not by police, not by an outraged citizenry, but simply because the truck stopped running.

He ground on the starter. Minutes passed before he thought to study the truck's somewhat whimsical gas gauge. A cop appeared. Several Indians appeared. Everything was fogging in like an unhypoed print. Rudolf wondered if he were exhausted from all that driving through driving rain. Somehow that offended his sense of literary symmetry. He wished he had another drink of garbage juice but when he reached for it there was a curious double exposure memory of a brown arm reaching into the cab and exiting again with the jug. It was all very confusing. Rudolf sneezed. He hiccupped.

The next time he awoke, without even opening his eyes, Rudolf knew he was going to wish he hadn't. Was he in jail? The bed was too soft for that. He stretched and his hand found a warm, hairless leg. Rudolf opened his eyes. Beside him Lillith sighed and moved in her sleep.

*Now you've done it!* Rudolf told himself. The thought that he might be joined in holy matrimony to this capable amazon brought Rudolf upright with an abruptness that threatened to send his head rolling into a corner of — where the hell? It looked like a motel room. Across the bed he could see the door to the john.

Kneeling with his face reflected in the tiny limpid pool, Rudolf suddenly remembered Tuchi. It was too late. Flaherty's garbage juice came up, accompanied by some oysters Rudolf had eaten three weeks ago. Pale and shaken, he finally staggered into the shower. Only when he was soaping himself did he realize that somebody had undressed him and put him to bed.

When he came out Lillith was still in bed but room service had left a tray. The dark-haired girl opened her eyes. "Morning, lover," she said.

"Am I?" Rudolf asked, "Did we—?"

Lillith tossed covers from the bed and emerged fully clothed in her working uniform of hot pants and a baggy sweater. Rudolf guessed that answered his question.

"You really hung one on," she said cheerfully. "Drink this."

"Oooooooooooooooooohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!" It wasn't the most sophisticated line in the world but Rudolf's delivery had never been more sincere.

Lillith bullied him into drinking a glassful of some red tinged corpse reviver and within minutes Rudolf had collected himself enough to climb back into the Mohawk's rumpled suit. "What happened?" he asked.

"Do you want all the painful details about resisting arrest and how duly constituted officers of the law were suborned into releasing you into the custody of hundred-dollar-bill-sprinkling strangers?"

Rudolf groaned again. "How did you happen along?" he asked.

"The eleven o'clock news gave a rather broad hint as to your whereabouts even if one of the guys on the camera crew hadn't called me for some background material hours before."

"Where's Flaherty?"

"Home minding the store. What were you actually doing up there with your head in the clouds?"

Rudolf groaned again. "Am I—?" He decided he'd rather not know. Lillith ate breakfast with a cheerful haste that Rudolf found nauseating. She gulped coffee and said, "Let's split."

Rudolf followed her out of the motel. "Where's the truck?" he asked.

"Ten deep in fuzz. You can afford a new one better than a long stay in somebody else's jurisdiction. You leave anything important in it?"

Rudolf thought and decided he hadn't. From the corner of his eye he saw several Indians from the next unit loading bags into an aging car. He remembered being surrounded momentarily by Indians. He peered into the early morning sunlight. It was the janitor of his old school and the other young men he'd brushed off last evening. "John!" he called, "I'm sorry, I didn't recognize you. What're you doing in this part of the country?"

The old man smiled. Rudolf stepped forward to shake hands and moved too fast. His vision blurred for an instant and he thought he was going to flash the biscuits again.

"You really got lit up last night," the old man said. "We're going to a conference up on the Iroquois reservation," he continued. "See if we can do something to keep the Corps of Engineers from damming all the treaty land under water."

When Rudolf could see again he said, "I'm really glad to see you. So many moochers I just didn't know you for a minute. Is there anything I can do for—?"

"Not now!" Lillith said firmly. "We've got to move."

"Stop in on your way back," Rudolf said. He fought down another wave of nausea. The Indians went back to loading their car as Lillith caught his arm and led him toward her camper. "Did I see them last night?" he asked.

"Considering that you were statutorily blind, I doubt it. They saw you. So did everybody else in the monumental traffic jam caused by a truck whose driver I charitably refrain from naming. Will you hurry up?"

Rudolf wondered how he had ever imagined this dark-haired amazon attractive. What annoyed him most was the way she filled a pair of hot pants. Had he really spent the night in the same bed with her?

Lillith was backing the camper out into the driveway when a black sedan pulled in to block the exit. Several men who all looked like Riordan got out. "Rudolf Redwolf?" one asked.

"Will you please move that car?" Lillith yelled, "I'm late already."

"You may be later, lady," one said.

Lillith came out of the cab with a camera. "In that *case* *Life's* readers may as well know who delayed me." She began snapping pictures.

"My left side photographs better," one cop said. The others ignored her. "Rudolf Redwolf?" one repeated, "You're under arrest."

"What for?"

"Would you like the charges alphabetically or at random?"

Rudolf didn't feel up to facing them either way. Somebody gave him his rights and hammered away until he admitted to understanding basic English. With Lillith snapping pictures he was handcuffed and led to the black car.

"Expert testimony says there wasn't a mark on your body but you were in obvious need of medical attention at the time of your legal harassment," Lillith yelled as the car drove away.

Rudolf felt his nausea return.

"What the hell were you on last night?" one of the cops asked, "magic mushrooms?"

Rudolf didn't feel up to explaining garbage juice.

He endured the booking procedures and refrained from vomiting until he was led to a holding tank. Twenty-four hours and three jails later he was feeling better, though still decidedly green when a stranger arrived with a brief case. The stranger was a small, middle-aged man whose physique derived from centuries of systematic malnutrition in some Slavic ghetto. His ferret face suggested that he knew who was responsible for those centuries and that his patience was nearing an end.

"Who're you?" Rudolf asked.

"I'm your lawyer. Bastards kept moving you so much I damn near missed you again."

"I don't know you."

"Of course you don't. Miss Lasky sent me."

Suddenly Rudolf thought how easy it would be for the golden horde to bail him out and spirit him off to never-never land. "Miss who?" he asked.

"Oh, for Christ's sake! The broad you slept with night before last and were too bombed-out to screw!"

"All right." Rudolf wondered if any situation would ever occur in which Miss Lasky would not be two jumps ahead of him.

"Where do we go from here?"

"Preferably someplace out of range of the illegal but thoroughly visible microphones that're violating a privileged conversation. You ready to leave?"

"I guess so." A turnkey opened the cell and Rudolf followed his counselor down the corridor. At the desk he signed for a manila envelope full of keys, pocket knife, billfold, and money. The lawyer rushed him into a Cadillac and they headed for the edge of town.

Before Rudolf quite realized what was happening he was in a helicopter. A half hour later the chopper settled down in the middle of the gravel pit. Flaherty came from his lab to see what new disaster threatened. The chopper lifted, leaving Rudolf and the lawyer behind. "Where's Lillith?" Flaherty asked.

The lawyer shrugged. "The question is, what do we do now?"

Flaherty sighed and led the way into his laboratory. "Place's clean, I think." He turned on a radio. They found chairs and boxes to sit around it. "Dear boy," Flaherty said, "I know you meant well but I do wish you hadn't done it."

"Why?"

"I've been sitting here all morning putting things together. Took me the longest time to guess what you were up to. Then I found the missing flask. Even then I thought maybe one of St. Audrey's crew stole it."

Rudolf sighed. "What difference would it make?"

"I don't know," Flaherty said. "In the long run it'll all work out the same. Nobody keeps a secret forever."

Rudolf felt a little twinge of worry. "Are we speaking the same language?" he asked.

"I couldn't say. Which flask did you think you were getting?"

Suddenly the worry was more than just a twinge. "Which one did I get?"

"The true breeding culture," Flaherty said.

## ***CHAPTER 14***

There was a clarion call of muted money which Rudolf recognized as a Lamborghini horn. He looked out and saw the oriental red car. The top was up. Now why, he wondered, did Pamela have to come out here personally when they could have sent any process server? He strolled warily toward the locked gate. Flaherty and the lawyer watched from the doorway. A man's head emerged from the right-hand window. "Can we come in?" he yelled. It was St. Audrey.

Rudolf looked back at Flaherty and the lawyer. "No use locking the stable door now," Flaherty said. The lawyer shrugged agreement.

Rudolf unlocked the gate. Looking straight ahead, Pamela drove through and parked next to the shed. They got out and went inside Flaherty's laboratory. "I've come to apologize," St. Audrey said.

Wordlessly, Pamela handed Rudolf the incubator.

Totally nonplussed, Rudolf looked at Flaherty. The Irishman shrugged. Rudolf turned back to St. Audrey. "I don't get it. What kind of a man are you?"

St. Audrey turned on his matinee idol smile. "If you cut me, I bleed. I have an aversion to standing bloody but unbowed."

Rudolf wondered how he could ever have admired and envied people like this. "I suppose you want something," he said.

"Nothing more than I've ever wanted. I want you on our side."

"And how do you expect to achieve that?"

"Unconditional surrender."

"Your building's fallen down already?"

The lawyer interrupted with frantic nonsense but St. Audrey didn't react. "I'm returning your property intact and unused," he said. "Now will you please call off your dogs?"

"That's an unusual request," Rudolf said. "I've never spied on you."

Flaherty erupted into roaring guffaws. "Och," he finally wheezed, "'tis merry sport t'see the engineer..."

Rudolf stared.

"Sure and we'll take care of the incubator," Flaherty said. "Now there's just one tiny little favor you'd be askin' of us?"

Through it all Pamela had been staring into the distance, trying for her habitual supercool. "Please, Rudy," she finally said. "You didn't have to do that to poor Archie."

"Archie?" That was the goddamn Mohawk's name. "It was him or me."

"But you didn't have to kill him!"

Suddenly Rudolf knew it was all a shuck. "Save it," he said. "Even if I had been there it just isn't in my peace-loving nature to hit that hard. Go frame somebody else."

"Nobody's framing you," St. Audrey said. "Can we speak freely?"

"That depends on whether Riordan's still manning his mikes and cameras over in the swamp."

"He's been gone since we — acquired the incubator. Now don't worry about homicide investigations," St. Audrey continued. "I'd much rather call it off. We don't need more bodies, do we?"

"I had nothing to do with whatever you're talking about."

"Please, Rudy," Pamela wailed, "can't we ever use a bathroom again?"

Suddenly Rudolf understood that he wasn't being accused of battery with a coup stick. Now he realized what had happened to the Mohawk. Too bad, he thought. He hadn't really disliked the bastard all that much. "So you want me to defuse your bathrooms?"

St. Audrey raised his hands, palms up. "Yes."

"No." Rudolf handed him back the incubator.

"Your wildest desire," St. Audrey tempted.

"Mine enemy's head on a platter?"

While St. Audrey stared Rudolf ushered him and his lovely, nubile, red-haired daughter back to their car and out the gate.

"Let's go home," he said when the Lamborghini was gone.

Flaherty and the lawyer were still in shock. They nodded and Flaherty led the way to a new

Plymouth.

"When'd you get this?" Rudolf asked.

"Yesterday when Lillith called and said the truck was impounded."

Rudolf groaned.

They arrived at the white house in the village just as another older car was arriving. Rudolf squinted and saw it was the janitor of his reservation school, accompanied by the same younger Indians. "How'd you make out?" he called.

Old John shook his head. "Can't beat the white man," he said. "They're gonna flood the whole damn reservation."

Rudolf gave a disgusted growl. "Come on in. Maybe we can scrape up something to eat."

Just as they were going inside the house the phone rang. "Rudolf?" It was St. Audrey's voice.

"Yes?"

"I'd give you your enemy's head on a platter but my religion forbids suicide. Now surely, there must be some private arrangement possible between us..."

Looking into the front room where Flaherty exchanged pleasantries with the dejected Indians, Rudolf suddenly knew there was something he wanted. "Come over right now," he said, and hung up.

Within minutes St. Audrey was knocking. This time Pamela stayed in the car.

"Behold my brethren," Rudolf said, and drew a startled glance from Flaherty. "Help them in their hour of need."

"What do they want?" St. Audrey asked.

Old John explained about the violated treaty and the Corps of Engineers' dam foolishness.

St. Audrey dialed eleven digits and spoke briefly.

The lawyer's ferret eyes narrowed at the name St. Audrey mentioned. "Hold it," he said, and grabbed the phone. "May I have your full name, sir?" Even across the room Rudolf could hear the "Who the hell gave you this number?"

"Thank you," the lawyer said, and handed the phone back to St. Audrey. "Hard to impersonate that voice without some preparation," he said with a thin smile.

When St. Audrey hung up a moment later he turned on his full voltage smile and said, "It's taken care of."

This time Rudolf guessed it was.

There was a round of happy handshaking while Old John and the younger Indians convinced themselves that what they had just witnessed had actually happened.

"I don't like to press you," St. Audrey said deferentially, "but delay could cost another life."

The Indians took the hint and began making their farewells. "Wait a minute," Rudolf said. "How you fixed for money?"

There was an embarrassed silence. "We're a little short," one of the young men admitted. "Had to buy three retreads."

"Take our car," Rudolf said. "We'll get another." He gave St. Audrey a piercing look which elicited several large bills. "You guys keep in touch," Rudolf said, and turned to St. Audrey. "Okay, let's go."

"Knew I should have brought the Cadillac," St. Audrey murmured.

Rudolf looked at the lawyer. "Can you call that chopper?" he asked.

An hour later they were in Northumberland, with the exception of Pamela who was driving the Lamborghini home. Rudolf approached the scene of the Mohawk's demise and poked the door open with a broom. "Tuchi," he called, "I've got it. Tuchi! Are you there?"

There was no answer. Rudolf tried several more times, then gave up. "We may be here a while," he said. "How about my first month's salary?" He glanced at the lawyer whose name he still hadn't learned.

"Make it the first year's," the lawyer said, "and never say salary when you mean a transfer of capital gains on which the tax has already been paid."

St. Audrey winced. The lawyer opened his briefcase and began moving chips from one ledger to another. Flaherty yawned and wandered about the library. Rudolf thought he was going to demand booze but the Irishman stretched out on a couch and went to sleep. Rudolf tried the bathroom again. Still

no Tuchi. He returned to the library and idly perused titles.

*The Saints...* He rummaged through its pages until he came to St. Audrey. (See Ethelreda.) He turned to Ethelreda (or Audrey) and read: *A widow, she married the boy Egfrid, son of the king of Northumbria; when he grew up she refused to consummate the marriage. The unfortunate Egfrid married again.*

Rudolf stood studying the brief reference. He wondered if St. Audrey knew his shabby origins, then suddenly realized why this estate was called Northumber. It seemed an odd thing to be proud of.

The lawyer finished his business. St. Audrey seemed to have recovered his cheerfulness in spite of having just signed away several million dollars. "I see you've discovered the family skeleton," he said.

"Yes," Rudolf said uncertainly.

"Have you ever wondered why I would have welcomed you as a son-in-law?"

"I assumed I had something you wanted."

St. Audrey laughed and hooked a dictionary from the shelf. He thumbed through it and underlined a word. Rudolf took the book and read, *Tawdry: cheap and gaudy in appearance or quality, so named for cheap and shoddy goods formerly sold at St. Audrey's fair. Synonyms: brummagem, shlock.*

"You see," St. Audrey said, "I recognized a kindred spirit."

Rudolf realized now that he had been completely accepted into white society. Studying St. Audrey's mocking smile, he knew he was worthy of the honor. He turned and tried the toilet again.

This time Tuchi's triangular head reared up through the toilet bowl. "It's near," she said. "I can smell it."

Rudolf held out the incubator. "I'll make you a nice deal for that trap," he said.

"Whom do you wish to kill?" Tuchi asked.

"Uh — nobody. Christ, haven't we had enough killing?"

"That," Tuchi snapped, "is a matter of personal taste."

"I want to learn to make that superhard, superductile crystalline stuff."

"Oh!" Tuchi stretched a pseudopod and took the incubator from Rudolf. "That's easy. You don't need the trap."

Flaherty appeared, yawning and blinking from his nap. "You'll be leaving now, I suppose?" he asked the alien.

"It will require some time to clean out the drive. Then there is the problem of my family."

"You'll be taking them with you?" Rudolf asked hopefully.

"When they reach traveling age. Of course, I'll have to construct a larger ship."

Rudolf had a sudden sinking feeling. "Uh, how long will that take?"

There was an instant's delay while Tuchi converted into Earth units. "One hundred forty-four years," she said.

Rudolf sat down.

"Don't take it so hard," St. Audrey comforted when Tuchi had disappeared down the john without revealing how the superhard, superductile crystals were made.

"Why not?" Rudolf asked.

"I see interesting times ahead but, like me, you're a professional survivor."

Rudolf gave his arch-enemy a thoughtful glance. Turning to Flaherty and the lawyer, he said, "We're through here, aren't we?"

The lawyer nodded. Rudolf, after the faintest hesitation, shook hands with St. Audrey and they boarded the helicopter for the half hour's flight back to the village.

"I don't know why you hang out in a dump like this," the lawyer said when they were inside the small white house again. "You're not hiding any more."

Rudolf guessed he wasn't. What the hell was he hanging around here for?

"She won't be back," Flaherty said.

Rudolf gave a guilty start. "Who?"

"Pamela."

To his surprise, Rudolf realized he hadn't been thinking about Pamela. He guessed she was one of those unattainable goals. Having attained her several times... Remembering how he had turned his back on his own people, Rudolf wondered if that was what he had really seen in Pamela. To shut off further discussion, he turned on the TV and hunted for the news.

It was the wrong time of day. Flaherty poured himself a drink from a plastic jug. He silently offered one to Rudolf. Rudolf shuddered. The lawyer took one and, after a single sip for politeness, became busy with his papers. "If I can trust you to stay out of trouble for twenty-four hours," he said, "I have things to do in the city."

"Other clients?"

"Four of them below the age of consent. My wife gets bent out of shape if I don't drop in once a week."

Rudolf saw him to the door, then went back to the TV. This time he caught himself playing wild Indian while the golden horde solemnly scribbled graffiti on St. Audrey's final girder.

"Reruns yet," he said.

Flaherty grinned. "I thought Lillith would have a heart attack. Tell me, dear boy, was it dangerous up there?"

"You'd have to ask somebody else. I wasn't there at the time."

"By the way," Flaherty continued, "I wonder where she is?"

The news cut to Lillith, still in hot pants and baggy sweater. "Now Miss Lasky," the interviewer said, "you first broke the story about the young Indian who was playing medicine man in a deserted gravel pit. In your opinion, is there any connection between that story and the sudden porosity that seems to be dissolving concrete on the Hartford thru-way?"

Lillith stirred, affording the cameraman another angle of her underpinning. Giving the lens a look of the kind of innocence Rudolf knew could never again exist in the world, she said, "Well, if somebody wants to prosecute for witchcraft..."

The commentator laughed.

Rudolf looked at Flaherty. Suddenly they were both on their feet. Rudolf led the way out to the decrepit auto Old John had left in exchange for their new one. They drove silently all the way to the gravel pit. Rudolf unlocked and they hurried into Flaherty's laboratory.

The concrete floor had turned into muck. One wall was crumbling and a corner of the roof had started to sag. Looking at Flaherty, Rudolf realized the Irishman knew what was going to happen even better than he did.

"But I don't get it," Rudolf protested. "Aluminum is such a small percentage of concrete."

"Aye," Flaherty agreed. "And glue's a small part of furniture if you want to put it that way."

"Is there any way to stop it?"

Flaherty sighed. "As long as there's alumina, some's bound to be poor enough to keep part of the culture asexual. That's why Tuchi warned us not to open the incubator. But tell me, dear boy, how did it get all over the thru-way?"

"I tossed the empty flask into the back of the truck. All that rain must've diluted it and dribbled it down onto the road."

"You're not going to be too popular once people realize what you've turned loose." Flaherty sighed again. "'Tis like a *seanachie* story. The little people give you three wishes and, no matter what the language, what the culture, what the people, the wisher aways ends up with the skatotropic touch. 'Tis a universal human trait."

"The skatotropic touch?"

"Yes, dear boy. Men work so hard and then it all turns into—"

"Assuming it's that bad," Rudolf said, "do you want to be on the winning side?"

"Not necessarily," Flaherty said. "But it beats losing."

"Then let's go home and answer our mail."

Riding back to the house, Rudolf dwelt on St. Audrey's analysis. He wondered if, subconsciously, he had already been angling for the main chance when he gave Flaherty's car to the Indians.

*Blame it on Freud.* He wondered if other generations had ever really believed in simple things like goodness and kindness. Probably not, if Indian treaties were any indicator. How would St. Audrey make out? In the catastrophes to come nobody would notice the collapse of his building. Rudolf thought back to the first time he had seen that matinee idol facade being interviewed on TV.

*"We hear of the Iron Age. Actually we live in the Ferroconcrete Age. Dams, buildings, roads, airstrips, missile silos — everything is made of steel covered with concrete."*

Rudolf knew he was going to miss it all.

Flaherty brought him out of it with a brisk, "Well, let's get to work."

They went into the house and started opening and sorting mail. Rudolf began writing checks. Hours later Lillith arrived. She took one look at their frantic activity, saw where the money was going, and gasped. "Like that?" she asked.

Rudolf nodded.

"Am I dark enough to pass?"

"You'll do quite nicely. All we have to do is find you and Flaherty totem animals."

Lillith got on the phone and by morning they had a secretarial staff opening and sorting mail. Within a week the millions Rudolf had extorted from St. Audrey were gone. Flaherty contributed his own fortune to the most colossal potlatch since the elder Rockefeller learned he too was mortal.

They began giving away the foreign bank deposits, doing their best to distribute everything equally among the North American tribes. With each check went a mimeographed suggestion that it be promptly negotiated.

"Don't you think you ought to advise them to insert it in survival equipment?" Lillith asked.

"No!" Rudolf said firmly and discovered Flaherty was in emphatic agreement. He let the Irishman explain it.

"We'll have panic soon enough," Flaherty said, "once people get it through their heads that it's all over — that from now on Earth can never support the cancerous overgrowth of population that's blighted our century."

"But you're trying to save the Indians," Lillith protested.

"Not at all," Rudolf said. "The Indians will save themselves. People who've never gotten much benefit from civilization aren't going to be too choked up over its passing."

"Then what are you giving all this money away for?"

"It's going out of style. I'm buying every Indian on this continent one grand glorious splurge — a chance to overeat, overdress, to blow his mind with all the tawdry junk he's never been able to afford."

"But what do you get out of it?"

Rudolf smiled. "Have you considered sanctuary?"

"Continually. Once people realize what's happening to the world you're not going to be a culture hero."

Rudolf looked at Flaherty. "How much time do we have?"

"How should I know?" the Irishman wondered. "This's the first time I've ever destroyed civilization."

"But I thought your knowledge of genetics..."

"From what I see on the tube some people're worried already. You can bet your coup stick St. Audrey's bought himself an island and stocked up a yacht. It'll spread from New York but it's anybody's guess how long it'll take."

"If people are walking New York streets and then tracking mud onto the planes at Kennedy..."

"Are we going to an island?" Lillith asked.

"No, and I'll bet St. Audrey isn't either," Rudolf said, remembering the millionaire's equanimity in accepting an extraterrestrial in his bathroom. "A professional survivor wouldn't want to be away from the action."

"Where are we going?" Flaherty asked.

"Where cement never grew. There'll be 'interesting times' down here but mobs like warm weather."

"You see, dear boy, liberal arts didn't ruin you after all!"

It took a week but when their float plane lifted off for the north woods the three of them were



prepared for housewarming. They settled in and held another potlatch for their new neighbors, after which they owned nothing worth envying or stealing.

## *EPILOGUE*

Rudolf was mildly surprised to realize that his oldest son was exactly the age he had been on what they now called "I" Day, the day Rudolf had given it all back to the Indians.

Paddling in the shallows where the going was easier, he finally rounded a point and could relax. One of the nice things about being fifty, Rudolf decided, was that he was no longer pained to admit that his sons were all better paddlers. It was only natural, outboards and gasoline having become increasingly scarce.

For a while, he remembered, it had looked like Whitey might do it all over again. But in the long run those who survived were the marginals who had never reaped much benefit from ferro-concrete civilization.

Back when Flaherty still fiddled nostalgically with outboards, occasionally coaxing one to sputter along on the output of his high tolerance yeasts, the Irishman had been fond of quoting Voltaire — that history was the sound of silk slippers coming downstairs while hobnailed boots raced up. But, relaxed atop a cargo of wild rice in the big canoe while his boys rigged the sail for the long downwind run, Rudolf was wearing moccasins.

It had all happened so suddenly. People had joked about giving it back to the Indians. Later when every dam, building, road, sidewalk, and freeway had released its oxygen and turned into a fertile muck that sprouted ragweed, then grasses, and finally trees — by then it had been too late. Those whose lives depended on pacemakers or insulin or tranquilizers or electricity or gasoline were no longer cluttering up the gene pool.

He often wondered what had become of St. Audrey. Probably the same thing that had happened to nine out of every ten people in the highly industrialized countries. The day he had lost a molar *via* a pair of pliers and a cupful of Flaherty's garbage juice, Rudolf had remembered the old days with some nostalgia. Even breathing clean air and drinking the limpid waters of Lake Erie, Rudolf was sure he was not going to live as many years as he might have survived under smog but at least he was living them.

Straight ahead in the clear blue distance he could make out their evening landfall. The canoe was dancing along in the fresh breeze, eldest son dozing in the bow while Number Two Boy steered. Rudolf roused himself to put a lure over the side. Within seconds he had a two-foot pike. He tossed it back and switched lures, hoping for a couple of the salmon that had begun spawning above the rapids that remained after Niagara Falls' concrete patchwork had collapsed.

There was another jerk. Rudolf began overhauling the line and discovered... "Tuchi!" he growled, "do you have to do that?"

The alien surfaced on both sides of the canoe, frolicking like a sea serpent. "Keep your shirt on," she said. "I'll herd some fish your way."

Rudolf smiled and guessed he could have made a worse choice of totem animal. He hauled in his salmon a few minutes later, stretched, and took a deep breath of pure air. Damn, was it ever nice to go out trading this time of year!

When he awoke a couple of hours later the sun was still high and the other canoes were converging on the landfall. Amidships of the large one, old Flaherty snoozed atop the load of skins he had acquired for the product of a high tolerance yeast.

They landed and began making camp. While the younger children yelled and skylarked, hunting firewood, Rudolf studied the sky and decided not to bother with a tent. Down by the shore a lean, dark-haired woman was cleaning the salmon Tuchi had herded toward his lure. She glanced up at his

approach. "Hello, lover," Lillith said. "Have a nice day?"

"So-so," Rudolf answered. "They're getting better all the time."