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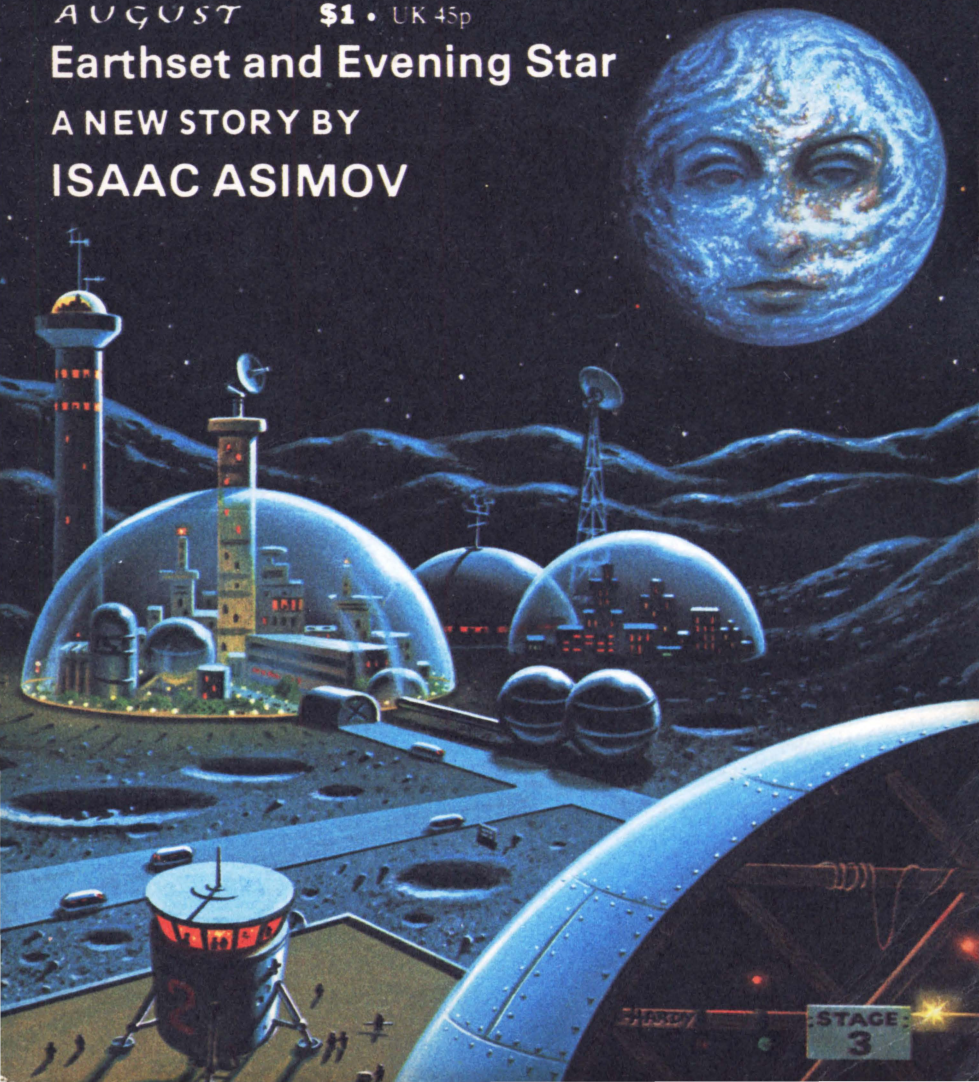
ISAAC ASIMOV



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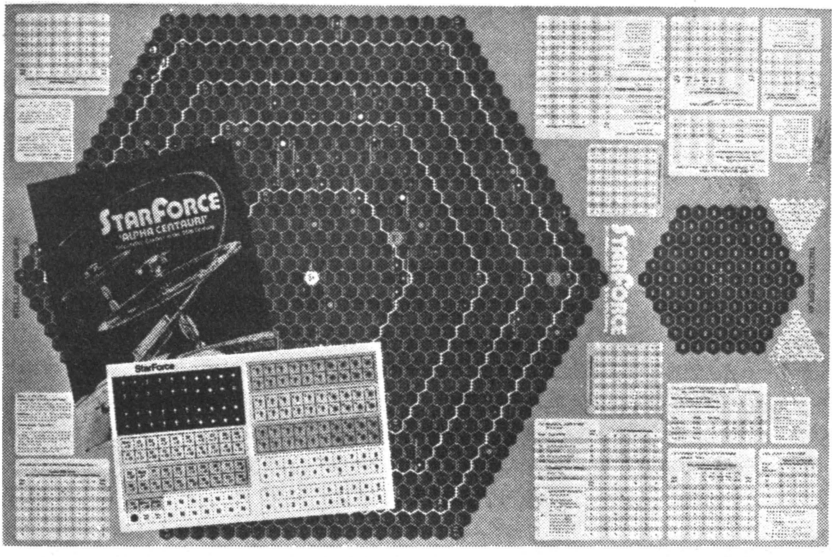

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From Tom Reamy, whose "Twilla" (September 1974) wound up on the final Nebula award ballot, a new (and even better, to our mind) story about John Lee Peacock, who came from Southern Kansas to California.

San Diego Lightfoot Sue

by TOM REAMY

This all began about ten years ago in a house at the top of a flight of rickety wooden stairs in Laurel Canyon. It might be said there were two beginnings, though the casual sorcery in Laurel Canyon may have been the cause and the other merely the effect — if you believe in that sort of thing.

The woman sat cross-legged on the floor reading the book. The windows were open to the warm California night, and the only sounds that came through them was the distant, muffled, eternal roar of Los Angeles traffic. The brittle pages of the book crackled as she turned them carefully. She read slowly because her Latin wasn't what it used to be. She lit a cigarette and left it to burn unnoticed in the ashtray on the floor beside her.

"Here's a good one," she said to the big orange tom curled in the chair she leaned against. "You don't know where I can find a hazelnut bush with a nest of thirteen white adders under it, do you, Punkin?" The cat didn't answer; he only opened one eye slightly and twitched the tip of his tail.

She turned a page, and several two-inch rectangles of white paper fell into her lap. She picked them up and examined them, but they were blank. She stuck them back in the book and kept reading.

She found it a while later. It was a simple spell. All she had to do was write the word-square on a piece of white parchment with black ink and then burn it while thinking of the person she wished to summon.

"I wonder if Paul Newman is doing anything tonight," she chuckled.

She stood up and went to the drafting table, opened a drawer and removed a pen and a bottle of india ink. She put a masking tape dispenser on the edge of the book to hold it open and carefully lettered

the word-square on one of the pieces of paper stuck between the pages. She supposed that's why her mother, or whoever, had put them there — they looked like parchment, anyway.

The word-square was eight letters wide and eight letters high; eight, eight-letter words stacked on top of one another. She imagined they were words, though they were in no language she knew. The peculiar thing about the square was that it read the same sideways or upside down — even in a mirror image, it was the same.

She put the cap back on the ink and went to the ashtray, kneeling beside it. She lay the parchment on the dead cigarette butts. "Well, here goes," she said to the cat. "I wonder if it's all right to burn it with a cigarette lighter? Maybe I need a black taper made of the wax of dead bees or something."

She composed herself, trying to take it seriously, and thought of a man, not a specific man, just *the* man. "I feel like Snow White singing 'Someday My Prince Will Come,'" she muttered. She flicked the cigarette lighter and touched the flame to the corner of the piece of paper.

It flamed up so quickly and so brightly that she gasped and drew back. "God!" she grunted and hurried to a window to escape the billows of black smoke that smelled of rotten eggs. The cat was already out, sitting on the farthest point of the deck railing, looking at her with round startled eyes.

The woman glanced back at the black smoke spreading like a carpet on the ceiling and then at the wide-eyed cat. She suddenly collapsed against the window sill in a fit of uncontrollable laughter. "Come on back in, Punkin," she gasped. "It's all over." The cat gave her an incredulous look and hopped off the railing into the shrubbery.

This also began about ten years ago in Kansas, the summer he was fifteen, when the air smelled like hot metal and rang with the cries of cicadas. It ended a month later when he was still fifteen, when the house in Laurel Canyon burned with a strange green fire that made no heat.

His name was John Lee Peacock, a good, old, undistinguished name in Southern Kansas. His mother and his aunts and his aunts' husbands called him John Lee. The kids in school called him Johnny, which he preferred. His father never called him anything.

His father had been by-passed by the world, but he wouldn't have cared, even if he had been aware of it. Wash Peacock was a dirt farmer who refused to abandon the land.

The land repayed his taciturn loyalty with annual betrayal. Wash had only four desires to life: to work the land, three hot meals each day, sleep, and copulation when the pressures built high enough. The children were strangers who appeared suddenly, disturbed his sleep for a while, then faded into the gray house or the County Line Cemetery.

John Lee's mother had been a Willet. The aunts were her sisters: Rose and Lilah. Wash had a younger brother somewhere in Pennsylvania — or, had had one the last time he heard. That was in 1927, the year Wash's mother died. Grace Elizabeth Willet married Delbert Washburn Peacock in the fall of 1930. She did it because her father, old Judge Willet, thought it was a good idea. Grace Elizabeth was a plain, timid girl who, he felt, was destined to be the family's maiden aunt. He was right, but she would have been much happier if he hadn't interfered.

The Peacocks had owned the land for nearly a hundred years and were moderately prosperous. They had survived the Civil War, Reconstruction, and statehood, but wouldn't survive the Depression. Judge Willet felt that Wash was the best he could do for Grace Elizabeth. He was a nice-looking man, and what he lacked in imagination, he made up in hard work.

But the Peacocks had a thin, unfortunate blood line. Only a few of the many children lived. It was the same with Wash and Grace Elizabeth. She had given birth eight times, but there were only three of them left. Wash, Jr., her first born, had married one of the trashy O'Dell girls and had gone to Oklahoma to work in the oilfields. She hadn't heard from him in thirteen years. Dwayne Edward, the third born, had stayed in Los Angeles after his separation from the army. He sent a card every Christmas and she had kept them all. She wished some of the girls had lived. She would have liked to have a girl, to make pretty things for her, to have someone to talk to. But she had lost the three girls and two of the boys. She had trouble remembering their names sometimes, but it was all written in the big Bible where she could remind herself when the names began to slip away.

John Lee was the youngest. He had arrived late in her life, a comfort for her weary years. She wanted him to be different from the others. Wash, Jr., and Dwayne had both been disappointments; too much like their father: unimaginative plodding boys who had done badly in school and got into trouble with the law. She still loved them because they were her children, but she sometimes forgot why she was

supposed to. She wanted John Lee to read books (God! How long since she'd read a book; she used to read all the time when she was a girl), to know about art and faraway places. She knew she hoped for too much, and so she was content when she got a part of it.

Wash didn't pay any more attention to John Lee than he had the others. He neither asked nor seemed to want the boy's help in the field. So Grace Elizabeth kept him around the house, helping with her chores, talking to him, having him share with her what he had learned in school. She gave him as much as she could. There wasn't money for much, but she managed to hold back a few dollars now and then.

She loved John Lee very much; he was probably the only thing she did love. So, on that shimmering summer day about ten years ago, when he was fifteen, she died for him.

She was cleaning up the kitchen after supper. Wash had gone back to the fields where he would stay until dark. John Lee was at the kitchen table, reading, passing on bits of information he knew she would like to hear. She leaned against the sink with the cup towel clutched in her hand and felt her supper turn over in her stomach. She had known it was coming for months. Now it was here.

He's too young, she thought. If he could only have a couple more years. She watched him bent over the book, the evening sun glinting on his brown hair. He's even better looking than his father, she thought. So like his father. But only on the outside. Only on the outside.

She spread the cup towel on the rack to dry and walked through the big old house. She hadn't really noticed the house in a long time. It had grown old and gray slowly, as she had, and so she had hardly noticed it happening. Then she looked at it again and it wasn't the house she remembered moving into all those years ago. Wash's father had built it in 1913 when the old one had been unroofed by a twister. He had built it like they did in those days: big, so generations could live in it. It had been freshly painted when she moved in, a big white box eight miles from Hawley, a mile from Miller's Corners.

Then the hard times began. But Wash had clung to the land during the Depression and the dust. He hadn't panicked like most of the others. He hadn't sold the land at give-away prices or lost it because he couldn't pay the taxes. Things had gotten a little better when the war began, but never as good as before the Depression. Now they were bad again. At the end of each weary year there was only enough money to do it all over again.

She supposed that being the oldest, Wash, Jr., would get it. She was glad John Lee wouldn't. She went upstairs to his room and packed his things in a pasteboard box. She left it where he would find it and went to her own room. She opened a drawer in the old highboy that had belonged to her grandmother and removed an envelope from beneath her cotton slips. She took it to the kitchen and handed it to John Lee.

He took it and looked at her. "What is it, Mama?"

"Open it in the morning, John Lee. You'd better go to bed now."

"But it's not even dark yet." There's something wrong, there's something wrong.

"Soon, then. I want to sit on the porch awhile and rest." She kissed him and patted his shoulder and left the room. He watched the empty doorway and felt the blood singing in his ears. After a while, he got a drink of water from the cooler and went to his room. He lay on the bed, looking at the water spots on the ceiling paper, and clutched the envelope in his hands. Tears formed in his eyes and he tried to blink them away.

Grace Elizabeth sat on the porch in her rocker, moving gently, mending Wash's clothes until it got too dark to see. Then she folded them neatly in her lap, leaned back in the chair, and closed her eyes.

Wash found her the next morning only because he wondered why his breakfast wasn't waiting for him. She was buried in the County Line Cemetery with five of her children after a brief service at the First Baptist Church in Hawley. Aunt Rose and Aunt Lilah had a fine time weeping into black lace handkerchiefs and clucking over Poor John Lee.

On the way back from the funeral John Lee rode in the front seat of the '53 Chevrolet beside his father. Neither of them spoke until they had turned off the highway at Miller's Corners.

"Write a letter to Wash, Jr. Tell him to come home." John Lee didn't answer. He could smell the dust rising up behind the car. Wash parked it in the old carriage house and hurried to change clothes, hurried to make up the half day he had lost. John Lee went to the closet in the front hall and took down a shoe box, in which his mother kept such things, and looked for an address. He found it after a bit, worked to the bottom, unused for thirteen years. He wrote the letter anyway.

He had left the envelope unopened under his pillow. Now he opened it, although he had guessed what it was. He counted the carefully hoarded bills: a hundred and twenty-seven dollars. He sat on the edge of the bed, on the crazy

quilt his mother had made for him, in the quiet room, in the silent weary house. He wiped his eyes with his knuckles, picked up the pasteboard box, and walked the mile to Miller's Corners.

His Sunday suit, worn to the funeral that morning, once belonging to Dwayne, and before that, Wash, Jr., was white at the cuffs from the dusty road. His shoes, his alone, were even worse. It was a scorcher. "It's gonna be another scorcher," she always used to say, looking out the kitchen window after putting away the breakfast dishes. He sat on the bench at the Gulf station, cleaning the dust off the best he could.

The cicadas screeched from the mesquite bushes, filling the hot still air with their insistent calls for a mate. John Lee rather liked the sound, but it had bothered his mother. "Enough to drive a body ravin' mad," she used to say. She always called them locusts, but he had learned in school their real name was cicada. And when they talked about a plague of locusts in the Bible, they really meant grasshoppers. "Well, I'll declare," she had said. "Always wondered why locusts would be considered a plague. Far's I know, they don't do anything but sit in the bushes and make noise. Now, grasshoppers I can understand." And she would smile at him in her pleased and proud way that caused a pleasant hurting in the back of his throat.

"Hello, John Lee."

He looked up quickly. "Hello, Mr. Cuttsanger. How are you today?" He liked Mr. Cuttsanger, a string-thin man the same age as his mother, who had seemingly permanent grease stains on his hands. He wiped at them now with a dull red rag, but it didn't help.

"I'm awfully sorry about your mother, boy. Wish I coulda gone to the funeral but I couldn't get away. We were in the same grade together all through school, you know."

"Yes, I know. She told me."

"What're you doin' here still dressed up?" he asked, sticking the rag in his hip pocket and looking at the box.

"I reckon I have to catch a bus, Mr. Cuttsanger." His heart did a little flip-flop. Not the old school bus either, but a real bus.

"Where you off to, John Lee?"

"Where do your buses go, Mr. Cuttsanger?"

Mr. Cuttsanger sat on the bench beside John Lee. "The westbound will be through here in about an hour goin' to Los Angeles. The eastbound comes through in the mornin' headed for St. Louie. You already missed it."

"Los Angeles. My brother, Dwayne, lives in California." But he didn't know where. He had seen the Christmas cards in the shoe

box, but he hadn't paid any attention to the return address.

Mr. Cuttsanger nodded. "Good idea, goin' to stay with Dwayne. Nothin' for you here on this played-out old farm. Heard Grace Elizabeth say the same thing. Your father ought to sell it and go with you. But I guess I know Wash better'n that." He arose from the bench with a little sigh. He went into the station and returned with a small red flag. He stuck it in a pipe welded at an angle to the pole supporting the Gulf sign. "There. He'll stop when he sees that. You buy your ticket from the driver."

"Thank you, Mr. Cuttsanger. I need to mail a letter also." He took the letter he had carefully addressed in block printing to Delbert Washburn Peacock, Jr., Gen. Del., Norman, Okla., from his pocket and handed it to Mr. Cuttsanger. "I don't have a stamp."

Mr. Cuttsanger looked at the letter. "Is Wash, Jr., still in Norman?" He said it as if he doubted it.

"I don't know. That's the only address I could find."

Mr. Cuttsanger tapped the letter against the knuckle of his thumb. "You leave a nickel with me and I'll get a stamp from Clayton in the mornin'. Sure was a lot simpler before they closed the post office." He sat back on the bench in the shade of the car shed. John Lee followed his eyes as he looked at Miller's Corners evaporating under the cloudless sky. An out-of-state car blasted through doing seventy. Mr. Cuttsanger sighed and accepted a nickel from John Lee. "They don't even have to slow down any more. Used to be thirty-five-mile speed-limit signs at each end of town. Guess they don't need 'em now. Ain't nothin' here but me and the cafe. Myrtle's been saying for nearly a year she was gonna move to Hawley or maybe even Liberal. Closed the post office in fifty-five, I think it was. That foundation across the highway is where the grocery store used to be. Don't reckon you remember the grocery store?"

"No, sir, but I remember the feed store."

"Imagine that. You musta been about four, five years old."

"I was born in forty-eight."

"Closed the feed store in fifty-two. Imagine you rememberin' that far back." He continued to ramble on in his pleasant friendly voice. John Lee asked questions and made comments to keep him going, to make the time pass faster. A whole hour before the bus would come.

But it finally did, cutting off the highway in a cloud of dust and a dragon hiss of air brakes. John Lee looked at the magic name in the little window over the windshield:

LOS ANGELES. He swallowed and solemnly shook hands with Mr. Cuttsanger.

"Good-by, Mr. Cuttsanger."

"Good-by, John Lee. You take care now."

John Lee nodded and picked up the box and walked to the bus, his legs trembling. The door sighed open and the driver got out. He opened a big door on the side of the bus under *Continental Trailways.* He took the pasteboard box.

"Where you goin'?"

"I'd like a ticket to Los Angeles, please." He couldn't keep from smiling when he said the name. The driver put a tag on the box, put it in with the suitcases, and closed the door. John Lee followed him into the bus. Inside it was cool like some of the stores in Liberal.

He bought his ticket and sat down in the front seat, scooting to the window as the bus lurched back onto the highway. He looked back at Miller's Corners and waved to Mr. Cuttsanger, but he was taking down the red flag and didn't see.

John Lee leaned back in the seat and hugged himself. Once more he couldn't keep from smiling. After a bit, he looked around at the other people. There weren't many and some weren't wearing Sunday clothes; so he decided it would be all right to take off his jacket. He settled back in the seat, watching the baked Kansas countryside rush past the window. Strange, he thought, it looks the same way it does from the school bus. Even though he tried to prevent it, the smile returned unbidden every once in a while.

The bus went through Hawley without stopping, past the white rococo courthouse with its high clock tower; past the school, closed for the summer; over the hump in the highway by the old depot where the railroad tracks had been taken out; across the bridge over Crooked Creek.

It stopped in Liberal and the driver called out, "Rest stop!" John Lee didn't know what a rest stop was, and so he stayed on the bus. He noticed that some of the other passengers didn't get off either. He decided there was nothing to worry about.

He tried to see everything when the bus left Liberal, to look on both sides at once, because it was the farthest he had ever been. But Oklahoma looked just like Kansas, Texas looked just like Oklahoma, and New Mexico looked like Texas, only each seemed a little bleaker than the one before. The bus stopped in Tucumcari for supper. John Lee had forgotten to eat dinner, and his bladder felt like it would burst.

He was nervous but he managed all right. He'd eaten in a cafe before, and, by watching the others,

he found out where the toilet was and how to pay for his meal. It was dark when the bus left Tucumcari. He tried to go to sleep, to make the time pass faster, the way he always did when the next day was bringing wondrous things. But, as usual, the harder he tried, the wider awake he was.

He awoke when the bus stopped for breakfast and quickly put his coat over his lap, hoping no one had noticed. He waited until everyone else had gotten off, then headed for the toilet keeping his coat in front of him. He didn't know for sure where he was, but all the cars had Arizona license plates.

It was after dark when the bus pulled into the Los Angeles terminal, though it seemed to John Lee as if they had been driving through town for hours. He had never dreamed it was so big. He watched the other passengers collect their luggage and got his pasteboard box.

Then he went out into: Los Angeles.

He walked around the street with the box clutched in his arms in total bedazzlement. Buildings, lights, cars, people, so many different kinds of people. It was the first time he had ever seen a Chinese, except in the movies, although he wasn't absolutely sure that it wasn't a Japanese. There were dozens of picture shows, lined up in rows. He liked movies and used to go nearly every Saturday afternoon, a long time ago before the picture show in Hawley closed.

And buses, with more magic names in the little windows: SUNSET BLVD; HOLLYWOOD BLVD; PASADENA; and lots of names he didn't recognize; but they were no less magic, he was sure, because of that.

He was standing on the curb, just looking, when a bus with HOLLYWOOD BLVD in the little window pulled over and opened its door right in front of him. The driver looked at him impatiently. It was amazing how the bus had stopped especially for him. He got on. There didn't seem to be anything else he could do.

"Vine!" the driver bawled sometime later. John Lee got off and stood at the corner of Hollywood and Vine grinning at the night. He walked down Hollywood Boulevard, gawking at everything, reading the names in stars on the sidewalk. He never imagined there would be so many cars or so many people at night. There were more than you would see in Liberal, even on Saturday afternoon. And the strange clothes the people wore. And men with long hair like the Beatles. Mary Ellen Walker had a colored picture of them pasted on her notebook.

He didn't know how far he had

walked — the street never seemed to end — but the box was heavy. He was hungry and his Sunday shoes had rubbed a blister on his heel. He went into a cafe and sat in a booth, glad to get rid of the weight of the box. Most of the people looked at him as he came in. Several of them smiled. He smiled back. A couple of people had said hello on the street too. Hollywood was certainly a friendly place.

He told the waitress what he wanted. He looked around the cafe and met the eyes of a man at the counter who had smiled when he came in. The man smiled again. John Lee smiled back, feeling good. The man got off the stool and came to the booth carrying a cup of coffee.

"May I join you?" He seemed a little nervous.

"Sure." The man sat down and took a quick sip of the coffee. "My name is John Lee Peacock." He held out his hand. The man looked startled, then took it, giving it a quick shake and hurriedly breaking contact. "I'd rather be called Johnny, though."

The man's skin was moist. John Lee guessed he was about forty and a little bit fat. He nodded, quickly, like a turkey. "Warren."

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Warren. You live in Hollywood?"

"Yes."

The waitress brought the food and put it on the table. Warren was flustered. "Oh...ah...put that on my ticket."

The waitress looked at John Lee. Her mouth turned down a little at the corners. "Sure, honey," she said to Mr. Warren.

John Lee discarded the straw from his ice tea and put sugar in it. "Aren't you eating?"

"Ah...no. No, I've already eaten." He took another nervous sip of the coffee, and John Lee heard a smothered snicker from the booth behind him. "You didn't have to pay for my supper. I've got money."

"My pleasure."

"Thank you, Mr. Warren."

"You're welcome. Uh...how long you been in town?"

"Just got here a little while ago. On a Continenal Trailways bus, all the way from Miller's Corners, Kansas." John Lee still couldn't believe where he was. He had to say it out loud. "I sure do like bein' in Los Angeles, Mr. Warren."

"You have a place to stay yet?"

He hadn't really thought about that. "No, sir. I guess I haven't."

Warren smiled and seemed to relax a little. It was working out okay, but the kid was putting on the hick routine a little thick. "Don't worry about it tonight. You can stay at my place and look for something tomorrow."

"Thank you, Mr. Warren.

Thats very nice of you."

"My pleasure. Uh...what made you come to Los Angeles?"

John Lee swallowed a mouth full of food. "My mamma died the other day. Before she died, she gave me the money to get away."

"I want to sit on the porch a while and rest," she had said.

"It was either Los Angeles or St. Louis, and the Los Angeles bus came by first." He pushed the gray memories back out of the way. "And here I am!"

Warren looked at him, no longer smiling. "How old are you?"

"I was fifteen last January." He wondered if he was expected to ask Mr. Warren's age.

"God!" Warren breathed. He slumped in the seat for a moment, then seemed to come to a decision. "Look, uh...Johnny. I just remembered something. I won't be able to put you up for the night after all. As a matter of fact, I have to dash. I'm sorry."

"That's all right, Mr. Warren. It was kind of you to make the offer."

"My pleasure. So long." He hurried away. John Lee watched him stop at the cash register. When he left, the cashier looked at John Lee and nodded.

"Nice goin' there, John Lee Peacock, sugah." The voice whispered in his ear with a honeyed Southern accent. He turned and looked nose to nose into a grinning black face. "Got yoself a free dinnah and didn't have to put out."

"What," he said, completely befuddled.

A second face, a white one, appeared over the back of the seat. It said, "May we join you?" doing a good imitation of Mr. Warren.

"Yeah, I guess so." They came around and sat opposite him, both of them as skinny as Mr. Cuttsanger. He thought they walked a little funny.

The black one said, "I'm Pearl and this is Daisy Mae."

"How ja do," Daisy Mae said, chewing imaginary gum.

"Really?" John Lee asked, grinning.

"Really, what, sugah?" Pearl asked.

"Are those really your names?"

"Isn't he *cute?*" shrieked Daisy Mae.

Pearl patted his hand. "Just keep your eyes and ears open and your pants shut, sugah. You'll get the hang of it." He lit a pale blue cigarette and offered one to John Lee. John Lee shook his head. Pearl saw John Lee's bemused expression and wiggled the cigarette. "Nieman-Marcus," he said matter-of-factly.

"Well, if it isn't the Queen of Spades and Cotton Tail." They all three looked up at a chubby young man, standing with his hand delicately on his hip. His fleshy lips

coiled into a smirk at John Lee. He wore light eye make-up with a tiny diamond in one pierced ear. He was with a muscular young man who looked at John Lee coldly. "You girls stage another commando raid on Romper Room?"

"Why, lawdy, Miss Scawlett, how you do talk!" Pearl did his best Butterfly McQueen imitation, and his hands were like escaping blackbirds.

"This is a cub scout meeting and we're den mothers," Daisy Mae said in a flat voice. The muscular young man grabbed Miss Scarlett's arm and pulled him away.

"It's a den of something!" he shot back over his shoulder.

"Did you see how Miss Scarlett looked at our John Lee?" Daisy Mae rolled his eyes.

"The bitch is in heat."

"Who was that gorgeous butch number she was with?"

"Never laid eyes on him before."

"Your eyes aren't what you'd like to lay on him," Daisy Mae said dryly.

Pearl quickly put his hands over John Lee's ears. "Don't talk like that afore this sweet child! You *know* I don't like rough trade!"

John Lee laughed and they laughed with him. He didn't know what they were talking about most of the time, but he decided he liked these two strange people. "Doesn't ...uh...Miss Scarlett like you?"

"Sugah," Pearl said seriously, taking his hands away, "Miss Scawlett doesn't like anybody."

"Stay away from her, John Lee," Daisy Mae said, meaning it.

"She has a problem," Pearl pronounced.

"'A *big* problem," Daisy Mae agreed.

"What?" John Lee asked, imagining all sorts of thing.

"She's hung like a horse." Pearl nodded sagely.

"A *big* horse." Daisy Mae nodded also.

John Lee could feel his ears getting red. Damnation, he thought. He laughed in embarrassment. "What's wrong with that?" He remembered Leo Whittaker in his room at school who bragged that he had the biggest one in Kansas and would show it to you if you would go out under the bleachers.

"Sugah," Pearl said, patting his hand again, "Miss Scawlett is a *lady.*"

"It's a wonder it doesn't turn green and fall off the way she keeps it tied down. Makes her walk bowlegged."

"Don't be catty, Daisy Mae. Just count your blessin's." Daisy Mae put his chin on the heel of his hand and stared morosely at nothing, like Garbo in *Anna Christie.* "John Lee, sugah," Pearl

continued, "was all that malarkey you gave that score the truth?"

"Huh?" John Lee asked, completely confused.

"It was," Daisy Mae said in his incredible but true voice.

"You really don't have a place to stay tonight?"

"Huh-uh." He wondered why Pearl doubted him.

"And he's also really fif-*teen*," Daisy Mae said, cocking his eyes at Pearl.

"Daisy Mae, sugah," Pearl said with utmost patience, "I'm only bein' a Sistuh of Mercy, tryin' to put a roof ovuh this sweet child's head, tryin' to keep him from bein' picked up by the po-leece fah vay-gran-cee."

Daisy Mae shrugged fatalistically.

"Why does it matter that I'm fifteen?" John Lee really wanted to know what they were talking about.

"You *are* from the boonies," Daisy Mae said in wonder.

"Sugah, you come stay with us. There's a lot you've got to learn. If we leave you runnin' around loose, you gonna get in seer-ee-us trouble. Sugah, this town is full of tiguhs and... you... are... a... juicy... lamb."

"Your fangs are showing," Daisy Mae said tonelessly.

Pearl turned to him, about to cut him dead, but instead threw up his arms and did Butterfly McQueen again. "Lawzy, Miss Daisy Mae, you done got a spot on yo' pretty shirt!" He turned back to John Lee with a martyred expression. "I wash and clean and iron and scrub and work my fanguhs to the bone, and this slob can get covered in spaghetti sauce eatin' *jelly beans!*"

John Lee dissolved in a fit of giggles. Pearl couldn't hold his outraged expression any longer and began to grin. Daisy Mae chuckled and said, "Don't pay any attention to her, John Lee. She's got an Aunt Jemimah complex."

Pearl got up. "Let's get out of this meat market. There are too many eyes on our little rump roast."

Daisy Mae put his hand on John Lee's. "John Lee, if we run into a cop, *try* to look twenty-one."

He wiped the laugh tears from his eyes. "I'll do my best." He got the pasteboard box and followed them out of the cafe. They cut hurriedly around the corner past a large sidewalk newsstand, then jaywalked to a parking lot. Pearl and Daisy Mae acted like a couple of cat burglars, and John Lee had to hurry to keep up.

They got into a '63 Corvair and drove west on Hollywood Boulevard until it became a residential street, then turned right on Laurel Canyon. They wound up into the Hollywood Hills, Pearl and Daisy

Mae chattering constantly, making John Lee laugh a lot. He felt very good and very lucky.

Pearl pulled into a garage sitting on the edge of the pavement with no driveway. They went up a long flight of rickety wooden steps to a small two-bedroom house with a porch that went all the way around. Pearl flipped on the lights. "It ain't Twelve Oaks, sugah, but we like it."

John Lee stared goggle-eyed. He'd been in Aunt Rose's and Aunt Lilah's fancy houses lots of times, but they ran to beige, desert rose, and old gold. These colors were absolutely electric. The wild patterns made him dizzy, and there were pictures and statues and things hanging from the ceiling.

"Golly," he said.

"Take a load off," Daisy Mae said, pointing to a big reclining chair covered in what looked like purple fur. John Lee put the box on the floor and gingerly sat down. He leaned back and was surprised at how comfortable it was. Pearl put a record on the record player, but John Lee didn't recognize the music. He yawned. Daisy Mae stood over the box. "What's in this carton you keep clutching to your bosom?"

"My things."

"Pardon my nose," Daisy Mae said and opened it. He pulled out some of John Lee's everyday clothes. "You auditioning for the sixteenth road company of *Tobacco Road?*"

"Don't pay any attention," Pearl said, sitting beside John Lee. "She's a costumer at Paramount. Thinks she knows *every*-thing about clothes."

"Don't knock it. I had to dress thirty bitchy starlets to buy that chair you got your black ass on. I'll hang these up for you, John Lee."

John Lee yawned again. "Thank you."

Pearl threw up his hands. "Land o' Goshen, this child is *ex-haus*-ted!"

Daisy Mae carried the box into a bedroom. "Two days on a Continental Trailways bus would give Captain Marvel the drearies."

Pearl took John Lee's arm and pulled him out of the chair. "Come on, sugah. We gotta give you a nice bath and put you to *bed,* afore you co-lapse." He led him to the bathroom, showed him where everything was, and turned on the shower for him. "Give a holler if you need anything."

"Thank you." Pearl left. John Lee had never taken a shower before, although he had seen them at Aunt Rose's and Aunt Lilah's. He took off his clothes and got in.

The door opened and Pearl came in, pushing back the shower curtain. "You all right, sugah? Oh, sugah, you are *all right!*" He leered

at John Lee, but in such a way that made him laugh. His ears turned red anyway. Pearl winked and closed the curtain. "You don't mind if I brush my teeth?"

"No. Go ahead." He could hear Pearl sloshing and brushing. After a bit there was silence. He pulled back the shower curtain a little and peeped out. Pearl was leaning against the wash basin, a toothbrush in his hand, his head down, and his eyes closed. John Lee watched him, wondering if he should say anything.

"John Lee," Pearl said without looking up, his voice serious and the accent totally absent.

"Yes, Pearl?" He spoke quietly and cautiously.

"John Lee, don't pay any attention when we tease you about how cute you are, or when we ogle your body. It's just the way we are. It's just the way the lousy world is."

"I won't, Pearl." He felt the hurting in the back of his throat, but he didn't know why.

Pearl suddenly stood up, the big grin back on his face. "Well. Look at me. Poor Pitiful Pearl. Now. What do you sleep in? Underwear? Pee-jays? Nightshirt? Your little bare skin?"

"My pajamas are in the box, I think."

"Good enough." Pearl left the bathroom and returned when John Lee was drying on a big plush towel printed like the American flag. Pearl reached in and hung the pajamas on the doorknob without looking in. "There you go, sugah."

"Thank you, Pearl."

He left the bathroom in his pajamas with his Sunday suit over his arm. Daisy Mae took the suit. "I'll clean and press that for you."

"You don't have to, Daisy Mae." The names were beginning to sound normal to him.

Daisy Mae grinned. "It won't hurt me."

"Thank you."

Pearl took his arm. "Time for you to go to bed." He led John Lee into the bedroom. There was an old, polished brass bed. John Lee stared at it, then ran his hand over the turned-back sheets. Even Aunt Rose hadn't thought about red silk sheets. He never imagined such luxury.

"Golly," he said.

Pearl laughed and grabbed him in a big hug and kissed him on the forehead. "Sugah, you are just not to be be-*lieved!*" John Lee grinned uncomfortably and turned red. Pearl pulled the sheet up around his neck and patted his cheek. "Sleep tight."

"Good night, Pearl."

Daisy Mae stuck his head in to say good night. Pearl turned at the door and smiled fondly at him, then went out, closing it. John Lee wiggled around on the silk sheets.

Golly, he thought, golly, golly, golly!

Pearl walked dreamily into the living room and collapsed becomingly onto the big purple fur chair. He sighed hugely. "Daisy Mae. Now I know what it must feel like to be a mother."

The next morning John Lee woke slowly and stretched until his muscles popped. He looked at the ceiling, but there was no faded water-stained paper, only neat white tiles with an embossed flower in the center of each. He slid to the side of the bed and felt the silk sheets flow like water across his skin. He went to the bathroom and relieved himself, splashing cold water on his face and combing the tangles out of his hair. He sure needed a haircut. He wondered if he ought to let it grow long now that he was in Hollywood.

Hollywood.

He'd almost forgotten. He bet Miss Mahan was worried about him. He sure liked Miss Mahan and a pang of guilt struck him. He should have told her he wouldn't be back in school this fall, especially after she was nice enough to come to mamma's funeral and all. Well, there was nothing he could do now. Mr. Cuttsanger would tell her — and everybody else — where he was.

He went back to his room and put on his best pair of blue jeans, a white tee-shirt and his gray sneakers. He wondered where everyone was. The house was very quiet. He guessed they had both gone to work. He went out on the back porch — only Pearl called it a deck — and saw Daisy Mae lying there on a blanket stark naked. He started to go back in, but Daisy Mae looked up. "Good morning, slugabed, you sleep well?"

John Lee fidgeted, trying not to look at Daisy Mae. "Yeah. Real good. Where's Pearl?"

"She's at work. Does windows for May Company."

"Didn't you have to work today at Paramount?"

"Got a few days off. Just finished something called *Wives and Lovers.* Gonna be a dog. You want some breakfast, or you wanta join me?"

"Uh... what're you doin'?" He sure didn't seem to care if anybody saw him naked.

"Gettin' some sun, tryin' to get rid of this fish-belly white."

"You always do it with... uh... no clothes on?" You're acting like a hick again, John Lee Peacock. Damnation, he thought.

Daisy Mae chuckled. "Sure. Otherwise, I'd look like a two-tone Ford. If it embarrasses you, I'll put some clothes on."

"No," he protested quickly. "No, of course it doesn't embarrass me. I think I *will* join you."

"Okay." He pointed back over his head without looking. "There's another blanket there on the chaise."

John Lee spread the blanket on the porch and pulled his tee-shirt over his head. He pulled off his shoes and socks. Daisy Mae wasn't paying any attention to him. He looked around. The next house up the hill overlooked them, but that was the only one. He didn't see anybody up there. He took a deep breath, slipped off his pants and his shorts, and quickly lay down on his stomach. He might as well get some sun on his back first.

Daisy Mae spoke without looking at him. "Don't stay in one position more than five minutes, or you'll blister."

"Okay." He estimated five minutes had passed, swallowed, and turned over on his back. He looked straight into the eyes of a woman leaning on the railing of the next house up, watching him. He froze. The bottom dropped out of his stomach. Then he jumped up and grabbed his pants. He knew he was acting like an idiot, but he couldn't stop himself. He hopped on one foot, trying to get the pants on, but his toes kept getting in the way. They caught on the crotch and he fell flat on his butt. He managed to wiggle into them, sitting on the floor.

Daisy Mae looked up. "You sit on a bee or something?"

"No." He motioned with his head at the woman, afraid to look at her because he knew he was beet red all over.

Daisy Mae looked up, grinned, and waved. "Hi, Sue." He didn't do anything to cover himself, didn't seem to care that she saw him.

"Hello, Daisy Mae." Her voice was husky and amused. "Who's your bashful friend?"

"John Lee Peacock from Kansas. This is Sue. San Diego Lightfoot Sue."

Damnation, John Lee thought, I'm acting like a fool, sitting here hunkered up against this shez, as Daisy Mae calls it. Doesn't anyone in Hollywood have a normal name? He forced himself to look up. She was still leaning on the railing, looking at him. Only now she was smiling. She was wearing a paint-stained sweat shirt and blue jeans. Her hair was tied up in a scarf but auburn strands dangled out. She wasn't wearing any make-up that he could see. She was kinda old, he thought, but really very stunning. Her smile was nice. He felt himself smiling back.

"Nothing to be bashful about, John Lee Peacock. I've seen more male privates than you could load in a boxcar." Her voice was still amused but she wasn't putting him down.

"Maybe so," he answered, "but

I haven't had any ladies see mine." His boldness made him start getting red again.

She laughed and he felt goose bumps pop out on his arms. "You could have a point there, John Lee. How would you like to make a little money?"

"Huh?"

"It's okay," Daisy Mae said, getting up and wrapping a towel around his waist. "Sue's an artist. She wants you to pose for her."

John Lee looked back up at her. "That's right," she said. "I'm as safe as mother's milk."

"Well, okay, I guess. But you don't need to pay me for something like that." He got up and kicked his underwear under the chaise.

"Of course I'll pay you. It's very hard work. Come on up."

"Uh...how do I get up there?"

"Go down to the street and come up my steps. Front door's open, come on in. You'll find me." She smiled again and went out of sight.

He looked at Daisy Mae. "Will it be all right with Pearl?"

"Sure. We've both posed for her. She's good. Scoot." Daisy Mae went into the house. John Lee put on his tee-shirt and shoes. He wondered if he should take off his pants and put on his underwear, but decided against it.

He opened her front door and went in as she had told him. She was right about him finding her. The whole house was one big room. A small kitchen was in one corner behind a folding screen. A day bed was against one wall between two bureaus that had been painted yellow. There was a door to a closet and another to a bathroom. There were a couple of tired but comfortable-looking easy chairs, a drafting table with a stool pushed under it, and an easel under a skylight. Pictures were everywhere; some in color, mostly black and white sketches; thumbtacked all over the walls, leaning in stacks against the bureaus, chairs, walls. A big orange cat lay curled in a chair. It opened one eye, gave John Lee the once over, and went back to sleep.

Sue was standing at the easel, frowning at the painting he couldn't see. She had a brush stuck behind one ear and was holding another like a club. "I'm glad you showed up, John Lee. This thing is going nowhere." She flipped a cloth over it and leaned it against the wall.

John Lee stared at the pictures. Nearly all of them were of people, most of them naked, though there were a couple of the cat. Some of the people were women but most of them seemed to be men. He spotted a sketch of Pearl and Daisy Mae, leaning against each other naked, looking like a butterfly with one

black and one white wing.

She watched him look for a while. "This is just the garbage. I sell the good stuff. That one of Pearl and Daisy Mae turned out rather well. It's hanging in a gay bar in the Valley. Got eleven hundred for it."

"Golly."

"You're right. It was a swindle."

"Do you... ah... want me to... do you want to paint my picture with my... clothes off?" He waved his hand vaguely at some of the nude sketches. Damn his ears!

She didn't seem to notice. "If you don't mind. Don't worry about it. It'll be a few days yet. Give you a chance to get used to the idea. I want to make some sketches and work on your face for a while." She came to him and put her hand on his cheek. "You've got something in your face, John Lee. I don't know... what it is. More than simple innocence. I just hope I can capture it. Hold still, I want to feel your bones." He grinned and it made her smile. "Makes you feel like a horse up for sale, doesn't it?" She ran her cool fingers over his face, and he didn't want her to ever stop. He closed his eyes.

Suddenly, she caught her fingers in his hair and shook him. She laughed and hugged him against her warm soft breasts. His stomach did a flip-flop. She released him quickly and crossed her arms with her hands under her armpits. She laughed a little nervously. "You're just like Punkin. Scratch his ears and he'll go to sleep on you."

"Punkin?"

She pointed at the cat. "Don't you think he looks remarkably like a pumpkin when he's curled up asleep like that?"

"Yeah." He laughed.

"Do you want to start now?"

"I guess."

"Okay. Just sit in that chair and relax." She pulled the stool from beneath the drafting table and put it in front of the chair. She sat on the stool with her legs crossed, a sketch pad propped on one knee. She lit a cigarette and held it in her left hand while she worked rapidly with a stick of charcoal. "You can talk if you want to. Tell me about yourself."

So he did. He told her about Miller's Corners, Hawley, the farm, school, Miss Mahan who also painted but only flowers, Mr. Cuttsanger, his mother, a lot about his mother, not much about his father because he didn't really know very much when you got right down to it. He made her chuckle about Aunt Rose and Aunt Lilah. She kept turning the pages of the sketch pad and starting over. He wanted to see what she was drawing, but he was afraid to move.

She seemed to read his mind. "You don't have to sit so still, John Lee. Move when you want to." He changed positions but he still couldn't see. Punkin suddenly leaped in his lap, making him jump. The cat walked up his chest and looked into his eyes. Then he began to purr and curled up with his head under John Lee's chin.

Sue chuckled. "You are a charmer, John Lee. He treats most people with majestic indifference." John Lee grinned and stroked the cat. Punkin squirmed in delicious ecstasy. Then John Lee's stomach rumbled.

Sue put the pad down and laughed. "You poor lamb. I'm starving you to death." She looked at her watch. "Good grief, it's two thirty. What do you want to eat?"

"Anything."

"Anything it is."

He stood with Punkin curled in his arms, watching her do wonderful things with eggs, ham, green peppers, onions, and buttered toast. He said he loved scrambled eggs; and she laughed and said scrambled eggs indeed, you taste my omelets and you'll be my slave forever. She pulled down a table that folded against the wall, set out the two steaming plates with two glasses of cold milk. He was quite willing to be her slave forever, even without the omelet.

Punkin sat on the floor with his tail curled around his feet, watching them, making short, soft clarinet sounds. She laughed. "Isn't that pitiful? The cat food's under the sink if you'd like to feed him."

"Sure." He tried to pour the cat food into the bowl, but Punkin kept grabbing the box with his claws and sticking his head in it. John Lee sat on the floor having a fit of giggles. God o' mighty, he thought, everything is so wonderfully, marvelously, absolutely perfectly good.

She continued sketching after they did the dishes. He sat in the chair feeling luxuriously content. He smiled.

"May I share it?" Sue asked, almost smiling herself.

"Huh? Oh, nothin'. I was just... feeling good." Then he felt embarrassed. "You... ah... been painting pictures very long?"

"Oh, I've dabbled at it quite a while, but I've only been doing it seriously for a couple of years." She smiled in a funny, wry way. "I'm just an aging roundheel who decided she'd better find another line of work while she could."

He didn't know what she was talking about. "You're not old."

"I stood on the shore and chunked rocks at the Mayflower." She sighed. "I'm forty-five."

"Golly. I thought you were about thirty."

She laughed her throaty laugh that made him tingle. "Honey, at your age everyone between twenty-five and fifty looks alike."

"I think you're beautiful," he said and wished he hadn't, but she smiled and he was glad he had.

"Thank you, little lamb. You should have seen me when I was your age." She stopped drawing and sat with her head to one side, remembering. "You should have seen me when I was fifteen." Then she shifted her position on the stool and laughed. "I was quite a dish — if I do say so myself. We were practically neighbors, you know that?" she said, changing the subject. "I'm an old Okie from way back. Still can't bear to watch *The Grapes of Wrath.* We came to California in '33 and settled in San Diego. Practically starved to death. My father died in '35, and my mother went back to telling fortunes and having seances — among other things. My father wouldn't let her do it while he was alive."

"Golly," he said bug-eyed. "A real fortune teller?"

"Well," she said wryly, "I never thought of it as being very real, but I don't know anymore." She looked at him speculatively for a moment, then shrugged. "Whether she was real or not, I don't know but I guess she was pretty good, 'cause there seemed to be plenty of money after that. Then the war started. And if you're twenty-three, in San Diego, during a war, you can make lots of money if you keep your wits about you." She shifted again on the stool. "Well, we won't go into that."

"Where's your mother now?"

"Oh, she's dead... I imagine. It was in '45, I think. Yeah, right after V-J Day, I went over for a visit and she wasn't there. Never heard from her again. You know, her house is still there in San Diego. I get a tax bill every year. I don't know why I keep paying it. Guess I'd rather do that than go through all that junk she had accumulated. I was down there a few years ago and went by the place. Everything was still there just as it was; two feet deep in dust, of course. I'm surprised vandals haven't stripped the place, considering what the neighborhood's become. I took a few things as keepsakes, but I didn't hang around long. It's worse than it was when she was there."

She worked a while in silence, then stopped drawing again and looked at him in a way that made his stomach feel funny. "If I were twenty and you were twenty... you're gonna be a ring-tailed boomer when you're twenty, John Lee." She suddenly laughed and began drawing. "If I'm gonna make people older and younger, I might as well make myself fifteen

— no point in wasting five years."

He didn't know what a ring-tailed boomer was, but the way she said it made his ears turn red. Her mentioning San Diego reminded him. "Why do they call you San Diego Lightfoot Sue?"

"Daisy Mae has a big mouth," she said wryly. "I'll tell you about it someday."

"I sure like Pearl and Daisy Mae," he said and smiled.

"So do I."

"Pearl is awfully nice to me."

"Some people have a cat and some people have a dog."

He sure wished he knew what people were talking about, at least some of the time.

It seemed to him hardly any time had passed when Pearl sashayed in with a May Co. carton under his arm. "It is I, Lady Bountiful, come to free the slaves," he brayed and presented the box to John Lee with a flourish. "It's a Welcome To California present."

"Golly." He took the box gingerly.

"Well, *open* it." John Lee fumbled at the string while Pearl planted a kiss on Sue's cheek. "Sugah, you look more like Lauren Bacall every *day!*"

Sue grinned. "Hello, Pearl. How are you?"

He sighed an elaborate sigh. "I am *worn* to a frazzle. I've been slaving over a tacky May Company window all day. If they would *only* let me be *cre-a-tive!*"

"Wilshire Boulevard would never survive it."

John Lee stared at the contents of the box. "How did you know what size I wore?"

"Daisy Mae has tape measures in her eyeballs." He made fluttering motions with his hands. "Well, try them *on.*"

John Lee grinned and hurried to the bathroom with the box. He put it on the side of the tub and went through it. There were pants, a shirt, socks, shoes, and, he was glad to see, underwear. But he had never seen gold underwear and it looked kinda skimpy. He quickly shucked off his clothes and slipped on the gold shorts. Golly, he thought. They fit like his hide, and he kept wanting to pull them up, but that's all there was to them.

The shirt was yellow and soft. He rubbed it on his face, then slipped it over his head. It fit tight around his waist, and the neck was open halfway to his navel. He looked for buttons but there weren't any. The sleeves were long and floppy and had little pearl snaps on the cuffs.

He slipped on the pants, which had alternating dark-brown and light-brown vertical stripes. He was surprised to find that they didn't come any higher than the shorts. He gave them an experimental tug

and decided they wouldn't fall off. They were tight almost to the knees and got loose and floppy at the bottom.

He sat on the commode to put on the shoes but stood again to hitch the pants up in back. He slipped on the soft, fuzzy gold socks. The shoes were brown and incredibly shiny. And they didn't even have shoestrings. He stood up, gave the pants a hitch, and looked at himself in the mirror. He couldn't make himself stop grinning.

He opened the bathroom door and walked out, still grinning. Pearl made his eyes go big and round, and Sue leaned against one of the yellow bureaus with her mouth puckered up. John Lee walked nervously to them, the shoes making a thump at every step. "The pants are a little bit too tight," he said and didn't know what to do with his hands.

"Oh, sugah, you are *wrong* about that!"

"If he had his hair slicked down with pomade, he'd look like an adagio dancer... or something," Sue said in a flat voice.

Pearl lowered his eyebrows at her, then twirled his finger at John Lee. "Turn around."

He turned nervously, worried because Sue didn't seemed pleased.

"John Lee, sugah," Pearl said in awe, "you have *got* the *Power!*"

"Pearl. Don't you think you went a little overboard?" Sue put her hand on the back of John Lee's neck. "If he walked down Hollywood Boulevard in that, he'd have to carry a machine gun."

"Well!" Pearl swelled up in mock outrage. "At least they're not *lavender!*"

Sue laughed. John Lee laughed too, but he wasn't exactly sure why. They were saying things he didn't understand again. But he felt an overwhelming fondness for Pearl at that moment. He reached out and shook Pearl's hand. "Thank you, Pearl. I think the clothes are beautiful." Then, because he felt Pearl would be pleased, he kissed him on the cheek.

The effect was startling. Pearl's face seemed to turn to putty and went through seven distinct expression changes. His mouth worked like a goldfish and he kept blinking his eyes. Then he pulled himself together and said too loudly, "Listen, you all. Dinner will be ready in exactly seventy-two minutes. We're having my world-famous sowbelly and chittlin lasagne." He hurried out, walking too fast.

John Lee was up very early the next morning. Sue opened the door still in her bathrobe. "I didn't know what time you wanted me to come over," he said apologetically. "Did I wake you up?"

Sue smiled and motioned him in. "Ordinarily, I'm not coordinated enough to tie my shoes before noon, but I woke up about two hours ago ready to go to work. I didn't even take time to dress." She indicated one wall of the room. "Check out the gallery while I put the wreck together."

All the old sketches had been cleared away from the wall. John Lee saw himself thumbtacked in neat rows. "Golly," he said, walking slowly down the rows. The sketches were all of his face: some sheets were covered with eyes, laughing, sleepy, dreamy, contemplative; others with mouths, smiling, grinning, pouting, pensive. There were noses and ears and combinations. He recognized some of the full-face sketches: this one was when he was talking about his mother; that one when he was petting Punkin; that one when he was telling of Aunt Rose and Aunt Lilah; another when he sat in rapt attention, listening to Sue.

She emerged from the bathroom dressed much as she had been the day before except that she wore a little make-up and her hair fell through the scarf, hanging long and fluffy down her back. John Lee thought she was absolutely gorgeous. "What do you think," she asked tentatively, not quite smiling.

He couldn't think of anything to say that wasn't obvious to the eye, and so he just grinned in extreme pleasure.

She smiled happily. "I think I've caught you, John Lee. I really feel good about it. You're just what I've been needing."

"What're you gonna draw today?"

She indicated a large canvas in position on the easel. "I'm ready to start, if you are."

Oh, Lord, he thought, just don't turn red. "Yeàh. I guess so."

"You can keep your pants on for a while, if it'll make you more comfortable. I'll work on your head and torso." She was businesslike, not seeming to notice his nervousness. It made him feel a little better.

He took a deep breath. "No... I might as well get it over with." She nodded and began puttering around with paints and turpentine, not looking at him, without seeming to be deliberately not looking at him. He pulled the tee-shirt over his head and wondered what to do with it. Quit stalling, he admonished, and slipped off his sneakers and socks. He looked at her but she was still ignoring him. He quickly pulled off his pants and shorts. He stood there feeling as if there were a cyclone in his stomach. "Well," he said, "I'm ready."

She turned and looked at him as if she had seen him naked every

day of his life. "You have absolutely nothing to be embarrassed about, John Lee."

"Well," he said, "well..."

"What's the matter?"

"I don't know what to do with my *hands!*" Then he couldn't keep from laughing and she laughed with him. "What do you want me to do?"

"Let's see..." She moved one of the chairs under the light. "Lean against the chair. I want you relaxed..."

"I'll try," he chuckled.

She smiled. "I want you relaxed and completely innocent of your nudity. Sort of the *September Morn* effect."

"You're asking a lot." He leaned against the chair, trying to look innocent.

She gave a throaty laugh and shook her head. "You look more like a chicken thief. Don't try too hard. Just relax and be comfortable, like you were yesterday."

"I had my clothes on yesterday."

"I know. You'll do okay as soon as you get used to it."

"I still don't know what to do with my hands."

"Don't do anything with them. Just forget 'em; let them find their own position. I know it's not easy. Just forget I'm here. Pretend you're in the woods completely alone. You've just been swimming in a little lake, and now you're relaxing in the sun, leaning against a warm rock. Try to picture it."

"Okay, I'll try."

"You're not thinking about anything, just resting, feeling the sun on your body." She watched him. A pucker of concentration appeared over his nose. He shifted his hips slightly to get more comfortable, and his fidgety hands finally came to rest at his sides. His diaphragm moved slowly as his breathing became softer. The frown gradually disappeared from his face, and the quality she couldn't put a name to took its place. God, she thought, it brought back memories she had thought were put away forever. She felt like a giddy young girl.

"That's it, John Lee," she said very softly, trying not to disturb him. She picked up a stick of charcoal and began to work rapidly. A pleased smile flickered across his lips and then disappeared. "Beautiful, John Lee, beautiful. Don't close your eyes; watch the sun reflecting on the water."

She got the basic form the way she wanted it in charcoal, then began squeezing paint from tubes onto a palette. She applied the base colors quickly, almost offhandedly. After about fifteen minutes she said, "When you get tired, let me know and we'll take a break."

"No. I'm fine."

After another half hour she saw his thumb twitch. "If you're not tired," she said, putting the palette down, "I am. Would you like some coffee?"

"Yeah," he said without moving. "Are you sure I can get back in the same position again?"

"I'm sure." She tossed him her bathrobe and he put it on. "Do a few knee bends and get the kinks out." She poured two cups of coffee from the electric percolator. "I told you it was hard work."

He grinned and stretched his arms forward, rolling the muscles in his shoulders. "I'm not tired."

She handed him a cup. "You've been warned." She opened the back door when she heard a plaintive cry from outside. Punkin strolled in and looked up at her, demanding attention. She picked him up and he started purring loudly.

John Lee found it easy to keep the same position the rest of the morning. Sue had made him as comfortable as she could because of his inexperience. She worked steadily with concentration. He missed the easy chatter of the day before, but he didn't want to disturb her. They took periodic breaks, though she sometimes became so engrossed she forgot. Then she would admonish him gently for not reminding her. When they broke for lunch, she made him do knee bends and push-ups and then massaged his back and shoulders with green rubbing alcohol.

Daisy Mae strolled in with a foil-covered Pyrex dish. "You didn't do that when Pearl and I posed for you," he said with feigned huffiness and slipped the dish into the oven.

"Hello, Daisy Mae," John Lee grinned, putting on the robe. "Look at the sketches."

"Hello, John Lee. I knew Sue would get so absorbed she'd forget to feed you. So I brought the leftover lasagne." He looked over the sketches, critically, with his fingers theatrically stroking his chin. "I think the girl shows some promise, though I see years of study ahead."

Sue kissed him on the cheek and began setting the table for three. Daisy Mae sprawled in a chair like a wilting lily. "God!" he grunted. "I got a call from Paramount this morning. I start back to work Thursday. We're doing a *west*-ern. On lo-*ca*-tion. My *God.* In *Arizona!* Centipedes! Tarantulas! Scorpions! Rattlesnakes! Sweaty starlets! If I'm not back in five weeks, send the Ma-*rines!*"

Sue laughed. "You can console yourself with thoughts of all those butch cowboys."

"Darling," he said, arching his wrist at her, "some of those cowboys are about as butch as Pamela Tiffin. I could tell you stories..."

"Don't bother. I've heard most of them."

"I haven't," John Lee piped in brightly.

Sue started to say something, but Daisy Mae beat her to it. "Someday, John Lee. You're much too young to lose *all* your illusions."

When they had eaten, Sue thanked him for bringing the lasagne and shooed him out. He started to peek under the cloth covering the painting, but she slapped his hand. "You know better than that."

"Can John Lee bunk over here tomorrow night? I'm giving myself a going-away party before I'm exiled to the burning deserts, and it's liable to last all night."

She stood very still for a moment. Then she nodded with a jerk of her head. "Of course." Daisy Mae waltzed out with his Pyrex dish. Sue looked after him for a moment, then at John Lee sitting bewildered on the day bed. She gave him a quick nervous smile. "You ready?"

He took off the bathrobe, hardly feeling embarrassed at all, and took his place, bringing back the woods, the lake, and the warm rock, but needing them only for a moment to get started.

At four thirty she covered the painting and began washing the brushes. She had said hardly anything at all since Daisy Mae left, giving him only an occasional soft-voiced direction. He put his clothes on and went to her. "Is it turning out the way you'd hoped?"

Her eyes met his. He saw sadness in them and something that had gotten lost. "Yes," she said almost unaudibly. Then she smiled. "You're a joy to paint, John Lee. Now, run along before Pearl comes traipsing in. I'd rather not have company this evening. Be over bright and early, and I think we'll finish it tomorrow."

Punkin stopped him on the steps, wanting to be petted. He picked up the cat and glanced back to see Sue watching him through the window. She turned away quickly.

The painting was completed at three p.m. the next afternoon. Sue stood back from it and looked at John Lee, smiling. He went to her hesitantly, almost fearfully, still naked, and looked at it. "Golly," he breathed. When she painted a nude, she really painted everything. He felt the heat starting at his ears and flowing downward. He was almost used to being naked in front of her, but it was an astonishing shock to *see* himself being naked.

She laughed fondly. "John Lee,

you're a regular traffic light."

"No, I'm not," he muttered and got even redder.

Suddenly, her arms were around him, hugging him tightly to her. He felt electricity bouncing in the bottom of his stomach. He threw his arms around her and wanted to be enveloped by her. "John Lee, my little lamb," she whispered in his ear, bending her head because she was an inch taller, "do you like it?"

"Yes!" he breathed, with that peculiar pain in the back of his throat again. "Oh, yes."

He shifted his head slightly so he could see. The painting was done in pale sun-washed colors. He leaned against a suggestion of something white which might have been a large rock. It was everything she had said she wanted, and more. He seemed totally innocent of clothing, so completely comfortable was he in his nudity. His body was relaxed, but there was no lethargy in it. There was something slightly supernatural about the John Lee in the painting, as if perhaps he were a fawn or a wood sprite, definitely an impression of a forest creature. The various shades of pale green in the background implied a forest, and there was a dappling of leaf shadows on his shoulder and chest — but only a suggestion. However, these were unimportant. The figure dominated the painting, executed in fine detail, like a Raphael. The face was innocent, totally uncorrupted by worldly knowledge. But there was a quality in it even purer than simple innocence. The eyes were lost in a reverie.

"Do I look like that?" he asked, slightly overwhelmed.

"Well..." she said with a husky chuckle, "yes, you do. Although I will have to admit I idealized you somewhat."

"Is it okay if I bring Pearl and Daisy Mae over to see it?" he asked with growing excitement. "Pearl was supposed to come home at noon today to help with the party. Only she... I mean he, calls it a Druid ritual."

She laughed and released him. "All right."

He raced happily to the door then skidded to a halt. He hurried back, grinning sheepishly, and picked up his pants. He put them on, hopping on one foot, then out the door, clattering down the steps. She looked at the empty doorway for a moment, then rubbed at her eyes but was unable to stop the tears.

"Hell!" she said out loud. "Oh, hell!"

John Lee came over from the party about ten o'clock dressed in his new clothes and carrying a Lufthansa flight bag Pearl had packed for him. He flopped into one of the chairs, grinning. Sue was

in the other, reading. She looked at him speculatively. Punkin leaped lightly from her lap and stretched mightily, his rear end high in the air, his chin against the floor, and his toes splayed. Then he hopped into John Lee's lap. Stroking the cat and still grinning, he met her eyes. They both burst into a fit of giggles.

"John Lee, you have *no* staying power," she choked out between gasps of laughter.

He got himself under control, gulping air. "I'd much rather be over here with you."

"I hope Pearl gave you a whip and a chair to go with those clothes."

"No, but he warned me to stay out of corners and, above all, bedrooms."

There was a light tap on the door. "I've been expecting this," she muttered. "Come on in!"

The door opened, and a pale, slim, good-looking young man wafted in like the queen of Rumania inspecting the hog pens. "Hello," he sighed, not quite holding out his hand to be kissed. "Pearl was telling us about the painting you did of John Lee. May I see it?" He looked at John Lee and smiled anemically.

"Of course." Sue got up and turned the light on over the easel. A shriek of laughter drifted over from next door. The young man strolled to the painting and stood motionless for a full two minutes staring at it.

Then he sighed. "Pearl is so lucky. My last one ran off with my stereo, my Polaroid, and knocked out three fillings."

"That's... ah... too bad," she said, valiantly not smiling.

"Yes," he said and sighed again. "I'd like to buy it."

"It's not for sale."

"I'll give you a thousand."

She shook her head.

"Two thousand."

"Sorry."

He sighed again as if he expected nothing from life but an endless series of defeats. "Oh, well. Thank you for letting me see it."

"You're extremely welcome."

He drifted to the door like a wisp of fog, turned, gave John Lee a wan smile, and departed. They both stared at the closed door.

"I feel as if I just played the last act of *La Traviata,*" Sue said in a stunned voice.

"If I remember correctly," John Lee said, "that was Cow-Cow."

She lifted the painting from the easel. "There's only one thing to do if we don't want a parade through here all night. Be back shortly." She left, taking the painting with her.

When she returned half an hour later, he was dozing. "The showing was an unqualified success. I was

offered se-ven thou-sand dol-lars for it. You never saw so many erotic fantasies hanging out. It was like waving a haunch of beef at a bunch of half-starved tigers." She put the painting back on the easel and stood looking at it. "It *is* good, though, isn't it, John Lee?" She sounded only partially convinced. "It really is good." She looked at him, sprawled in the chair, half asleep, smiling happily at her. "Well," she laughed, "neither the artist nor the model are qualified judges. And that crowd at Pearl's could only see a beautiful child with his privates exposed."

She sat on the arm of the chair, putting her hand on the side of his face. He closed his eyes and moved his face against her hand the way Punkin would do. "You're such a child, John Lee," she said softly, feeling her eyes getting damp. "Your body may fool people for a while, but up here," she caught her fingers in his hair, "up here, you're an innocent, trusting, guileless child. And I think you may break my heart." She closed her eyes, trying to hold back the tears, afraid she was making a fool of herself.

He looked up at her, feeling things he had never felt before, wanting things he had never wanted before. Perhaps if he hadn't been floating in the dreamlike area between wakefulness and sleep, his natural shyness might have prevented him. He slipped his arms slowly around her neck and pulled her gently to him. He felt her tense as if about to pull away, then her lips were like butterfly wings against his. She lay across him with her face buried in his neck. He stroked her hair and brushed his lips against her cheek.

"Is this what you want, John Lee?" she asked, her voice unsteady. "Is this what you really want?"

"Yes," he answered. "You're all I want."

"You're sure you're not just feeling sorry for an old lady?" she said shakily, trying to sound if she were making a joke, but not succeeding completely.

He held her tighter. "I love you, San Diego Lightfoot Sue."

She stood up, wiping at her eyes with trembling fingers. "Daisy Mae and his big mouth," she said, half laughing and half crying. John Lee stood up also, giving the striped pants a hitch in the back. "Oh, John Lee," she said, hugging him to her, "take off those awful clothes."

He stood on tiptoe to kiss her because his mouth came only to her chin. He removed the clothes, feeling no embarrassment at all. She turned out the light and locked the door before undressing, feeling embarrassment herself for the first time in nearly thirty years. She turned back the cover on the day

bed, and they lay in the warm night, listening to the shrieks of strained laughter from Pearl's, feeling, exploring, each trying to touch every part of the other's body with every part of his own. Then, she showed him what to do and kissed him when he was clumsy.

They lay together, drowsily. Flamenco music drifted over from the party next door. Sue had her arms around John Lee, her breasts pressed against his back, her face against his neck. "John Lee?"

"Mmmm?"

"John Lee, when you're twenty... have you thought, I'll be fifty?"

"I love you, Sue. It doesn't matter to me."

She was silent for a moment. "Perhaps it doesn't now. You're too young to know the difference, and I still have a few vestiges of my looks left. But in a few years you'll want a girl your own age, and in a few years I'll be an old woman." He started to protest, but she put her fingers on his lips, brushing them with feathery touches. "Your lips are like velvet, John Lee," she whispered. He opened his mouth slightly and touched her fingers with his tongue. Then she clamped her arms around him and began weeping on his shoulder. "My God, John Lee! I don't want to be like your favorite aunt, or even your mother! I don't want to see you married to some empty-headed girl, some pretty *young* girl, having your babies like a brood sow, living in a tract house in Orange County. I want to be the one to have your babies, but I'm too old..."

He twisted in her arms to face her and stopped her words with his mouth. The second time, she showed him how to make it last longer, how to make it better, and he was very adept. He fell asleep in her arms where she held him like a teddy bear, but she lay awake for many hours, making a decision.

The next morning, he moved his things from Pearl's to Sue's.

When he had gone, Pearl began to sob, large tears rolling down his face. His hands clutched at each other like graceful black spiders. Daisy Mae put down the glass of tomato juice with the raw egg and Tabasco he had made for his hangover and took Pearl in his arms.

"Oh, Pearl, you knew it would happen. Just like it always happens," he soothed.

"But John Lee was different from the others," he forced out between heaving sobs.

"Yes, he was. But he's just next-door. He's still our friend. We can see him anytime."

"But it's not the same. Sue will be taking care of him, not me! Oh, Daisy Mae," he wailed, "if this is what it's like to lose a child, I don't want to be a mother any more!"

Sue began a new painting that morning. "I want you like you were last night," she told John Lee, "sitting all asprawl in the chair, half asleep, with Punkin in your lap, but *not* in those same clothes." They went through his meager wardrobe. She selected a pair of khaki-colored jeans and gave him one of her short-sleeve sweat shirts. She showed him how to sit. "Leave your shoes off. I have a foot fetish." She ran her fingernails quickly across the bottom of his foot. His leg jerked and he grabbed her, giggling, and pulling her in his lap. She submitted happily to his kisses for a moment, then pulled away.

"Okay," she laughed, "calm yourself. We've got work to do."

"Yes, ma'am," he said primly, striking a pose and beaming at her.

Thank God, she thought, he doesn't seem to have any regrets.

"My *Gawd!*" Pearl shrieked, seeing the new painting for the first time. He bulged his eyes and hugged himself. "*Sue!* That's the most erotic thing I've seen in my *life!* It's practically porno-*graphic!*" If I look at it any longer, I'm gonna embarrass myself." He turned away dramatically and saw John Lee grinning and blushing.

"I embarrass myself a little with that one," Sue admitted. "Talk about erotic fantasies."

The painting was in dark brooding colors, but a light from somewhere fell across John Lee, sitting deep in the chair, one bare foot tucked under him and the other dangling. One hand lay on his thigh and the other negligently stroked the orange cat in his lap. His face was sleepy and sensual. His eyes looked directly at you. They were the eyes of an innocent fawn, but they were also the eyes of a stag in rut.

"You're not... ah... gonna show it to a bunch of people, are you?" John Lee asked tentatively.

When he woke the next morning, the bed beside him was empty. He rubbed the sleep from his eyes and unfolded the note lying on her pillow. "John Lee, my love," it read in her masculine scrawl, "I had to go to San Diego for the day and didn't want to wake you. I'll be back tonight late. Sue."

He was asleep when she came in. She sat on the edge of the bed and moved her hand lightly across his chest. "John Lee. Wake up, honey."

He squirmed on the bed. "Sue?" he mumbled without opening his eyes. He turned over on his stomach, burying his head, fighting wakefulness.

She pulled back the covers and slapped him lightly on his bare bottom. "Wake up. I want to do another painting. Get dressed."

"I'm too sleepy. Leave your number and I'll call you."

"Okay, smarty," she laughed, "you've got thirty seconds before I get out the ice cubes."

"White slaver," he grinned, sitting up and kissing her.

"Where did you hear that?"

"I spent the day with Pearl and Daisy Mae."

She kissed him and stood up. "Come on, get a move on." She put a new canvas on the easel. "Why wasn't Pearl at work? And I thought Daisy Mae had left for, my God, Arizona."

"Today is Saturday," he said and went into the bathroom.

"So it is. I sorta lose track." She began squeezing black and white paint from tubes.

John Lee washed his face and ran a comb through his hair. He came out of the bathroom and put on the same clothes he had worn for the last painting. "These okay?" She nodded. "Shoes or foot fetish?" he grinned.

She wrinkled her nose at him. "Shoes."

He put on his Sunday shoes rather than the sneakers. "Daisy Mae doesn't leave for a couple of weeks yet. They're having fittings and things. Wardrobe gave her... him an 1865 lady's riding skirt with a *zipper* on the side. Any *welder* in *Duluth* would know better than that. What do you want me to do?"

"Just stand there." Her voice was tense and hurried.

"Stand?" he groaned. "Don't you want to do another one of me sitting down?" He snapped his fingers. "Do one of me asleep in bed!" She didn't laugh at his joke, and so he stood where she indicated. She began, using only black and white. "Don't artists need the northern light, or something?" he asked hopefully, pointing to the dark skylight.

She smiled. "That's just an excuse artists have been using for the last few thousand years when they didn't feel like working. Be patient with me, John Lee. You can sleep all day tomorrow. I have to go back to San Diego."

"Can't I go with you?"

"No, John Lee." Her voice was so serious that he didn't say anything else.

She finished just before dawn. He was about to fall asleep standing, and so she undressed him and put him to bed. He put his arms around her and kissed her, wanting her to stay a little while. "No," she said, running her fingers through his hair, "you're too sleepy. I'll be back in a few days and we can stay in bed for a week."

He smiled and his eyelids began to droop. "That'll be nice."

"Yes, my little lamb, very nice." She kissed him gently on the mouth. He was asleep before she got out the door.

He woke up late Sunday after-

noon and immediately looked at the painting. It wasn't as well done as the other two, he thought. It had a hurried look. It was also in black and white. The John Lee in the painting was just standing there, his arms hanging at his sides, looking at you from beneath lowered brows. John Lee looked at the floor where he had been standing when he posed, but nothing was there. Yet, in the painting, there were lines on the floor. He was standing within a pentagram. And he looked different; he looked older, at least five years older, at least twenty.

Tuesday night Pearl and Daisy Mae took him to Graumann's Chinese where he thought the movie was great and had a wonderful time standing in the footprints, though he had never heard of most of the people who had made them. After the movie they went to a Chinese restaurant where he ate Chinese food for the first time. He didn't really like it, but he told Pearl he did because it made him happy. It was nearly midnight when he got back to Laurel Canyon. Pearl wanted him to stay in his old room, but he said he'd better not because Sue might come home during the night and he wanted to be there.

He went up the wooden steps feeling incredibly content. If Sue were only there. Punkin came down the banister like a tightrope walker, making little soft sounds of greeting. John Lee picked him up and made crooning noises. The cat butted his head against John Lee's chin, making him chuckle. He carried Punkin into the house and turned on the light.

His head exploded. His legs wouldn't hold him up any longer, and he fell to his knees, dropping the cat. There was something white beside him, but he couldn't make his eyes focus. He thought he heard a voice, but he wasn't sure because of the wind screaming through his head. The white thing grabbed him and pulled him to his feet. It shouted more words at him, but he couldn't understand what they were. Something crashed into his face. The fog cleared a little. There was a man dressed in white, holding the front of his shirt. He could smell the sour whiskey on his breath. He slapped John Lee again and shoved him against the wall, but he managed to stay on his feet.

The wind was dying in his head. He heard the man's angry words. "Jesus Christ!" he said, looking at the picture of John Lee sitting in the chair. He took a knife from his pocket and slashed through the canvas.

"Stop it!" John Lee croaked and took an unsteady step in the man's direction.

He whirled, pointing the knife

at John Lee. "Jesus Christ!" he said again, in amazement. "You're just a little kid! She threw me over for a little kid!" The man's face seemed to collapse as he lunged at John Lee with the knife. John Lee grabbed his arm, but the man was far too strong. Then the man stepped on Punkin's tail. The cat screeched and sank his claws into the man's leg. He bawled and fell against John Lee. They both went to the floor, the man on top, his face beside John Lee's.

"Jesus God," the man whispered in bewilderment. Then his breath crept out in an adenoidal whine and didn't go back in again. John Lee squirmed from beneath him. The man rolled onto his back. The knife handle stuck straight up in his chest, blood already clinging to it. John Lee tried to get to his feet but could only make it to his knees. He saw Pearl and Daisy Mae run in, but there was something very wrong with them. They floated slowly through the air, running toward him but getting farther away. Their mouths moved but only honking sounds came out. Then the floor hit him in the face.

The first thing John Lee felt was someone clutching his hand. He opened his eyes and they felt sticky. Pearl's tense and worried face leaned over him, smiling tentatively. "Pearl?" His face hurt and his mouth wouldn't work properly. He sounded as if he were talking with a mouth full of cotton.

"Don't try to talk, John Lee, sugah," Pearl said anxiously. "You're in the hospital. They said you had a mild concussion. I was scared to death. You've been unconscious for ages. This is *Thursday.*"

John Lee put his hand to his face and felt bandages on his mouth and a compress under his lip. "What happened," he had to swallow to get the words out, "happened to my mouth?" It hurt to talk.

"You got a split lip. It's all purple and swelled up. But don't sweat it, sugah. It makes you look ve-ry sex-y."

John Lee grinned but stopped when it hurt too much. "Is Sue back?"

"She sat with you all night. I made her go home and sleep. They put you in a tacky ward, but Sue had you moved to this nice private room."

"The man..." He tried hard to remember what happened. "The man..."

"He's dead, sugah. You never saw so many police cars and ambulances and red lights. I don't know what they're gonna do, John Lee." Pearl was distraught.

Sue came in. "Don't upset him, Pearl. Everything will be all right." She smiled brightly, and John Lee

felt everything would be. "How are you feeling, little lamb?"

"Awful," he groaned and tried to laugh, but it hurt too much.

Pearl gave his arm a pat and said, "I'd better get back to work before May Company fires my little black fanny. Bye, sugah."

"Bye, Pearl." Pearl left with a big grin. Sue sat in the chair he had vacated. She took John Lee's hand and held it to her face.

"I'm so sorry," she said as if in pain.

He wanted to bring back her bright smile. "You're looking particularly beautiful today." He had never seen her dressed up before. She sore a silk suit in soft green, her auburn hair loose and long.

She did smile. "Thank you — and thank Playtex, Maidenform, and Miss Clairol. You look... pretty awful." But she said it as if she didn't mean it.

"Pearl said I looked ve-ry sex-y."

She grinned and then her face was serious. "John Lee, are you lucid enough to listen and understand what I have to say?" He nodded. "All right. There'll be a... hearing... or something in a few days, when you're feeling better, with the juvenile authorities. You won't be in any trouble, because they know Jocko attacked you. They know it was an accident..."

"Who was he?" he interrupted.

She looked at him for a moment. "Someone I used to know," she said softly.

"Did you love him? Was he your lover?" He didn't know if he was saying it right. He wanted to know, but he also wanted her to know that he didn't care.

"They're not exactly the same thing, but, yes, to both." She didn't look at him.

"You gave him up for me," he said in wonder, loving her so much it hurt.

She looked at him then and smiled, but there was a funny look in her eyes. "I'd give up most anything for you, John Lee."

The next couple of weeks were a blur. A bunch of people talked to him: men in blue suits and tight-faced women in gray. He told them everything that happened, and they went away to be replaced by others, but none of them would let him see Sue again. There was one lady he liked, who said she was a judge. He told her that his grandfather was a judge but he died a long time ago. She asked him about everything and he told her. She had a kind voice and made the others behave the way Miss Mahan would.

"But, Your Honor," one of the men said, "this child has killed a drunken sailor in a knife fight over a prostitute!"

The judge laughed pleasantly. "Really, Mr. Maley, there's no need for exaggeration. You're not addressing a jury. John was merely protecting himself when attacked. The man's death resulted when he fell on his own knife."

"You can't deny he's been living with a known prostitute. I wouldn't be surprised if she hasn't seduced him."

"Please, Mr. Maley," the judge frowned, displeased, "don't speak that way in front of the child."

"You saw those paintings! Disgusting!"

The judge stood up and began putting on her coat. "Artists have been painting nudes for several thousand years, Mr. Maley. You should see the collection in the Vatican. And these are very good paintings. I made the artist an offer for the nude myself. Come along, John. I'll take you to dinner. Good evening, gentlemen."

Dwayne came to see him one day, but John Lee would never have recognized him. He hadn't seen him since he went away to the army seven years before. Dwayne was twenty-nine, big and good-looking like all the Peacock men. He shook hands with John Lee, saying little, and went away after talking to the judge.

Aunt Rose and her husband flew out from Hawley. She touched him a lot and clucked a lot. Of course, she'd *like* to take care of him, him being the youngest son of her late sister and all, but the way things were, the economy and the cost of living and all, she just didn't see how she could.

It was a terrible thing, her sister marrying into the Peacock family, such an unfortunate family. Poor Grace Elizabeth's husband had died the same day she was buried, the very day John Lee had left on the bus. He had fallen off the tractor and been run over by his own plow. He had crawled almost all the way to the house before he bled to death. Such a tragic family, the Peacocks. Her sister had lost six of her children, five of them in infancy and poor Wash, Jr.

They had tracked him down in Oklahoma because the farm was his now; or, she should say, they had tracked down his wife; or, she should say, his ex-wife. Wash, Jr., had been killed six years ago when a pipe fell off a rig and crushed his skull. His wife hadn't even notified the family. Then she married a Mexican driller from Texas and was living in Tulsa, but what could you expect from one of them trashy O'Dell girls. It was a good thing she had had none of Wash, Jr.'s children, just three stillbirths, because she had no claim on the family at all now. Of course, she had two fat brown babies by her new husband, but you know how

Mexicans are: like rabbits.

Dwayne hadn't wanted the farm. He just told them to sell it and send him the money. Dwayne was the logical person to take John Lee, being his closest kin. Her sister, Lilah, was in no shape to take care of him. If Dwayne couldn't, then she didn't know what would happen to the poor thing, him living with a prostitute and all.

Aunt Rose and her husband flew back to Hawley.

The judge told him how sorry she was, but if one of his relatives didn't assume custody, as a minor he would have to be declared a ward of the state. But it wouldn't be too bad. He'd have a nice place to live, could finish school, and would have lots of other boys his own age. He asked her why he couldn't live with Sue, but she said it was out of the question and wouldn't discuss it further.

But Dwayne did assume custody, and John Lee moved into his brother's small apartment on Beachwood near Melrose. "Half the money from the sale of the farm is rightfully yours," Dwayne said, dressing for work. "You'll have to go to school this fall. The judge said so. Other than that, your time is your own. But you're not supposed to see that woman again." He showed John Lee how to turn the couch into a bed and then left for work. He was a bartender at a place on Highland and worked from six until it closed at two in the morning.

John Lee caught the bus to Melrose and Vine and rode to Hollywood and Highland. He took a taxi to the house in Laurel Canyon. Sue wasn't at home and he couldn't find Punkin. The three paintings had been framed and were hanging. She had repaired the damanged one. No other paintings were in sight. Everything had been pushed against the walls, leaving most of the floor bare. There were blue chalk marks on the bare boards that had been hastily and inadequately rubbed out. The room smelled oddly.

He found an envelope on the kitchen table with his name on it. He removed the folded piece of notepaper. "John Lee, my little lamb," it read, "I knew you would come, although they told us we mustn't see each other again. You must stay away for a while, John Lee. Only a little while, then it won't matter what they say. There'll be nothing they can do. I love you. Sue."

Pearl wasn't at home either, and so he went back to Dwayne's apartment, watched television for a while, took a bath, and went to bed on the convertible sofa. He didn't know when Dwayne came in about two thirty.

Dwayne always slept until nearly noon. John Lee found little to talk to him about, and Dwayne seemed to prefer no conversation at all. John Lee watched television a lot, went to many movies, and waited for Sue.

He fell asleep in front of the television a few days later and was awakened by Dwayne and the man who was with him. Dwayne frowned at him and the man smiled nervously. The man said something to Dwayne, but he shook his head and led the man into the bedroom, closing the door. John Lee went to bed and didn't know when the man left.

The next morning he looked into the bedroom. Dwayne was sprawled on the bed, naked, still asleep. A twenty dollar bill lay beside him, partially under his hip. John Lee closed the door and fixed breakfast.

Dwayne came in while he was washing the dishes. He didn't say anything for a while, fixing a cup of instant coffee. He sat at the table in his underwear, sipping the coffee. John Lee continued with the dishes, not looking at him. Then he felt Dwayne's eyes on him and he turned. "I don't want you to think I'm queer," Dwayne said flatly. "I don't do anything, just lay there. If those guys want to pay me good money, it's no skin off my nose." He turned back to his coffee.

John Lee hung up the dishtowel to dry. "I understand," he said, but he wasn't sure that he did. "It's all right with me."

Dwayne didn't answer but went on sipping coffee as if John Lee weren't there. He made sure, from then on, he was asleep before Dwayne came home.

Sue called a few nights later. He had never heard her voice over the phone, but it sounded different: brighter, less throaty, younger. "Come over, John Lee, my little lamb," she laughed gleefully. "I'm ready. Come over for the showing."

The taxi had to stop a block away because of the police cars and fire trucks. John Lee ran terrified through the milling crowd, but when he reached Sue's house there was nothing to see. The rickety wooden steps went up the hill for about twenty feet and ended in midair. There was nothing beyond them, only a rectangle of bare earth where the house had been. But nothing else, not even the concrete foundation.

He felt a touch on his arm. He whirled to stare wide-eyed at Pearl. He couldn't speak, his throat was frozen. His heart was pounding too hard and he couldn't breathe. Pearl took his arm and led him into the house where he had spent his first night in Hollywood.

Pearl gave him a sip of brandy which burned his throat and

released the muscles. "What happened? Where's Sue?" he asked, afraid to get an answer.

"I don't know," Pearl said without any trace of corn pone accent. He seemed on the verge of hyseria himself. "There was a fire..."

"A fire?" he asked, uncomprehending.

"I think it was a fire..." Pearl nervously dropped the brandy bottle. He picked it up, ignoring the stain on the carpet.

"Where's Sue?"

"She... she was in the house. I heard her scream," he said rapidly, not looking at John Lee.

John Lee didn't feel anything. His body was frozen and numb. Then, he couldn't help himself. He began to bawl like a baby. It was all slipping away. He could feel the good things escaping his fingers.

Pearl sat beside him on the purple fur chair and tried to comfort him. "She was over there all evening, singing to herself. I could hear her, she was very happy. I went over but she wouldn't let me in. She said I knew better than to look at an artist's work before it was finished. She said anyway it was a private showing for you. I didn't hear her singing after that, and then, a little while ago, I heard a noise like thunder or an explosion. I looked over, and there was a bright green light in the house, like it was burning on the inside, but not like fire either. I heard her scream. It was an awful, terrible scream. There was another voice, a horrible gloating voice, I couldn't understand. Then the whole house began to glow with that same green light. It got brighter and brighter, but there was no heat from it. Then it went away and the house wasn't there anymore."

Pearl got up and handed John Lee an envelope. "I found this on the deck. She must have tossed it down earlier." John Lee took the envelope with his name on it. He recognized her handwriting, but it was more hurried and scrawled than usual. He opened it and read the short note.

He went back to school that fall and lived with Dwayne. He said his name was Johnny, because John Lee was home and Sue. He met a lot of girls who wanted him, but they were pallid and dull after Sue. He went with them and slept with them but was unable to feel anything for them. He never turned down any man who propositioned him either, and there were many. He didn't care about the money, he only needed someone to relieve the pressures that built up in him. It didn't make any difference, man or woman. He let lonely middle-aged women keep him, but he never found what he was looking for.

(to page 151)

We are used to understanding speculative fantasies as rational predictions of what might be. Or as entertainments, accidents thrown up by the imagination, mere dismissable merenesses.

Sf is better understood as a mirror.

Sf offers its writers unlimited possibilities to choose among. An sf writer may define his settings, his characters, his stories as he pleases and as he is able.

But given the vast reaches of time and space in which any possibility may be considered true, which states of mind does a writer present in dramatic form? What situations does he imagine? Who does he imagine himself to be? What does he imagine himself doing?

The choices a writer makes are an elaborate self-definition, both of himself and of the times of which he is a product. In the mirror of a science fiction story may be seen a reflection of the author. In the mirror of science fiction stories may be seen a reflection of an era. And in our reading of science fiction — the stories we choose and what we make of them — may be seen a reflection of ourselves. We read science fiction to know ourselves better.

Sf is a potent and important literature still in process of being

ALEXEI & CORY PANSHIN

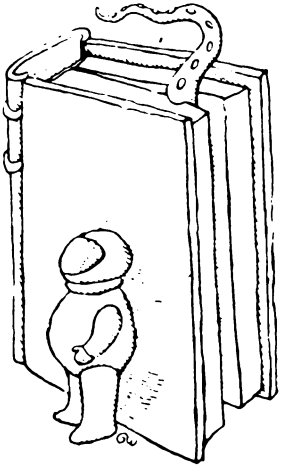
Books

Norstrilia, by Cordwainer Smith, Ballantine, $1.50.

A Funeral for the Eyes of Fire, by Michael Bishop, Ballantine, $1.50.

The Female Man, by Joanna Russ, Bantam, $1.25.

Sign of the Unicorn, by Roger Zelazny, Doubleday, $5.95.



born. Even its best practitioners do not yet know its full dimension. Even its most insightful critics can not yet conceive of what it will become.

Some months ago, Joanna Russ began a column in this space by saying, "The reviewer's hardest task is to define standards." We know the standards of mimetic fiction do not stretch to encompass the virtues and limitations of existing sf, let alone the sf that is to come.

What broader and apter standards are we to apply? By what standards are we to judge science fiction when we understand neither science fiction nor ourselves?

Our best course is to look into the mirror and see what the mirror reveals. We look for ourselves — for the complete actions we might perform and the whole people we might be. The better a science fiction story is, the deeper and wider and clearer we will see.

This standard, at least, has a chance of revealing to us the virtues that we always sensed in science fiction, those virtues that mimetic standards denied. It tells us why, for instance, Robert Heinlein has been the most consistently interesting of modern science fiction authors. He has been a deeper and more revealing mirror for more of us than any other writer of our time. It also suggests how Robert Heinlein, in his partial people, in his incomplete actions, in his cloudiness and obfuscation, and in his allegiance to the prejudices of a particular time, might be superseded.

The books on hand for review this month are deep and subtle mirrors. They are among the very best of what science fiction currently offers. All are partial and incomplete, but even in their partiality and incompleteness they are revealing.

Paul Linebarger, who was born in 1913 and died in 1966, was a strange austere man, intellectually brilliant, emotionally repressed, raised abroad, removed from the mainstream of America. Linebarger was a psychologist and military man, a specialist in the Far East and in psychological warfare. Throughout his life, he carried on a series of literary careers under various pseudonyms, eventually and chiefly as the science fiction writer, Cordwainer Smith.

The bulk of Cordwainer Smith's work is not large — five books. Most of this science fiction is set against a common far-future background, a huge incomplete tapestry, the largest piece of which is *Norstrilia,* the only novel by Cordwainer Smith. *Norstrilia* was originally written in 1960. Cut in

half and unsuccessfully prettied to look like two novels, it was published as two paperbacks, *The Planet Buyer* (1964) and *The Underpeople* (1968). It is only now, however, fifteen years after it was written, that we have the opportunity to see *Norstrilia* in its complete and original form — if we ignore the many proofreading errors that disfigure the book.

It is a strange, static, hierarchic universe that Smith shows us. It is a world of underpeople — animals formed into simulacra of humanity — of men, and of men elevated into rulers of the universe, the Lords of the Instrumentality. This vastly changed world allows no change. Signs of difference, breaches of custom, and unauthorized opinions are all answered with instant death. The open pastoral world of Norstrilia is as static, hierarchic and intolerant as the closed urban world of Earth. One equals the other.

Against this background, men struggle and plot for the means of vastly extended life — the drug stroon, extracted from gigantic sick sheep by the farmers of Norstrilia. But men lack all sense of purpose. The men of Earth play desultorily at games derived from the life styles of our own time as a substitute for purpose. The men of Norstrilia live to produce stroon, so that they may live longer to produce more stroon.

For what reasons did Smith invent this bizarre half-mad situation? Quite clearly, it seems, the static universe and the rigid hierarchy of beings within it were an intertwined problem that Smith felt the need to sort out and solve.

Norstrilia, this long, serious and inventive novel, is Smith's best attempt to state and resolve his problem. But the novel, even in its complete and restored form, is not successful.

In a "Theme and Prologue" at the outset of *Norstrilia,* Smith describes the story to come. He tells us that all that remains are the details. But the details don't match the original description. We are promised a hero who knows his own mind. We are promised adventures and consequence.

What we are given is Roderick Frederick Ronald Arnold William MacArthur McBan the 151st, who when asked his purposes is helpless to answer. He is the epitome of ignorance. His experiences are a blur to him. Throughout the story, he is the tool of others. He has no power over his own wealth, the nominal motive center of the novel. He is not responsible for its original acquisition. He is not responsible for its ultimate disposal. Quite simply, he has no active part to play in what is given as his story.

We have two problems in *Norstrilia.* One is the problem of the static hierarchic universe. The other is Rod's problem of bewilderment and repression. If the novel were a success, both would be solved in common terms.

In fact, neither is solved. Rod falls into the hands of a "clinical psychologist," who gives him the gift of being ordinary. Rod's money falls into the hands of a foundation dedicated to providing fun, games and easy hatreds to occupy a motiveless mankind. But nothing whatsoever is changed by the events recounted in *Norstrilia.* At the conclusion, the world remains as static and hierarchic as it was at the outset. And Rod McBan the 152nd is brought on in the last paragraph to demand of his father, our hero, why the world is as it is and why he is who he is — the central questions of the book. And there is no answer.

The aristocratic and unhappy world of the Lords of the Instrumentality is a better mirror of Smith, with his special and peculiar upbringing, than a mirror of our times. This may explain why Smith has never been widely popular, but rather has appealed to the elite few who can identify with the situation Smith presented. Presented, but never resolved.

Michael Bishop is a new writer to watch. He is twenty-nine and has been writing science fiction since 1970. In the last year, several of his novellas have been nominated for awards. *A Funeral for the Eyes of Fire* is his first novel.

A Funeral for the Eyes of Fire shows an interest in the anthropological comparable to Ursula Le Guin and a sense of the alien comparable to James Tiptree, Jr. But it is an individual work, Bishop's own and no one else's. *A Funeral for the Eyes of Fire* is highly imperfect. It is a pied mirror, everywhere reflecting brilliantly bright, everywhere cloudy. It leads the eyes inward, and ultimately reveals nothing clearly. Even so, it is the most impressive first novel so far seen in the Seventies.

Bishop is one of the new and still rare breed of science fiction writer attempting to produce art without rejecting the pulp vigor that is science fiction's continuing strength. If the cover blurbs of his book are to be believed, *A Funeral for the Eyes of Fire* is just so much more pulp trash. But the blurbs are a lie. Bishop is attempting to use undiluted science fiction to present a tragic action of Shakespearean dimension, a disintegrating situation comparable in its mindless destructiveness and pain to our conduct of the Vietnamese War.

Two Earthmen — brothers — have fled one hundred light years from the claustrophobic confines of the Urban Nucleus of Atlanta to seek haven on the planet of Glaparcus. In company with two Glaparcan envoys, they have traveled a further six light years on a mission to the planet Trope. If successful in their mission, the Earthmen will earn themselves a home on Glaparcus. Nominally, they are successful. In actual fact, their mission is a farrago of lies, betrayals, misunderstandings, bloodshed and death.

Our comparison of *A Funeral for the Eyes of Fire* to Shakespeare was fully intended. Bishop clearly had Shakespeare in mind in his construction, and sometimes even in his diction. The result is not successful, but the failure is not laughable.

In part, Bishop fails because his situation is not plausible. Early in the book, a character calls it ludicrous, and it is. It is a set-up, a situation designed to disintegrate as spectacularly and painfully as possible, existing for no other reason.

In larger part, Bishop fails because of his choice of narrator. In function, Gunnar Balduin is Rosencrantz and Fortinbras in one, a tool and petty villain, and a mopper of blood and burier of bodies. But as Bishop presents him, he is a character without knowledge, sincerity, history or personal characteristics. He is a cypher whose eloquence and special vision are not his own, but Bishop's.

Here is Bishop's voice: *Its orchid glow made the sky seem to be in a state of lush, organic rot ... like a crisply burning fuse down the indigo sky ... like a piece of crisp paper burning at the edges ... like a purple intoxicant ... like a shiny black placenta.*

These words fit unconvincingly in Gunnar Balduin's mouth. Bishop might have come closer to fulfilling his ambitions if he had foregone the safety and ease of first-person narrative, reserved his voice to himself, and observed his protagonist from outside.

A Funeral for the Eyes of Fire is an awkward and discordant book, easy to resist, easy to reject. But if its implausible situation and characterless narrator are set aside, it has a rare power. Its wealth of detail, its special vision, and its inexorable progress suggest that when Michael Bishop has his voice and tools under firm discipline, he will be a force to be reckoned with.

In her book, *The Female Man,* Joanna Russ attempts to disarm criticism by anticipating it. She fills a page with dismissive phrases

and indicts all those who might use any of them as benighted and lightless.

One of the phrases is "this pretense at a novel," and we are tempted to use it. *The Female Man* is advertised as a science fiction novel, but it is not one. It is not a story. It is not an action. There is no narrative thread. Instead, one might more fairly call *The Female Man a* meditation or an exercise in self-revelation that uses some of the devices of science fiction.

In *The Female Man,* the author divides herself into four fragments. Joanna, from what might be our own world, is most like the author. Jeannine is the product of a variant universe in which the Depression world of the author's childhood has lingered and lingered. Janet is an emissary from the all-female world of Whileaway — stated to be another planet in the author's award-winning short story, "When It Changed," but here given as a possible future Earth. Jael is from an alternate universe in which men and women are at war, the possible seed from which Janet's Whileaway grows.

These characters meet again and again in varying combinations and situations to demonstrate the author's convictions and confusions. It's all a grand kaleidoscopic interior monolog, well-written, passionate and intense. But it is not a novel. Nothing is visualized, nothing happens. If there is a conclusion to be drawn from the book, it is that the author feels that men are not altogether human, but that women without men are or might be.

Here are the males of our species:

"Burned any bras lately har har twinkle twinkle A pretty girl like you doesn't need to be liberated twinkle har Don't listen to those hysterical bitches twinkle twinkle I never take a woman's advice about two things: love and automobiles twinkle twinkle har May I kiss your little hand twinkle twinkle. Har. Twinkle."

On a certain level, the author's dismissal of criticism is correct and inarguable. These are her feelings, sufficient in themselves by their very existence. If you share these feelings, *The Female Man* is a perfect emotional mirror. If you don't share these feelings, go fuck yourself.

But *The Female Man* is also an exercise in self-indulgence. Fiction in general, and science fiction in particular, exists as a device by which our attitudes may be challenged and altered. *The Female Man* is solipsistic — a crime Russ tells us is punishable by death on her planet of Whileaway because it is such a tempting attitude. Cordwainer

Smith's *Norstrilia* and Michael Bishop's *A Funeral for the Eyes of Fire* both fail because they allow no internal challenge to themselves. In *Norstrilia*, Smith lacks the nerve to imagine a larger power than the rigid and self-satisfied Lords of the Instrumentality. In *A Funeral for the Eyes of Fire*, Bishop is so determined to be tragic that he falls into implausibility. In the same way, *The Female Man* does not dare to be a novel, to challenge its own certainties and test them in the crucible of character and action.

A few years ago, Joanna Russ delivered a number of talks at science fiction conventions complaining that the heroes in sf stories were all too like the male in the quote given above and that sf offered no place for complete women. She had a point. But the answer is not *The Female Man*. The answer is sf stories in which whole women — not female children like *Rite of Passage* or female cyborgs like *The Ship That Sang* — are imagined. That is the best contribution to the cause of female liberation and human liberation that Joanna Russ or any other writer could make. Because we will never be whole until we imagine ourselves whole, and live what we imagine.

There was a time in the Sixties, from the publication of "A Rose for Ecclesiastes" in 1963 to the publication of *Lord of Light* in 1967, when Roger Zelazny was the most stimulating and adventuresome of the writers of science fiction. In a remarkable series of spendid novellas and imperfect novels, Zelazny demonstrated that many of the limitations of science fiction that we had suffered without question were unnecessary. He transcended them in a single bound, leaving us to follow him.

But then the magic died. When the Sixties ended and Zelazny's nearest peer, Samuel R. Delany, and other writers of their common generation fell silent, Zelazny continued to write one novel after another. One bad novel after another. Hasty books. Books without the surge and sweep of language that had made Zelazny a delight. Books in which the only reality was power and the only motive revenge. Books in which comic-book gods contended, hurling meaningless lightning at each other. It became possible to wonder if Zelazny was a burnt-out case or whether there had ever been merit in his work.

Among these books were *Nine Princes in Amber* and *The Guns of Avalon*, the first two novels in a projected series. Their narrator was Corwin, one of the royal family of the alternate universe of Amber

— true reality — all other worlds, including our own, being but shadows of Amber. At the outset of *Nine Princes in Amber*, Corwin awakes in our world to a realization of his own amnesia and sets out on a quest to remember himself and seize power in Amber. For two books, through harrowing adventures, imprisonment and mutilation, he does not pause until at last he has succeeded in feeding his appetite for power. He does not think. He does not reflect. He moves ahead, hating and hungering, destroying everything that crosses his path.

Nine Princes in Amber is morally sleazy and solipsistic. *The Guns of Avalon* is self-hating. Both of these facts are somewhat disguised by the immediate egotistical hypnotic power of first-person narration, and Zelazny seems completely unaware of them. Both books badly need second drafting. Zelazny cannot seem to remember from one end of a book to the other even the simplest postulated facts — like the number of Corwin's brothers and sisters and the names and identities of their mothers. Seemingly, the kindest thing that could be said of these books is that certain symbols, certain scenes, certain moments, contain hints and flashes of the old Zelazny power.

Now the third book in the series, *Sign of the Unicorn*, has been published, and all is changed. Oh, some things are the same. Inconsistencies remain. *Sign of the Unicorn*, like the two books before it, could stand a second draft. But oh what a difference the differences make. Having attained power at last, for the first time Corwin stands still to ask some of the necessary questions that were ignored in the earlier books. Characters, previously without definition, begin to take on form and weight and individuality.

Perhaps the true turning point is a scene that takes place in our world. Corwin has retreated there when wounded, in a sudden unconscious flash. He waits there, without power, without help, without hope — and aid comes to him, a neighbor of whom we have heard previously not a word. This man's acceptance of Corwin, complete, selfless and unquestioning, is a redemption.

The last two chapters in the book are brilliant. They toss away all the certainties and self-protections that Zelazny has bounded himself with — that crucial move that Smith and Bishop and Russ could not make. They reveal Amber as less than the truest reality. Solipsism as a way of life is explicitly brought up and finally discarded. New levels of meaning are achieved. At the

(to page 162)

Charles Runyon's new story concerns one Franklin Poole, whose life is about to be terminated against a familiar but no less chilling backdrop of bureauocrats and paperwork, when suddenly one alternative opens up . . .

Terminal

by CHARLES RUNYON

Franklin could not recall how he'd gotten separated from the other passengers on his flight. One moment they'd all been together; the next moment he was alone on this long moving sidewalk. The walls arched overhead without feature; the light came from no source he could determine. He felt no wind in his face, no sense of movement.

He took off his hat of chocolate-brown felt, gripped the handle of his attache case, and got down on his knees to examine the belt. It was smooth and resilient, like transparent plastic. He moved his palm across its surface, and the edge of his hand touched the wall. With a gasp of pain he jerked it back. The wall was HOT! A red burn throbbed on the side of his hand.

And yet the wall gave off no heat. Friction then, which meant the sidewalk was moving at a tremendous rate of speed. Ahead, the corridor stretched to the disappearing point of infinity. He swiveled his head and looked back. The same behind. He was a speck on an endless belt, hurtling toward an unknown destination.

Franklin was a practical man, a seller of pumps. Panic would have served no purpose; therefore he did not panic. Rather he recapitulated his recent past, step by step, to see if he could have gone to sleep and might presently be dreaming.

The plane ... he remembered coming down low over the jungle, glimpsing the long runway of Fangia International. His secretary Cerise had reached over and gripped his hand, saying: "It's the transition from air to earth, I guess. I suffer a birth trauma every time I come down." Her flesh had been cool, and he remembered the scent of her perfume and the clean blonde British features, the silver

hairs growing between her eyebrows. And he recalled the stewardess standing at the top of the ladder with her wipe-on smile and her large bust making it necessary for him to swivel sideways to get past her. He and Cerise had almost run through the sizzling African sun, down the short flight of concrete steps, where the American woman from Sedalia, Missouri — her son, she'd informed everyone on the flight, was an engineer with some construction project, building the dam to supply the water which Franklin hoped would surge through RRASP pumps — had turned and plucked at his sleeve, saying: "You go first. These things make me nervous."

He'd stepped on and was jerked off-balance by the speed of the moving walkway. He'd felt a sharp annoyance, followed by a reminder to himself not to criticize the Fangians too harshly, since, after all, they'd only recently risen from cannibalism....

And then he'd turned around.

To see nothing.

Now to decide to smoke. Filling his pipe, he pried a wooden match (Ohio Bluetip; all executives these days had to develop some flash of personality) from his watch pocket and held it against the wall. It flared with frightening swiftness. He drew on his pipe and felt disappointed when the hot aromatic smoke failed to dispel the coldness in his stomach.

This cannot be.

He saw a break in the wall ahead. He had time only for a glimpse; then he was adjacent to it, stopping so suddenly that he had to thrust one foot forward to keep from falling. He read the glowing letters above the door and laughed aloud, one short barking cough, because he had been terrified only a second before.

"Customs." He muttered the word as he passed under the sign and started up the short stairway. He felt a reluctant admiration for Fangian science. Sometimes the latest innovations got through to the backward countries first, something to do with the fact that they weren't tied to tradition. Probably the greatest thing the Europeans had done was to raze those old rotten cultures to the ground, give the backward countries a clean base on which to build. He lost himself in contemplation of some breathtaking innovation in glass and steel to house the Fangia branch of RRASP, Inc. His picture in *Fortune*, an honorary post in some government agency...

And a kiss from his wife. He rejected the last thought. Gripping his attache case, he thrust his hand into his inside jacket pocket. Passport. Baggage stubs. Wallet thick with traveler's checks. He

pushed open the door.

The terminal was a vast dome sustained by a tracery of golden ribbing, with pearly light drifting down to a floor of... marble, he supposed, though it gave him the weak-kneed feeling of walking on the polished surface of a cloud. He looked impatiently at the long line of people waiting at the counter ... ah, the inspector was motioning him forward. There were gold loops around his shoulder, and the words *Customs Inspector* were scripted in gold across the black visor of his cap. The uniform resembled those elaborate costumes they dreamed up for musical comedies.

Walking briskly forward, Franklin reminded himself that customs officials liked to be treated with ... not respect, but appreciation of their work as a necessary evil. Franklin always took pride in the fact that he treated porters, bellhops and policemen as human beings.

"Have you anything to declare, sir?"

The smooth, precise English startled him. "Well, uh ... my baggage...."

"Shall we begin with that, sir?"

The inspector was reaching out for the attache case. Reluctantly Franklin laid it out on the counter. "These are contracts, papers, brochures, specifications, nothing really to inspect —"

"Open it please."

Franklin opened it, then jumped back as a frog leaped out. Good God! There was a rubber catapult, what they used to call a nigger-flipper back in the days before Black Power. Also some marbles, string, rusty nails and ... Franklin felt a hot prickly flush climb up his neck. He recognized the cracked, dog-eared pornographic photo he'd carried in his billfold during his early teens. What the hell was going on here? He remembered the catapult, too; he'd whittled the wood from a hickory fork with lip-chewing effort. It had seemed a completely finished work of art, but now he saw that it was crudely done....

"I can't permit these to pass, sir."

"No, of course ... it's not what I ... my wife, I suspect, playing a little joke —" He gasped as the inspector dumped the contents of the case into a flaring funnel-shaped receptacle. Franklin watched the mementos of his youth disappear in puffs of white vapor, *pfft fft futt!* Before he could react, the attache case went too, real morocco leather with his name embossed in gold. It made a larger PFFFFT!

"You imbecile! That was a gift from my office staff."

"Regulations, sir. Have you anything else to declare?"

"No ... wait. I want to know

what you've done with my luggage."

"Your bags have already been disposed of."

The words sent a tingle of fear through his body. In total consternation, he fished the stubs from his pocket. "But you can't. Here are my ... and my secretary's —" He whirled suddenly and looked at the line behind him. Fear dissolved into blank incomprehension. None of those passengers could have gotten on at Heathrow with him, nor could they have come from any country that he knew of. Most were European in appearance, but the clothing ... well, he didn't know anywhere in the world where a woman would be permitted to wear a skirt like that, with a foot-wide strip of transparent fabric hanging between hip and thigh, and absolutely nothing beneath it. She was obviously a normally constructed female.

Turning back to the inspector, he spoke through numb lips: "My secretary should be coming through...."

"Her name, sir?"

"Cerise ... Holden."

The inspector lifted his lapel and moved his lips. Apparently there was a communications device beneath it. After a response Franklin didn't hear, the man nodded. "Waiting room twenty-four, sir. Over there."

Franklin followed the direction of the pointing finger. His legs felt like dried clay. The vast terminal was strangely quiet. He listened for the sound of flights being called, but heard nothing. Nor did he see long rows of ticket counters, or porters wheeling baggage. Only long lines of people, wearing different costumes but the same expression that he himself wore, that of dazzled, wide-eyed bewilderment. A few men in white uniforms were walking about, doing things which were not required, like dress extras who provide background in theater productions.

The waiting room was a miniature of the larger hall: Dome-shaped, with light coming through the pearly walls. Doors opened on all sides. He had a mental picture of an endless series of similar rooms connected like cells in a beehive.

He saw nobody who resembled Cerise — no, revise that. He saw a woman who *resembled* her, standing with her thumb hooked in the shoulder strap of her bag. She looked like Cerise from the side, with the light just striking the forepart of her face, lining the long straight nose and receding chin. He nearly spoke to her before he realized it could not be Cerise. This woman was in her forties, and her face bore the lines of one who has

lived to the fullest....

She saw him. Her eyes widened for an instant and then drew into a squint.

"I'm sorry, I thought —"

The same words escaped their lips at the same instant. It was she who carried on the aborted phrase.

"I thought you were someone I knew, but then you couldn't be. He died several years ago."

Feeling the hair rise at the back of his neck, Franklin thought: There it is, if you have eyes to see it. But he chose to postpone the realization until it became inevitable.

"Your name is...?"

"Cerise. Uh, Cerise Greenwalt. Divorced ... but I use my husband's name."

He stared at her in open shock. She looked so *old*. Her flesh had been rearranged by time and gravity; her breasts had reached an angle of repose three inches lower than he remembered. Her shoulders thrust forward to make a hollow of her chest, and her shoulder blades lay on her back like small, folded wings. A soft tummy pushed out the front of her dress. Her eyes looked tired. Her lips did not droop, but the effort she put into holding them firm gave a hint of cruelty to her mouth. Nothing like the swelling plum-ripeness he had touched only an hour before. Oh, God....

She began talking, in the manner of women of her age and inclinations, to draw the roving eye:

"Silliest darn place I ever saw. Lost my luggage, and you *know* a girl has to carry a complete wardrobe wherever she goes. Particularly when one is invited ... *expects* to be invited places. Of course I took the ship because it was almost as fast; they've done wonderful things with hovercraft in the last few years, you know; and with the war going the way it is, the only ones who fly are troops or government people. The worst part of it is I really can't remember getting off the boat. There were these warnings, and the boat had to shut off its engines and lie flat on the surface of the sea, and we were in the lounge, and there were drinks being passed, and of course you couldn't really know how much you were getting to drink, and there were all sorts of naughty people moving around in the dark, and I suppose I passed out ... and here I am."

She blinked her wide blue eyes as though she expected him to assume responsibility for her condition. He had a feeling that a huge block of time had been snipped out of his life, while hers had gone on....

"How...." The question in his mind made his mouth dry, and he had to moisten his lips. "How did

this man die, the one you thought I resembled?"

"Oh, well, it's been so long ago...." She peered at him closely, and for a moment recognition flared in her eyes; then the part of her which knew him sank beneath the surface. "It's uncanny, really...." Her eyes narrowed; then she shook her head to clear it. "I remember it all too well, you know. We'd just gotten off the plane and inside the terminal — I was working for him then — and we were going to establish a branch office in Fangia. And of course it never got established — after Mr. Poole's death — they sent in a new man who had his own office staff, and of course there was no place for me. So very sad, actually, his plans all went down the drain because the new man made a botch of the whole thing. And then his wife came over — there was trouble about the body, you see, claiming it and all that. She came over and they had her doped up with something. I corresponded with her for several years afterward, and she never did get over the drug. Her son committed suicide; her daughter married three times and then disappeared into the free nation...."

"Jesus Christ!"

He decided the woman was insane, the way her eyes kept rolling around like marbles in a cup. How could he have ever contemplated an affair with her? But of course she'd been much younger then... and it could have been his own death which had set her on the road to middle-aged fatuousness....

"*How* —" He bore down on the word in order to stop the butterfly flutter of her mind. "How did Mr. Poole die?"

"Oh ... well. We had just gone down the stairway to the inside of the terminal, and Mr. Poole ... he was always so brisk and efficient, that's how I remember him. We were waiting, and there was this baggage train coming down the line, one of those little tractors pulling a whole string of carts, and I guess he didn't see it. Anyway he stepped right out smack in front of it and...." Her voice lifted an octave, became tense and monotonous, her words just skimming the surface as if she had told the story in the same words many times.... "There were women screaming, and I guess the driver of the cart got rattled. Anyway he didn't put on his brakes until five or six of the carts had passed over him, and I remember he was all rolled up and twisted and his attache case open and all the papers we'd had so much trouble preparing were all scattered and torn, but the strangest thing was that he still had hold of the handle when they pulled him out from beneath the carts

even though his chest was crushed and his neck was broken...."

Franklin turned away, his heart pounding. It was his own death she had told about. And yet ... *his heart was pounding.* Death was supposed to be the end of it, the end of heartbeat, the end of thought. Must not let emotion get the better of me, he thought. The facts are as follows: I am standing here in what is apparently a waiting room. A woman who less than an hour ago appeared to be young is also standing here, now a rather shrewish middle-aged woman somewhat the worse for debauchery. She is convinced that she saw me die. Yet I am here, and as long as I am, then the disposition of the body which goes by the name of Franklin Poole must be considered to be a continuing problem. So ... taking things in their proper order, the first priority is to get past the inspectors.

"You say you had some problem with customs?"

"Yes, I said I wouldn't go through without my baggage and all my nice clothes. So they said I would have to wait."

"They didn't say how long?"

"No. I have no idea how long it's been. I haven't been able to find any clocks. I thought they had clocks in terminals, so people could catch their planes or whatever it is they have to catch —"

"Come with me." He cupped her shoulder and ushered her outside of the little room. In the center of the vast dome he stopped and pointed toward the inspection counter. "Look, you see that door there behind the inspector? I'm going to engage him in conversation, and you slip along the wall and go through. If nobody stops you, I'll find some way to follow."

Cerise was always ready to use another person's mind rather than struggle with her own blunt instrument. *No, that's unfair,* thought Franklin. He gave her shoulder a firm squeeze and smiled down into her face. She gave him a misty look and walked away. Franklin filled his lungs with air and strode up to the counter.

"Could I trouble you for some information?"

"We are here to serve, sir."

"Well .. this border you guard, is it some kind of dimensional shift?"

"Not as I understand the term, sir."

Cerise was moving along the wall, pausing to search in her handbag as she slid her eyes right and left.

"Let me rephrase the question," said Franklin. "Is it some kind of line between the material and the nonmaterial?"

"That would depend upon your point of view, sir."

Cerise was standing in front of the door. She paused to look over her shoulder at Franklin, and he fired a fervent thought: *Go, stupid!* Keeping his voice calm, he said to the inspector:

"Could we call it then, a line between the astral plane and —"

Cerise stepped through the door and disappeared in a sudden PFFFFT! Nothing was left but a fading mist and a few garments drifting silently down to the floor. With a mild sort of peripheral interest Franklin noted the lack of undergarments, which confirmed a suspicion he'd always had about Cerise.

The inspector lifted his lapel and spoke in a low voice: "Cerise Greenwalt, born 1957, died 1999, fulfillment index point twenty-three."

Franklin shut his eyes tightly and said to himself :*Wake up wake up Franklin you don't like this dream try something else anything else....*

When he opened his eyes, the inspector was still standing there. Franklin's eyes darted about seeking some blurred edge or cloudy transparency which would permit him to penetrate the illusion. There were none. Everything had a sharp glittering reality which pierced his brain like needles Well, he decided, there is nothing to do but take my cue from the inspector and pretend that this is normal everyday business, a person walks through a door and gets puffed out of existence like an underarm spray deodorant....

He leaned on the counter and tried to sound casual. "Mind telling me what that fulfillment index stands for?"

"Not at all. It is the ratio between life-potential and life-realizaiton."

"Twenty-three? I would have said Cerise made the most of what she had."

"We have our own standards of measurement, sir."

"Yes. Well...." He began to get the idea. "I guess you count off for sin and things like that, eh?"

"There are demerits for certain actions and inactions. But I don't know the details. It's handled in the accounting department."

Should have known, thought Franklin. Those ideas we once had about angels with swords in their hands belonged to the days when ordinary people carried swords. As mankind progressed, it devised better ways to separate the masses from the rulers. No more impervious barrier existed than the modern corporation with its huge bureaucracy full of polite and unresponsive officials.

"Look, uh...." He leaned across the counter and spoke in a confidential tone, "I don't think

I'm ready to make the trip. The old fulfillment index needs a little more work. Could you tell me if there's a way back?"

"You wish to cancel?"

"I want to go back, yes."

"Through that door then."

The inspector reached under the counter. Off to his right a sign glowed on a wall that had previously been featureless. It read: CANCELLATIONS.

Nice people, thought Franklin, as he walked toward the door. Wonder why none of the people I knew ever cancelled out. Fred Turner, for example, who checked out in a hunting accident. But maybe he didn't know about the cancellation option. *I* wouldn't have known if I hadn't asked....

The door led into a paneled office with draperies and a thick burgundy carpet. Franklin suddenly felt very much at home, particularly when a large smiling man in a business suit got up from behind the desk and held out his hand. "Hi, there. I'm in charge of returning passengers."

"Franklin Poole." Franklin found the man's hand reassuringly warm and human. "I didn't catch your name?"

"We don't use them. Have a cigar." The man sat down and folded his hands. "You understand we're the poor orphan of the organization. They don't like returnees, gives the firm a bad image. So I'm limited, severely limited in what I can offer in the way of transportation. We just have three vehicles ready to go, and none are actually first class."

"I'll take just about anything that gets me there."

"Good. Now I'm required to tell you that this is your last chance to reconsider. Do you have any questions?"

"One thing. *When* will I reappear?"

"We splice you in just a few microseconds before your previous death."

"And I'm not injured in any way? Crippled, paralyzed?"

"The body will be in perfect condition."

"Then I can't ask for anything more."

"Excellent. This way then. Step right through this curtain."

The firm hand on his shoulder propelled him gently past a shimmering drapery. He glimpsed a sign above the entrance which read: REINCARNATION CHAMBER. When he saw what else the room contained, he screamed and tried to claw his way back through the curtain. It had become an impervious part of the shining steel chamber. There was nothing to do but turn and face....

A toad, a spider, and a rattlesnake.

Here's a first-rate new story from Henry Slesar, who used to be a regular contributor, but who is heavily into TV at the moment: "I've been head writer of the daytime suspense serial, THE EDGE OF NIGHT (and won the Emmy this year as best serial writer). Also been doing several ABC Wide World Mystery dramas. New mystery novel just published by Random House (*The Thing At the Door*). Still a loyal devotee of science fiction."

The Rise and Fall of the Fourth Reich

by HENRY SLESAR

The driver of the black Thunderbird spoke little Spanish. This had proved no handicap when he paused for directions on the Paseo de la Reforma and the Avenida de los Insurgentes; there was always someone in the bustling Mexico City crowds who spoke English or presumed he did. But then, as the car began negotiating the narrow crazy-quilt streets of the makeshift neighborhood, a *ciudades perdidas,* one of the "lost cities" created virtually overnight by the squatters, the language barrier produced sweaty frustration and a muttered succession of curses that could only be comprehended by someone who spoke a third language — German.

The man who sat beside him seemed unaffected by his invective, even though he understood every word. He was considerably older than the driver and more detached from the strain of their petty difficulty. His name was Dr. Hans Bodenshaff. He was an endocrinologist, who had pursued the precise, elegant pathways of glandular secretion since he was a student at the Academy of Medicine in Dusseldorf. But he had also spent almost a third of this seventy-one years in pursuit of this particular latitude and longitude, and now the search was ended. Tranquillity rested on his thin shoulders, and there was no perspiration in the folds of his seamed face.

"Patience, Guenther, patience," he said in German.

Guenther Binder, a blond, chunky man who used the name of George Brighton in London and New York, scowled his resentment; but then his ruddy features brightened when he saw the dusty pink bricks of the building they had seen in the photograph taken by Leopard, the Mexican contact whose real name nobody knew. It

was the house, unquestionably; little more than a hovel, not yet attacked by the iron balls and bulldozers that were leveling the area to make way for urban development. Leopard's photograph had captured its squatty ugliness to perfection, but now there was no stooped old man in the doorway. If the gods were with them that day, the old man would be in the building's third-floor back apartment, lying on a cot, unaware of Destiny arriving in a rented sedan.

The back entrance was there, just as Leopard had described it; and the lock couldn't have thwarted an energetic, hungry dog. Guenther snapped it with a push of his hand and then stepped back with a sudden display of respect for his older companion. Dr. Bodenshaff took the creaking wooden stairs slowly and deliberately, almost ceremoniously.

There were no markings on the scabrous door, and this time, no lock to impede them. The occupant either feared no intruders or no longer had the strength to secure himself against the outside world. Guenther turned the knob.

He was lying on a cot, just as the doctor had imagined him. But he hadn't been prepared for the knife thrust of disappointment when he saw the old man's face. There was no remnant of the features that had once engraved itself upon the planet like a new continent. The lips that had once blared out martial music loud enough to stir the world had vanished into a black toothless hole; the eyes that had given hypnotic guidance to millions looked out blindly through thick gray windows of cataracts. He was hairless, face and head, and his body had shrunken dwarfishly. Only the rasp of his breath gave evidence of life. Guenther, more shaken by the sight than his companion, turned and said:

"Are you sure, doctor? Can it really be *him?*"

Bodenshaff stiffened his own slight frame and snapped, "There's no question of verification. Did you expect him to *look* like himself? He is eighty-five years of age, Guenther! And from the look of him, he seems to have celebrated his last birthday...."

He moved to the cot and, hesitating with a superstitious tremor, forced himself to lift the old man's wrist. It felt like two pencils bound in parchment, but the pulse was surprisingly strong.

Then he leaned closer, so that the near-blind eyes might recognize his presence, and he whispered:

"My Fuehrer...we have come to take you home."

For a bad ten minutes Bodenshaff was concerned with another patient: Guenther. The

young man, faced with the living flesh of the man whose ghost haunted his generation, was seized by a fit of hysterical tachycardia. The doctor forced a sedative between his trembling lips and barked orders at him like a Prussian colonel. Finally, Guenther went to work. He emptied the trunk of the Thunderbird and lugged the heavy black suitcase up the rickety stairs. He assisted the doctor in setting up his equipment, but not before he had done housemaid chores, sweeping, mopping, scrubbing up and disinfecting the small white box of a room. Neither spoke more words than necessary, as if unwilling to disturb the sleep of the old man on the cot.

There was only one interruption to their preparations; the Leopard had mentioned the old Mexican woman who took occasional care of the derelict they called *el ciego* — the blind one. She chose that morning to arrive with her straw basket of pulpy fruit and vegetables and soup greens, and Bodenshaff dispatched his assistant to tell her that her services would no longer be required.

"El está muerto," Guenther told her, almost exhausting his Spanish vocabulary. She nodded without surprise and shuffled away.

Guenther wondered at the phrase as he climbed the stairs again. Like the rest of the world, he too had been certain that *"el está muerto,"* convinced by what was surely one of the most subtly conceived and well-executed deceptions of the Nazi regime, a plan formulated long before the first excavation of the *Führerbunker* below the Chancellery. The scenario wasn't Hitler's, it was Bormann's; Hitler had been realist enough to prepare for defeat, but not for Gotterdammerung. If it hadn't been for the sudden collapse of the foundation of a new apartment building in the Hansa Quarter, the true scheme of the bunker might have remained a secret forever. But, then, the building engineers had discovered the six-mile tunnel snaking underground towards what was then a rubbled field that *might* have been the site of a concealed hanger, and a well-fueled aircraft....

Few agreed that the escape plan was ever carried out; only the truly dedicated, the Bodenshaffs and Binders of the world, intensified their manhunt. Bodenshaff, his faith vindicated, hoped that Hitler himself would supply the details of how it was managed, once the strings of his decayed vocal cords had been retuned by medical science. Guenther had his own theory: simply that the Fuhrer had confided his true intentions only to Bormann and Dr. Goebbels; the others who remained with him in

the bunker during the final stage of the capital were no more than an audience for the stage play of Hitler's death and Viking funeral. But the blanket-wrapped body that Hitler's valet, S.S. Sturmbannfuehrer Heinz Linge carried out to the garden and ignited with gasoline wasn't Hitler's; it was only the corpse of a hapless orderly. Bormann had explained why the face was concealed; the beloved Fuehrer had disfigured himself with the bullet that took his life....

The simple lie permitted the accounts of Hitler's end to slip unquestioned into the stream of history. Yes, there would be doubters and skeptics. Time would make their speculations seem merely comic. But the last laugh would be — whose?

Guenther re-entered the small room, now almost converted into a hospital for one, and gazed at the old man's face. Could that sunken mouth laugh again?

"Gott in himmel," he said to himself. But Bodenshaff heard and looked away from the syringe he was pumping. Guenther said, "Make him smile again, Hans. Can you do it? Can you make him smile and be happy for the future?"

The older man frowned and hunted a vein in an arm like a railroad map.

"First we have to make him understand."

Despite his relative youth, Guenther was the more exhausted of the pair after the first twenty-four hours. Bodenshaff, with the supernatural energy of the crazed or dedicated, rarely slept or paused. He called on Guenther's assistance only in setting up the oxygen tent and intravenous jars that would breathe new air and pump new life fluids into the desiccated body. Guenther knew that some of the fluids were experimental, that only laboratory animals had known their effect before, but he had good reason to trust the doctor's judgment. In a laboratory in Stockholm, he had seen the endocrinologist create a new Lazarus, reviving a man legally dead for thirty-six hours.

On the morning of the third day, Guenther felt a hand on his shoulder, and heard the doctor say:

"He's awake."

A surge of new energy came to Guenther, too. He leaped from the pallet he had made in the corner of the room and followed the doctor to the shrouded cot. He held his breath as Bodenshaff peeled away the clouded crackling vinyl tent, and he saw a new degree of incandescence behind the cataract curtains of the old man's eyes.

"I have told him," Bodenshaff said simply. "I don't think he understood. I tried to explain why we were here, but he said nothing."

The black orifice in the old man's face was dilating like a lens.

"He's trying to speak," Guenther said.

Then they heard the Fuehrer's first words.

"Go away," he croaked, in Spanish. (Was this the voice of Wagnerian thunder?) "Go away from here!" Adolf Hitler said, in a language and a voice that belied past glory. "Let me alone. Let an old man die in peace!"

Bodenshaff smiled for the first time.

"No, my Fuehrer," he said. "We have not come to bury you. We have come to offer you life."

It was another twenty-four hours before Stiller arrived. Stiller was the only other medical professional Bodenshaff had admitted into his confidence. He was an opthalmologist, and Bodenshaff knew that the problem of Hitler's vision was one he was least capable of solving. Stiller would take care of it; Stiller would apply the surgeon's skill to the cataracts that prevented the old man from seeing the men who had come to restore him to power, and Stiller would make a better laboratory assistant than the excitable Guenther.

Bodenshaff marveled at Guenther's emotionalism. He was thirty-eight years old. He was still a child when the Fuehrer surveyed the world from his aerie in Berchtesgaden and declared it Germany's.

Then Stiller arrived, and they were able to begin.

On the sixth day, after the old man's eyes had been peeled of their gray cloud cover, after new strength had been pumped relentlessly into his bloodstream, after stimulants had excited the action of his heart, liver, pancreas, and nervous system, there was a significant event. Hitler opened his eyes and looked about him with new alertness. When he spoke, he chose German as his language, signifying his first awareness that he was among compatriates.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "What do you want of me?"

Bodenshaff came to attention.

"We are your subjects," he said.

"You're all mad! I am no one! Let me alone! Let me die!"

Guenther trembled, and Bodenshaff grasped his forearm.

"Listen to me carefully, my Fuehrer," the physician said. "My name is Hans Bodenshaff. I am a doctor, an endocrinologist. I served your cause for many years, although you do not know my name. I have performed thousands of experiments in behalf of the Reich, experiments probing into the very core of life itself. While you were bringing Germany victories on

the battlefield, I was seeking it in the laboratory. I failed, just as we all did —" Stiller growled something "— Yes, my Fuehrer, let us face the fact of our failure...."

"Betrayal!" Hitler said.

"Yes," Bodenshaff replied softly. "Betrayal, of course, and out of betrayal, defeat. But out of defeat — victory."

For a moment, it appeared as if his speach had lit the answering fire they sought to kindle in Hitler's eyes. But then the light dimmed, and he sank back against the pillow, old and indifferent, again.

"Tell him!" Guenther said. "Tell him what you can do, Hans!"

Bodenshaff said:

"We have come to restore you to power, my Fuehrer."

A harsh whisper from the cot.

"Madness!"

"No, my Fuehrer. Truth. Because the power we can return to you is the power of life, of strength, of youth. Do you understand? We are not men of politics — others will guide that destiny. We are scientists. We can give you back the years that were lost to Germany when you so wisely escaped from Berlin. We don't know how many years we can promise you, or how much vitality we can restore. But it will suffice for your return to the Fatherland!"

Stiller said, "Hans. He's asleep."

Bodenshaff didn't seem disappointed.

"But he heard," he said. "He heard and he understood. And now he must believe."

Guenther thought that the doctor would begin the testosterone treatments at once, but Bodenshaff first elected to give the old man increasingly massive doses of vitamins and then began a series of amphetamine injections whose effects he watched with concern for the stamina of Hitler's heart. When he survived the initial effort, Bodenshaff began the critical phase, the hormonal injections which had restored temporary youth to gray-haired rodent veterans of the laboratory. Guenther and Stiller observed with awed expressions to see if a human organism would respond in kind.

On the night of the tenth day, a terrible cry woke them from their sleep, and they listened in astonishment to what seemed to be nothing less than an impassioned, angry speech from the old man's mouth, rambling and incoherent, but still in the unmistakeable meter of the Fuehrer's oratory.

Bodenshaff silenced the harangue by an infusion of sedative into one of the jars that fed the old man's system. He spent the rest of the night at his patient's side.

In the morning, Guenther and

Stiller discovered the doctor asleep in the chair and Adolf Hitler speaking to the ceiling.

"Heinrici! Wenck! What has delayed them? Can no one tell me what has become of the Ninth Army? Get me General Koller! There must be no holding back now. No commander must hold back his forces. Disobedience will be punished by death. Koller! I hold you personally responsible! Do you understand?"

Guenther said, "What is he saying? Who are those people?"

"He commands," Bodenshaff said. "Generals who are gone. Armies that no longer exist."

"Himmler must die! No traitor must succeed me! Greim — the duty is yours! Himmler must be executed — Goering — the dog, my Blondi — shoot — shoot them all — the traitors, the betrayers, the cowards — shoot them, shoot them, shoot them!"

Guenther whispered, "Is he mad?"

"No," Stiller said. "He dreams."

Bodenshaff agreed. "He must dream of yesterday, before he can dream of the future."

The second miracle took place that same day.

Encouraged by the life signs, by the quickened pulse, the improved skin color, the brightness of his eyes, Bodenshaff carefully removed the umbilical cords running to i.v. jars and, with Guenther's aid, helped the old man sit up and face them. But Adolf Hitler, as if already aware of the new strength that had been poured into his deteriorated body, pushed aside their helping hands and attained the sitting posture by himself. Then he looked keenly from one face to the other, until his eyes rested on Bodenshaff. In a tone now commanding, he asked him to repeat his name, his nationality, his religion, his purpose.

"Bodenshaff, my Fuehrer. Nationality — German. Religion— Protestant. Purpose — reincarnation, rebirth, resurrection." He smiled. "But the more practical terminology would be rejuvenation. It was the chimera I sought in your name during the glorious years of your reign. I was assigned by the S.S. to Dachau, to participate in the noble experiments of racial hygiene. But I convinced my superior, Dr. Sigmund Rascher, that I would be better utilized in research which would uncover the mysteries of the aging process rather than of sterilization...."

"I know of no such experiments," Hitler said.

Bodenshaff nodded. "It was to be Rascher's surprise present to his Fuehrer, a gift unlike any other which could be laid at your feet: the secret of eternal youth itself. But —

we failed to produce convincing results. Like Steinach and Voronoff before us, our experiments produced only short-lived improvement in the aged; we were forced to conclude that the tests of man are useful only in the formation of spermatozoa and the secretion of hormone, that even the synthesis of testosterone was of no great consequence — although testosterone is one of the chemicals I still employ in conjunction with the process."

"What process?" Hitler said.

"The process I developed," the physician said. "In Stockholm, where I worked after the war. It is no magic formula, my Fuehrer. It is a synergistic group of chemicals which I believe will eventually lead to an acceptable method of human rejuvenescence. But it is still experimental —"

"And I am your guinea pig!" Hitler barked.

"No," Bodenshaff said. "What we do here is not for the sake of science, but for the sake of Mankind. A mankind which has been diverted from the course of glory you set for us, a course interrupted by —"

"Traitors!" Hitler shouted, and Guenther reacted in amazement to the strength in his throat and lungs. "Germany was defeated by disloyalty and betrayal! The Army General Staff —" He stopped, and seemed himself surprised by the outburst. But anger was a potent life sign, and he seemed aware of the fact, because now he said, in awed tones: "Can it really be true? You can make me as I was?"

"We can only do so much, my Fuehrer. But it will be enough for the Cause. Enough to make the world tremble at your resurrection from the dead. And when you make your reappearance, at the proper time and place, it will be a lightning bolt illuminating the world, a miracle that will signal the beginning of the next thousand years of the Reich...."

They looked at him in silence. When Hitler spoke again, his words were the most encouraging yet.

"Get me something to eat," he said.

The next day, to Guenther's further astonishment, the Fuehrer was able to walk, without the support of arms or canes or crutches. He moved slowly, cautiously, not trusting his weak limbs until he discovered that they were no longer weak. Then he straightened his small frame and strode across the length of the room. He was barelegged, but you could almost hear the sound of jackboots.

At one point, he demanded a mirror; what he saw didn't please him, despite the incredible transformation that had taken place,

despite the new firmness of his skin, the freshness of his complexion. Then Guenther realized what troubled him; it was his hairlessness. Bodenshaff knew that the hormonal treatments would do nothing to restore hair — the opposite, if anything — but Hitler's vanity was injured. Guenther suggested a wig, a false mustache, and Bodenshaff proposed it tentatively to Hitler, who growled at the idea, but then grudgingly agreed. It was Stiller who found the appropriate adornments; it took him almost two days to locate a shaggy hairpiece that even vaguely resembled Hitler's own; the mustache was easier. When Guenther saw the cowlick over the brow, the Chaplinesque mustache, he shivered in a form of ecstasy. And when Hitler himself saw his image, it did as much for him as all of Bodenshaff's formulas and vitamins and testosterone injections.

At the end of the week, Adolf Hitler had learned to strut again.

And he became impatient.

"Now!" he said. "Now I am ready! Your miracle has worked, Dr. Bodenshaff, you have done what you claimed you can do! Now I am ready to return to my people, to Germany, to the world!"

Bodenshaff said, "There must be no undue haste, my Fuehrer. The timing of your appearance must be right — the entire movement must be carefully prepared for the *Putsch* that will bring you back to power —"

"Then prepare them!" Hitler said. "Tell them I am ready! I know they have been waiting for me, as I waited for *them*, for long, empty years after the war! Waited for the fools and cowards to regroup so that I could return to lead them! But they did nothing...."

"Germany was in ruins," Bodenshaff said placatingly. "The Americans and the Russians were fighting over the spoils of Berlin. Your people were busy entrenching themselves into positions of power and influence, preparing for the day... not even realizing that *der Tag* would be led by their beloved Fuehrer himself —"

"But now they must know!"

"They will, my Fuehrer, in time they will. But the world has changed since you went into exile —"

"Fool!" Hitler shouted. "Do you think I managed to live to this age of mine — an outcast, a useless derelict — by feeding on the past? No! What sustained me was tomorrow! Always, the thought of tomorrow! Don't speak to me of the past! Do you think I believe that Germany can conquer the world by massive armies? Do you think I remained stagnant in my thinking, dreaming of *Blitzkrieg* and *Anschluss* and strategies long-since

outdated? For years after my exile I considered the means whereby the Reich would rise again — I knew the day of great land armies was over and finished — of armadas and armor and massive bombing — that victory was now determined by a handful of excited atoms! *That* would be my plan of conquest for the new Reich! My warriors would be atomic guerrillas —" His face was reddening, and Bodenshaff became concerned for the effect of his body.

"Please, my Fuehrer! Be cautious — don't excite yourself —"

"Tell them I am ready, Bodenshaff! Tell them!"

"Yes, my Fuehrer," the doctor nodded. "I will communicate with the Fatherland at once, and tell them you are ready."

Stiller took his leave that afternoon; he had a serious operation to perform on the retinas of a close friend's wife, and his part in the experiment was deemed over. In the doorway of the small house in Mexico City, he shook hands gravely with Dr. Bodenshaff and looked fearfully up the long flight of stairs that led to the Room. He said something to Bodenshaff that Guenther couldn't hear and then got into his car and drove away.

An hour later, Bodenshaff dispatched Guenther on a series of errands, shopping for the vegetable staples which constituted the whole of Adolf Hitler's diet, buying pharmaceutical supplies, and picking up a large flat box at a tailor shop whose proprietor seemed mystified by what he had just delivered. Guenther, too, had no knowledge of what he was carrying up the rickety stairs to the white box of a room where the New Order was being reborn. He learned that same night, when the third miracle occured.

Since their arrival at the house, one of the three men had taken turns guarding the front door, to insure no breach of privacy. With Stiller gone, Guenther's vigilance was longer than usual; he stood watch from four in the afternoon until eight, when Bodenshaff appeared to relieve him. The doctor looked pale and seemed feebler than normal; Guenther asked him worried questions, but Bodenshaff denied that he was ill — only shaken. The younger man understood when he returned upstairs, and saw Adolf Hitler in uniform.

Hitler whirled when Guenther entered, like a fashion model turning to give his audience the full benefit of the sartorial effect. Hitler's right hand was on his hip; the left, still useless, was held rigidly at his side. An Iron Cross hung from the breast pocket, and there was a black, white, and red armband circling his left arm. The

broken cross. To Guenther, the sight of it was searing. The total image of the man who wore the swastika was the greatest shock of his life, especially when he saw that Fuehrer was smiling. Smiling.

"They call you Guenther?" Hitler said.

"Yes," Guenther replied, his voice choked.

"The doctor speaks highly of you, of your devotion, your loyalty. You will be rewarded, Guenther. You will be at my side in the coming days of glory. You will be privileged to witness the birth of true peace in this world. *True* peace, Guenther, do you know what that is?"

"No," Guenther said.

"Not the peace of blind pacifists," Hitler said, and closed his eyes, remembering the grandeur of old speeches. *"Peace... not supported on the palm-leaf fans of tearful pacifist mourning-women, but founded on the victorious sword of a lordly people that puts the world to work for a higher culture...."*

Guenther's face was covered with perspiration, his shirt collar suddenly soaked.

"Once again, Guenther," Hitler said, "once again race shall be the central point of public life. Race, Guenther, the racial state, that is what we must build again. The international conspiracy of the Jews must be broken and finished once and for all. The world has been race-poisoned, Guenther, and we will be the antidote...."

Guenther, overheated almost to the point of prostration, ripped open the buttons of his shirt.

"Do you know why we lost the war, Guenther? Do you know the real betrayal that led to our defeat? It was the cowardice of men unable to face the necessities of the Final Solution, unable to overcome the sickening weakness they called sympathy, afraid to call it by its right name. This is why we failed — because the Jews survived! Because the blood money of international Jewish finance still flowed, purchasing the mercenary armies of the United States...if there had been no Jews left to save, the bankers would have made no bargains; Roosevelt and America would have been content to let Germany be a bulwark against the Bolsheviks. But the cowards and sympathizers and traitors failed in their duty. They failed, Guenther! But this time, there will be no holding back!" Hitler's face flushed purple, and he began to shout. "Koller! Koller! No holding back!" and Guenther realized his mind had strayed back to the *Führerbunker.* "Steiner must counterattack the Russians! The Luftwaffe ground troops must be alerted! Where is Keitl, where is

Jodl? What news from the North...?" His face paled and now he sank to the bunk. "What news of the armies?" he said wearily.

He was silent for a moment; then he looked at Guenther.

"Come here," Hitler said.

Guenther came forward.

Hitler's trembling right hand unpinned the Iron Cross from his chest and lifted the medal towards Guenther's half-open shirt.

"From the Fuehrer's hand," he said. "For bravery in battle, for exemplifying the ideals of Aryan manhood, I bestow this medal upon you, Guenther...Guenther, my son...." Then he saw the small gold Star of David swinging from the thin chain around Guenther's neck, and his hand froze in midair. "What is this?" he said. Guenther swiftly closed his shirt, but it was too late. Hitler sprung from the cot and bellowed something that was abbreviated by Guenther's hand as it snaked out and enclosed the thin throat. Hitler gagged and fell back on the bed, his eyes staring. Guenther, fearful that the Fuehrer would die in apoplexy, released his hand, and Hitler screamed: "The Jew is here! Bodenshaff, help! The filthy Jewboy! Kill him, kill him!"

But Guenther's hand covered his mouth again, and he said:

"Yes, Adolf, the Jewboy is here! Thirty years after my holiday in Auschwitz, thirty years after your Dr. Rascher froze my mother and father to death before my eyes, my naked mother and father lying on the ground while the S.S. guards poured water over their bodies and grumbled that they had to crack the ice before the water would pour.... I hear the sound of the cracking ice always in my ears, and the sound of the water splashing, and the sound of my mother's voice begging for a quicker death, Adolf, begging for something you won't be denied...."

His other hand found a scalpel on the table, and he made a quick, long, deep incision in Hitler's wrist. For a moment Hitler was unaware that his blood was spilling slowly out of his veins, staining his fresh new uniform, soaking the white sheets of his cot brilliantly red, forming a thin stream on the floor that soon flowed towards the doorway, and stopped at the feet of Dr. Bodenshaff as he entered the room.

"Guenther!" he said. "What have you done?"

"Save me!" Hitler gasped. "Save me, Doctor, we have been betrayed! Once again, betrayed by the Jew —"

Bodenshaff looked at Guenther's wild face sadly.

"Why couldn't you have waited, Guenther? Why couldn't you let us bring him home, and share your vengeance?"

It was then that Adolf Hitler realized he had no ally, and he began to scream.

"Bodenshaff! I thought you were a good German — a loyal German —"

"Yes," the doctor said flatly. "I was that, my Fuehrer. Until I was brought to Dachau and learned what "loyalty" meant to those who served depraved animals...."

"But *why?*" Hitler raged. "Why did you do this? Why did you give me back my strength, my hope? I was a dying old man! Why did you make me into *this*, only to murder me?"

"Don't you know?" Guenther said, all bitterness unleashed. "Don't you understand, my Fuehrer? Hans! Tell him why!"

Bodenshaff's eyes followed the trail of blood from his feet to the limp white hand that Adolf Hitler stared at in helpless horror. He shrugged and said:

"You've answered the question yourself, my Fuehrer.

"Who would want to destroy a dying old man?"

We published the first of the investigations of Engelbert Eszterhazy, Doctor of Medicine, in our February 1975 issue ("Polly Charms, the Sleeping Woman") and we're pleased here to offer a second: about missing crown jewels, among many, many other things both rich and strange.

The Crown Jewels of Jerusalem

by AVRAM DAVIDSON

The Spa at Gross-Kroplets is not one of the fashionable watering places of the Triune Monarchy, else Doctor Eszterhazy would scarcely have been found there. Nor, as he did not practice the curiously fashionable habit of abusing his liver for forty-nine weeks of the year, did he ever feel the need of medicating it with the waters of mineral springs for the remaining three.

It was entirely for the purpose of making a scientific analysis of those waters — or, specifically, those at Gross-Kroplets — which had brought him from his house in Bella, Imperial Capital of Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania, to the comparatively small resort high in the Rhiphaean Alps. Two moderately large and three moderately small (five, if one counts the House of the Double-Eagle) hotels served to provide room and board for visitors to the Spa; and although all were privately owned, the Spring itself had been the property of the Royal and Imperial House of Hohenschtupfen since the Capitulations of 1593 and was under the management of the Ministry of the Privy Purse.

Anyone, therefore, not in a condition of gross drunkenness or equally gross nakedness, is free to drink the waters (the waters may actually be drunk free in the original, or Old, Pump Room in what is now the First Floor or Basement, but few except the truly indigent care to avail themselves of the privilege; most visitors preferring to employ the drinking facilities in the First, Second, or Third Class Sections of the New or Grand Pump Room reached from the Terrace where a schedule of fees is in operation); and anyone is, accordingly, free to walk about the pleasantly, if not splendidly, landscaped grounds.

Eszterhazy, therefore, neither said nor did anything when he became aware that someone was not only closely observing him but in effect closely following him. When, of a morning, he walked with his equipment from the small, old-fashioned Inn called The House of the Double-Eagle, someone presently appeared behind his back and and plodded after him. When he set up his equipment next to the basin of rough-worked stone where the Spring welled and bubbled on its way upstairs and down, someone stood outside the doorless chamber and looked in. When he returned with his samples to the Inn, someone followed after him and had vanished before he reached the sprawling old building.

In the afternoons, the whole thing was repeated.

In the evenings, when what passed at Gross-Kroplets for A High Fashionable Occasion was at its most, Eszterhazy stayed in his sitting-room, making entries in his *Day-Book*, after which he read, first, from some technical work and, next, from some nontechnical one. He was particularly fond of the light novels of an English writer named G. A. Henty, although he more than once complimented the stories of G. de Maupaissant, Dr. A. Techechoff, and H. George Wells.

It was on the morning of the fourth day of his visit, when he was on his knees commencing a check of comparative sedimentation with the aid of a pipette, when someone came to the doorway of the springroom and, after coughing, said, "Are you not Engelbert Eszterhazy, Doctor of Medicine?"

Since Eszterhazy felt several simultaneous emotions, none of them amiable, he was for a moment incapable of elegance. — Why, for example, was the cough considered a sound worthy of announcing a supposedly polite address? Why not a gasp, an eructation, a hiccough, or a flatulency? But all he first said was, "You have caused me to contaminate the pippette."

The questioner paid as much attention to this as he might have to, say, "Brekekeke koax koax." And, with his eyebrows raised, he merely made an inquiring sound of *"Mmm?"* which moved his previous question. He was an inordinately ordinary-looking man, with, in a short jacket, baggy trousers, string tie, a mustache which straggled too long on the right side, and pinch-nose spectacles, the look of a drummer for a firm of jobbers in odd lots of oilcloth. A writing-master in a fifth-rate provincial *gymnasium*. Or, even, the owner by inheritance of two "courts" in one of the

proliferating jerry-built suburbs of Bella, whose rents relieved him of the need to be anything much in particular. And, with only another wiggle of the raised eyebrows, this person again repeated his *"Mmm?"* and this time on a note of higher urgency or pressure.

"Yes, sir, I am Engelbert Eszterhazy, Doctor of Medicine," the scientist said, irritably. "I am also Engelbert Eszterhazy, Doctor of Jurisprudence; Engelbert Eszterhazy, Doctor of Philosophy; Engelbert Eszterhazy, Doctor of Science; and Engelbert Eszterhazy, Doctor of Literature. And I do not know why any of this should entitle you to burst in upon my quietness and research."

The other man, as he heard all this, looked all around him, as though inviting spectators (of whom there were none) to witness it; then he said, "I must depart from my invariable incognito to inform *you*, sir, that *I* am King of Jerusalem and that you have unfortunately just prevented yourself from the reception of a *very* important appointment at my court!"

Eszterhazy looked down into the bubbling waters and heaved a silent sigh of self-reproach at himself for allowing himself to be irritated by a noddy. When he looked up, a moment later, prepared to offer a soft and noncommittal rejoinder, the man had gone.

During the rest of his stay in Gross-Kroplets, he did not see any more of the man; and his single enquiry met with no information at all.

He recollected the incident next, some months later, at the Linguistic Congress, during the middle of an interesting discussion on the Eastern and the Western Aramic, with the Most Reverend Salomon Isaac Tsedek, Grand Rabbi of Bella — who, with his perceptive mind and eye, and observing that a different idea had occurred to Eszterhazy, paused inquiringly. "— Your pardon, Worthy Grand Rabbi. Who is King of Jerusalem?"

"Almighty God, King of Heaven and Earth ... in a theological sense. In a secular sense, I suppose, the Sultan of Turkey." He did not offend against good manners by adding, "Why do you ask," as he — as all sensible men and women should — recognized that if a person wished to say why he asked, he would say why he asked. And they returned to their discussion of the construct case, and the genitive.

Some weeks after the Linguistic Congress, Eszterhazy, passing peacefully through the Pearl Market, where he had been pricing

some Russko chalcedonies, observed his friend Karrol-Francos Lobats, Commissioner of the Detective Police, deeply engaged in conversation with De Hooft, then President of the Jewelers Association. De Hooft, usually reserved to the point of being phlegmatic, was shaking his head excitedly and even took the Commissioner by the coat lapels. Lobats did notice Eszterhazy, who was going on by, and made as if to disengage himself; after a moment he fell back, as though it had not happened. And Eszterhazy continued on his way.

The visit to the Pearl Market, where gems of all sorts, plus ivory and amber, had been bought, sold, appraised, and bartered for centuries, was a mere brief amusement. Eszterhazy had an overflowing schedule. For one thing, he wished to prepare the final draft of his report on the therapeutic qualities (or otherwise) of medicinal spring water for the *Journal of the Iberian Academy of Medicine*. For another, he had already begun another study, an enquiry into the practice of clay-eating among the so-called Ten Mountain Tribes of Tsiganes (in which Herrek, his manservant, was of course of invaluable assistance). — Eszterhazy liked to have one enquiry overlapping another, in order to avoid the letdown, the lethargy, which otherwise often accompanied the conclusion of an enquiry.

And, in addition, the end of the Quarterly Court of Criminal Processes was approaching. Eszterhazy wished few men ill; he was by no means a Mallet of Malefactors; but the chance — which the conclusion of every quarter furnished him — of examining from the viewpoint of phrenology the freshly shaven heads of anywhere from fifty-odd to two-hundred or so newly convicted criminals was one which could not be passed up. Indeed, a few of the regular recidivists looked forward to the examination with an enthusiasm which the fact that Eszterhazy always gave each one a chitty payable in chocolate or tobacco at the canteen in the Western Royal and Imperial Penitentiary Fortress could not alone explain.

"See, this noggin o' mine goes down into history for the third time," one professional thief announced triumphantly to the guard, after Eszterhazy had completed the reading of his remarkably unlovely head.

"The rest of yous has already gone down into history five or six times on the Bertillion System" the guard said.

"Ahah, yous is just jealous, har har, thanks Purfessor for the

baccy chit!" And he swaggered off, prepared to spend three to five years under circumstances which no farmer would provide for his dogs or oxen. However, interventions on the part of Eszterhazy had already worked to the abolishment of the so-called Water Cure punishment and of the infamous Pig Pen.

So the Docket of Doctor Eszterhazy was rather full.

And so he made no much-about the tiny article, almost a filler, in the *Evening Gazette of Bella:*

The Honorable Police can give no substance to rumors about alleged thefts of certain antique jewelry, it was learned today by Our Correspondents.

And he passed on to the lead-*feuilleton* of the issue, entitled, by a most curious coincidence, *The Romance of Old Jewelry.* Liebfrow, the Editor of the *Evening Gazette,* was in many ways an old nannykins. But not in so many ways that he was unable to get a point across with a delicacy envied by other editors.

Skimming through the article, noticing references to the Iron Crown of the Lombards, the Cyprus Regalia, and the Crown of St. Stephen (the feuilleton seemed somewhat heavy on regalia), Eszterhazy noticed some word which triggered a small mechanism deep in his mind. He had not quite registered it on the upper level and was about to go over the article, column by column, when his Tsigane Servant, Herrek silently set upon the table a dish of cheese dumplings. And although the master of the premises at Number 33, Turkling Street, could have endured it very well if cheese dumplings were to be abolished by joint resolution of both Houses of the Imperial Diet, he knew that his housekeeper, Frow Widow Orgats, prided herself on her cheese dumplings — indeed, she regarded it as though an article of faith established by the Council of Trent that her master was delirious-fond of her cheese dumplings — speaking of them in high praise to the Faculties of Law and Medicine — and praising their remarkable lightness and sweetness to the Gentry and Nobility: in fact (Esterhazy knew damned well from experience) she was certainly even now behind the dining-room door, waiting expectantly.

So he performed.

"Ah, Herrek, Herrek!"

"Lord," said Herrek, a Tsigane of few words.

"Ah, these cheese dumplings of Frow Widow Orgats!"

"Lord."

"How delightfully sweet, how incredibly light!"

"Lord."

"Herrek, be sure and see she

gives you some. Let me know, should she overlook doing so."

"Lord."

And next Eszterhazy made a series of sounds indicating his being reduced to wordless ecstasy by the mere mastication of the cheese dumplings. And then he felt free to continue the rest of his dinner. Should he overlook having done all this, Frow Widow Orgats, an, after all, truly first-rate Cook and Housekeeper, otherwise would clump down back into her kitchen a prey to Injury and Grudge, slam about the tinned-copper cookpots, and burn the coffee.

And, by the time this Comedy of Manners was completed, Eszterhazy had clean forgotten what it was that he wanted to do about the newspaper piece on the Romance of Jewels. So he set it aside to be boxed for later perusal.

It was over the coffee and the triple-distillation liqueur of plum that the message arrived at the hands of Emmerman the night-porter. The message consisted of some words scribbled over, as it happened, a copy of the same feuilleton.

"What's this, Emmerman?"

"Someone give it me, Lord Doctor."

"What someone?"

"Dunno Lord Doctor. He ran off." Emmerman, bowing, departed to take up his post of duty from Lemkotch, the day-porter.

"Well, Eszterhazy," said himself to himself, "you train your servants to be brief, you must not complain if they are not prolix."

See Sludge, said the message, in its entirety. The handwriting tended towards the script favored in the official Avar-language schools of Pannonia, which brought it down to only seven million or so possible people. Still, that was a start of sorts. As for *Sludge.* The word was an epithet for any of the three and one half to four million Slovatchko-speaking subjects of the Triune Monarchy and for their language. Its use was rather a delicate matter. "Who you shoving, Sludge?" was, for example, grounds for blows. Yet. Yet the same person who violently objected to the word might easily say, "Speak Sludge" — meaning, Talk sense. Or: "What, three beers 'much to drink?" Who you talking to? You talking to a Sludge!" On reflection, and considering that the message had been scribbled on a newspaper....

There was always a kind of genteel pretense in the office of the *Evening Gazette* that the premises constituted a sort of extension of the College of Letters. No such notion had ever obtained in the raucous chambers of the *Morning Report,* where sometimes the spit

hit the spittoon, and sometimes it did not, and nobody cared or commented, as long as the details of the interview with the Bereaveds of the latest butcher-shop brawl got set down in full, rich, descriptions. Whereas the *Gazette* (if it mentioned the distasteful matter at all) might say, *The deceased was almost decapitated by the fatal blow. One of his employees was taken into custody:* the *Report* would be giving its readers something to the effect that, *Blood was all over the bedroom of the Masterbutcher Helmuth Oberschlager whose head was pretty nearly all chopped off by the frenzied blows supposedly delivered in an enraged lovequarrel over the affections of Frow Masterbutcher Helga Oberschlager, third wife of the elderly Masterbutcher Helmuth Oberschlager. The corpse lay almost upside-down propped against the bloodstained bed and the scant undergarment of Journeyman-butcher,* etc.

That was the way they did things at the *Report.*

As the editor of the *Report* had been born in the Glagolitic Alps, the very heart-land of the Slovatchko, he was not eligible to become President of the United States. So, instead, he had accomplished something almost as difficult namely, becoming editor of the largest circulation Gothic-language newspaper in the Imperial (and, officially Gothic-speaking) Capital. Where he disarmed all insults in advance by using the nickname of "Sludge" almost to the entire exclusion of his real name.

There would be little point in making references to someone's illegitimacy if he chose to answer his telephone with, "Bastard speaking, yeah?"

So.

"Hello, Sludge."

"Hel-lo Hel-lo! Doctor Eszterhazy! What an honor! Clear out of that chair, you illiterate son of a vixen" — this, to his star reporter, who had in fact already stood up and was offering the chair — "and let the learned doctor sit down.

"Thank you, Swarts."

Sludge, a squat, muscular man with a muddy complexion and prominent green eyes, looked at his visitor with keen appraisal. "I suppose you haven't really come to give us a story to the effect that Spa water is as good for the bowels as an Epsom Salts physic, and no goddamn good whatsoever for consumption, rheumatism liver complaint, kidney-trouble, and all the rest of it, eh?"

Eszterhazy did not ask him how he had put two and two together. They looked at each other with an understanding. "You may perhaps

be interested in a forthcoming article in the *Journal of the Iberian Academy of Medicine.*"

The editor, who had eagerly picked up a pencil, flung his head to one side, and put the pencil down again. "Oh, why, certainly, I'll have Our Special Correspondent in Madrid ...." His voice trailed away, the pencil was taken back, a note made. "I would ask what you would advise about it, eh, Doctor?" What the doctor would advise about it was that the *Report* wait until an abstract had appeared in the French medical journal, which would be excerpted in the British *Lancat.* After that, an article in a Swiss scientific publication of immense standing was inevitable. And the subject would by then be provided with all sorts of guarantees and precedents, and ready to be sprung upon the population of Bella without risk of Sludge spending perhaps 30 days in jail for, say, Libel of the National Patrimony (to wit, its medicinal Spas).

"Yeah. Yeah." Sludge scribbled away. "But not me, never, no. Not even thirty days. Not even thirty minutes."

He arose without a word of warning, and, at the top of his lungs, screamed something absolutely incomprehensible — waited. From somewhere far-off, above the clatter of the typewriting machines, the pounding of the steam-presses, a voice called up words equally obscure. Sludge smiled, sat down. He looked at his caller again. Waiting.

Who was not yet quite ready.

"Why not?" asked Eszterhazy. "You are the Responsible Editor of the *Report.* What?" Sludge rapidly shook his head. The star reporter smiled. "But .... it says so, on the masthead. 'L. Methodios Hozzenko, Responsible Editor.'"

Sludge smiled. The star reporter laughed out loud.

"That's my Uncle Louie," Sludge said. "The world's worst loafer, bar none. *I* am down on the payroll as L. M. Hozzenko, Nephew, Municipal Editor, see? — Trouble comes up, who goes down to the Court House? Uncle Louie. Who goes to jail? Uncle Louie. We bring him cheap cigars and beer in a bucket and sandwiches and hot sausage-and-crout, and he plays cards with the cops .... *He* don't care! — And what really brings you here, Doctor E.?"

Eszterhazy said that the Romance of Old Jewels brought him there. The star reporter choked on a snort. Sludge threw his head back and his arms out.

Eszterhazy said, "Details. Details. Details."

"This won't get out? All right, excuse me, Doctor, of course you won't — Not until our morning

first edition gets out. After that — 'Details?' Well, what is it you don't know? Obviously you do know that the Crown Jewels of Jerusalem have been stolen, and that —"

A multitude of thoughts rushed headlong through Eszterhazy's mind. "The Cyprus Regalia!" he exclaimed.

Sludge shrugged, indulgently. "That's for you educated folks," he said, without malice. "Us Glagolitski, we never even heard of the Cyprus Regalia. Never even heard of *Cyprus!* But — the Crown Jewels of Jerusalem? Oh, boy, did we ever hear of *them!* Say: one day, down at the old little farmstead, Grandpa rushes up, waving his stick, 'Who let the dogs knock over the barrow of pit-shit, was it *you?*' 'Oh, no, Bobbo! It wasn't me! I swear it, I swear it, by the Crown Jewels of Jerusalem, I swear it!' —See?"

And the star reporter said it was just the same among the Avars. "Suppose two old peasants have agreed on a deal for the rent of the orchards for the next plum-harvest. They join hands and repeat the terms, and then each one says in turn, 'I swear to keep this word and I swear it by the Holy Cross and the Avenging Angel and the Crown Jewels of Jerusalem ...' You talk to any of them about Cyprus Regalia, and he's likely to think he's being insulted, and to hit you with his pig-stick."

Eszterhazy slowly, slowly nodded, looked around the disorderly office. Observed with only a sense of the familiar the photograph of the Presence. Observed with mild surprise the photograph of the American President, A. Lincoln. "Yes ... I could sit here and, without having to send out for research materials, write an entire book to be titled ... say ... *The Cyprus Regalia or Crown Jewels of Jerusalem in Law, Legend, and History in the Triune Monarchy...*'"

Said Sludge: "And also, *With Added Details As To Its Theft from the Crypt of Saint Sophie ... Yeah ....*"

From the article, THE ROMANCE OF OLD JEWELRY, published in the *Evening Gazette* newspaper, Bella, April 7th, 190-

> Among the other items of jewelry pertaining to our beloved Monarchy are those sometimes called The Cyprus Regalia, or the Crown Jewels of Jerusalem. These consist of a crown with pendants, an orb with cross, and a sceptre, which, in turn, bears a miniature orb and cross. The most popular history of these items derives, ultimately,

from the Glagolitic Chronicle, composed for the most part, by the Monk Mazimilianos. According to this document of the later Anti-Turkish Resistance Period, these items form the Crown Jewels of the Christian Kings of Jerusalem during the Crusades. Most modern historians tend not to accept this account. Some, such as Prince Proszt-and-Proszt, concede that the Regalia did form part of the Crown Jewelry of the Lusignan Kings who reigned over Cyprus prior to the rule of Venice — though only a part — and who were indeed crowned in two ceremonies: one, as Kings of Cyprus, and, two, as Kings of Jerusalem. The learned Prince, denies, however, that these same Regalia were ever actually used during the earlier, or Jerusalem period at all. Other modern historical scholars, of whom it may suffice to mention only Dr. Barghardt and Professor Sz. Szneider, do not agree even to this account. The learned Dr. Barghardt goes so far as to state: "The Turks could not have found them in the vaults of Famagusta when they captured Cyprus, for the very good reason that they (that is, the Jewels) never were in Cyprus at all." And Prof. Sz. Szneider suggests that the Regalia were probably made for the use of one of the many late medieval Christian princes of the Balkania whose brave defiance of the Turks, alas ....

Eszterhazy sighed, ran his finger further down the column, grunted, stopped the finger in its tracks.

But popular opinion prefers to accept the traditional account that these were indeed the very Crown Jewels of Jerusalem, that they were in very truth captured from Prince Murad in single combat by the great and noble Grand Duke Gustave Hohentschtupfen, direct ancestor of our beloved Monarch. Popular opinion makes a very definite connection between the possession of these Regalia by the Royal and Imperial House, and the

August Titles of our beloved Ruling Family: which, as every school commence with "Holy Roman Emperor of Scythia, Apostolic King of Pannonia, and Truly Christian King of Jerusalem, Joppa, Tripoli and Edessa", and ....

Popular opinion, to be sure, was taking the whole thing very, very seriously indeed. Already reports were coming in from the wilder regions of Transbalkania that some of the peasantry were claiming that, with the loss of the Holy Crown Jewels of Holy Jerusalem, the Imperial and Royal power had passed, in effect, into abeyance, that Satan was now let loose to wage war upon the Saints, and that it was accordingly no longer necessary to pay the salt tax and the excise on distilled spirits.

All things religious were always touchy in the wilder regions of Transbalkania, but even close to home: in fact, two blocks away, Eszterhazy had heard a drayman shouting to a troika-driver, "Did you hear what them God-damned Turks have done, the dogs?"

"Yes, the dirty dogs," the troikanik had howled, "they stole back the Holy Jewels, we ought to send our gunboats down the Black Sea and bombard Consta' until they give them back, the dogs!"

The drayman had a caveat.

"We haven't *got* no gunboats on the Black Sea, Goddamn it!"

"Well, we better *get* some there then, blood of a vixen, the dirty dogs, *shove!*" And he cracked his whip over the backs of his horses, as though Ali Pasha, Murad the Midget, and Abdul Hamid themselves were all in the traces.

And now a voice called from the staircase, "Berty, art thou there?"

Not many people addressed Engelbert Eszterhazy in the *thou*-form. Even fewer called him "Berty."

"To thee, Kristy!" he called back.

Visits from his first-cousin once-removed Count Kristian-Kristofr Eszterhazy - Eszterhazy were rare. When he was not acting in his official capacity as Imperial Equerry, the Count preferred, in his purely personal capacities, to visit places much more amusing than the house at 33, Turkling Street. No merely familial duty nor memories of boyhoods spent much together had brought him here now, his moustache unwaxed, his figure for once unassisted by the usual corset, and smelling rather strongly of cognac, cologne, and extreme agitation. Without pause or further greetings, he made rapidly for the champagne bucket in the corner and, with a hand

which trembled slightly, poured himself a drink from the bottle, tossed half of it off, and —

"No," said Dr. Eszterhaxy, "it is not champagne. It is a mixture of geneva with an Italian wine which has been steeped in a profusion of herbs. Courtesy of the American Minister. He calls it a 'martini,' I don't know why."

Count Kristy downed the other half, sighed. "Listen, Berty, up, up, and into the saddle. Bobbo has gone round the bend."

It was one His Royal and Imperial Highness's amiable little habits, and which much endeared him to his Slovatchko subjects, that he liked to refer to himself in the third person ... *at certain times* .... by the term which meant, varying slightly in the Glagolitic dialects, Grandfather, Godfather, Foreman, Headman, Father-in-law, or — somewhat mysteriously — a boar with either three tusks. Or three testicles. "What!" he would exclaim, to a delegation from the Hither-Provinces. "What! No rain this year? What! Crops bad? What! Want your land-rates reduced? Ah, my children, you did right to come to Bobbo! Bobbo will take care of it! Pray for Bobbo! Bobbo is your Friend!" And so the Dissolution of the Triune Monarchy would be postponed for another five years. At times the intelligentsia and the underground felt certain that Ignats Louis was a stupid old fool. At other times, they were not so sure.

"What? Like poor old Mazzy?"

"Well ... not quite so bad as that. Doesn't ride his white horse up and down the stairs hunting for Bonaparte. What he *does* do: he blubbers, flops on his knees every other minute and prays, shouts, storms, curses, weeps, smacks his riding-crop on his desk, and — It's these damned Cyprus Regalia things. (Wouldn't be surprised if they aren't actually *glass,* myself.) Poor old Bobbo, he has the notion that until and unless the Holy Jewels are found, his Crowns, his real crowns, I mean, are in peril."

Eszterhazy, whose devotion to the Person of the Imperial Presence was based upon a deep-seated preference for King Log over King (or President, or Comrade) Stork, winced, shook his head.

"This is not quite reasonable," he said.

"When you are eighty-one years old, and an Emperor," Count Kirsty pointed out, "you don't have to be quite reasonable. The Old Un is really in a *state,* I tell you! Won't review the Household Troops. Won't read the Budget. Won't sign the Appointments or the Decrees. Won't listen to Madame play the harpsichord—"

"Oh! Oh!" If Ignats Louis would not listen to the twice-daily harpsichord performance by Madame de Mouliére, whose position as *maîtresse en titre* had, presumably, for many years been so purely titular indeed that it rested chiefly on the remembrance of things past and on the twice-daily performance upon the harpsichord — then, then, things were very bad indeed.

"Weeps, prays, storms, stamps," Count Kristy recapitulated. "Reminds everyone that it is still part of the Imperial Prerogative to flay his servants up to and including the rank of Minister — Well. And, speaking of which. The Prime —

"The Prime Minister has ordered extra guards around the Turkish Legation, yes. What else?"

"Aunt Tillie asked me to mention that she is also very disturbed."

The Grandduchess Matilda was the wife of the Heir. And where was the Heir? "Where would he be? If he isn't murdering grouse, stags, and boars, he's on maneouvres. Right now — *fortunately!* — he is on maneouvres just about as far away as he can be, in Little Byzantia, with no posts, no telegraphs, and the heliograph limited to matters purely military."

Little Byzantia was, in fact, one of the kernels in the nut. Little Byzantia was, nominally, still a *pashalik,* although the Triune Monarchy had administered it for forty-two years. During all that time, its eventual annexation to the Triple Crowns had been anticipated. And now, though very *sub rosa,* final negotiations with the Sublime Porte were underway. The Sublime Porte did not very much care at all. The Byzantian underground nationalists cared very much. Negotiations were very delicate. Anti-Turkish riots were not desired. Or — and this was another kernel in the nut — they were not desired *now.* The nut, of course, had many kernels. The temper of the Heir, always largely under control when at home and surrounded by ceremony, tended to become less and less under control the farther away from home it got.

There was a very possible and very undesirable order of progression. It went like this: First, Anti-Turkish riots in Bella ... or, for that matter, in Transbalkania, where a minority of several score thousand Turks still slept away their days over their hookahs and their prayer beads. Following such riots: A Reaction, any kind of a Reaction, on the part of Turkey. Following *that,* and assuming the Heir to find out (and find out he must, sooner or later), precipitate

action on the part of the Heir. Following that: A stroke, a heart attack, or any of the other disasters lying in wait for an exited old man of eight-one. And, *following that*—

The Heir had many lovable qualities. One loved the Heir. One wished him many more long years ... As Heir.

Slowly, Eszterhazy said, "In fact, Kristy, I am working on it now. But I will need time. And I will need help."

Count Eszterhazy-Eszterhazy said, "I can't do a damned thing about Time. But as for help, well—" he fished something out his Equerry's Pouch. "Bobbo ordered me to give you ... this."

"Jesus *Christ!*"

"This" was a piece of parchment, deeply imprinted with the Triple Crowns at the top. In the middle, a hand (and Doctor Eszterhazy well knew Whose) had scrawled the one word ASSIST. Underneath ASSIST, The same Hand had drawn the initials:

I L
I R

And, at the bottom (more or less), in wax, the Seal Imperial. And, in each corner, was another initial, forming together the INRI.

"I've never even held one in my *hand* before!"

The Count said, somewhat gloomily. "Neither has anyone else now alive, hardly. — One more glass of that American wine—St. Martin's, you call it? —then I must go."

The old King-Emperor's mind had, under stress and woe, evidently (at least in this one matter) gone back clear sixty-five years, when the *Provo* (as it was commonly called) had last been used: and that was to harry the horse-thieves of the Lower Ister. (Quite successfully, as a matter of fact.) Usually worn out in the course of their commissions, only a few survived to be seen even in museums. But everyone had seen pictures of them, in newspapers, magazines, even almanacs. Theater bills and posters. They were a staple feature of the popular melodrama.

"Baron Blugrotz, will nothing stay you from your mad determination to throw me and my aged wife out of our cottage into the snow because we will not allow you to take our promised-in-marriage-daughter into your castle?"

"Nothing [with a sneer]! Nothing, nothing, will stay me!"

A commotion, the door is flung open.

"*This* will stay you!" The *This* being, of course, the *Provo* which the hero holds up in his hand. —At which the evil baron and all his henchfellow's fall upon their knees and bare their heads and cross

themselves they will be merely hanged and not flayed or impaled, and the audience jumps to its feet and shouts and stamps and claps.

Perhaps the aged mind of Ignats Louis *had* buckled under the strain. Thinking that this relic of the Middle Ages and the Early turkish Wars was appropriate in the era of the telephone, telegraph, and police force. However. Ignats Louis [I L] had, indeed, issued it. He was, indeed, *Imperator and Rex* [I R]. And it took not much to see clearly the association in his ancient and pious mind between the supposed Crown Jewels of Jerusalem and the Eszterhazy letters, traditionally placed around the corners of the parchment, initials of the words *Iesus Nazarenus, Rex Iudaeorum* ....

"Well," said Doctor Eszterhazy, crisply, "it is not for me to bandy words with my Sovereign. He issues, I accept. — Make His Imperial Majesty an appropriate reply."

"And what," asked Count Kristy, putting his uniform cap back on and, with a rather wary shrug, preparing to depart, "what is 'an appropriate reply'?"

"Tell him," said Doctor Eszterhazy, "tell him I said, 'Adsum....'"

"Lemkotch, I am not at home to anyone."

He had known now for some time that the key word in the *Gazette* article, and the one which tripped the flare in his mind — he had known now for some time that the word was *Jerusalem.*

"Are you not Engelbert Eszterhazy, Doctor of Medicine?"

"I must depart from my invariable incognito to inform you, sir, that I *am King of Jerusalem...."*

Over and over again, head resting in his hands, in the silence and solitude of his study, he went over the odd scene in the old spring-room at the mountain spa. Was there, now that he deliberately tried to think that there might be, *was* there something else in his memory, besides that single scene, connecting himself with the man behind that totally unmemorable face? Or was this delusion?

After a while he sat up, took a pad and drawing-pencil, and, as best he could, made a sketch of the man as he remembered him. The clothing, he somehow felt, the clothing was nothing. *The face* — He discarded the first drawing and sketched, and larger, the face alone. With the pinch-nose eyeglasses. And the absurd moustache, trimmed shorter on one side. And the hair .... The hair, now .... Well, the man had worn a hat, a hat like millions. Take off the hat, then, and draw the face without it.

Did he part his hair in the middle? Perhaps. Trim it close, like a Prussian officer? Unlikely. Or was he, perhaps, bald? On the whole, and although he could not say why he thought so, Eszterhazy rather thought that the man *was* bald. He finished the sketch. And stared. Still nothing. Or, rather .... something ....

Take off the eyeglasses.

Take off the moustache, too.

After another while, he got up and, fixing the latest sketch to a drawing-board, set this one up on an easel. Turned the gas-lights down very low. Turned the shade of the electric-lamp so that it acted as a spot-light. Sat back in his chair. Allowed all the rest of the world to fall away ... except for The Face....

Had he seen it before?

He *had* seen it before.

Question and answer.

Where had he seen it before?

Question — but no answer.

The stillness grew. There seemed no one passing in the street. There seemed no carriages in the city. The Cathedral bells did not ring. The last voice in the world spoke, many, many blocks away. Then all fell silent.

But, if the sense of sound vanished, other senses remained. There was a smell, and a rather bad smell it was. He could not exactly say what the smell was. Familiar, though. Damnably familiar. That face. *Face.* Where had he seen —

Without even being able to recall the steps in between, Eszterhazy was in the kitchen. His housekeeper stared at him, her mouth all agape and askew.

"What did you say?" he was asking her, urgently, urgently.

"Why, High-born —"

"What did you say, what did you *say* —" He forced himself to speak in a softer voice. "Goodwoman, now, do not be afraid. But it is very important. What did you say, a while back, you said something about ..." He strained memory; memory submitted, yielded up. "— something about needing something. You said," he clenched his fists behind his back in the face of her massive incomprehension, the two moles near her mouth, one with a hair in it, never longer, never shorter —

"You said, 'We need to get some more —' Now. Goodwoman. You need to get some more of what?"

But still she stood frozen. A figure bobbed behind her. A figure in a greasy apron. Probably the scullery maid. "If you please, Frow Widow Orgats," the kitchenwoman murmured, "you had been saying, a minute or so back, how we was needing to get more disinfectant. For the, please pardon for the servants' privy. In the yard."

Something was out of the ordinary at the Western Imperial Penitentiary Fortress, where his card was always sufficient to bring Smits, the Sub-Governor, bowing respectfully, and saluting, as well, when he had done bowing. Smits was a career screw, up through the ranks of the Administration of Guards. It was, of course, the Governor, Baron von Grubhorn, who interviewed journalists and discussed with them the theories of Lombroso on The Criminal Type. It was the Govenor of the prison who made the weekly address to the prisoners, as they stood in chains, exhorting them on their duties as Christians and loyal subjects of the Triune Monarchy. But it was the Sub-Governor who checked the bread ration, saw to the cell assignments, and even tasted the prison stew — or, as it was unaffectionately called, 'the scum' — and, had the Sub-Governor not done so, the bread ration would have diminished, more murders been committed in the cells, and the stew been even scummier.

Now, however, the Sub-Governor was neither bowing nor saluting. He stood in the mud at the entrance to the Fortress, directing the emplacement of what seemed to be a Gatling gun. All about him were guards with rifles at the ready; they poured in and out of the entrance, moiling like ants. Eszterhazy stopped the steam runabout (whose bronze hand-bell no one here had seemed to have heard) about two hundred feet away, proceded on foot.

"What's wrong, Smits?"

The look Smits flung him was bleak as a rock. "Can't come here now. Away with you!" He peered, recognized the approaching visitor. "Can't *come* here now, Doctor! Governor's orders! The prisoners are about to riot, Sir, they think their bread ration is about to be reduced — a damned lie, but try to tell *them* that — Back, Sir! I says, Away with you! Don't you *hear* —" He gestured, said some words in a lower voice. Two captains and a number of ordinary guards began to trot forward, holding the rifles at the oblique, to bar his way.

He reached into his pocket and thrust holding his forearm up at the traditional forty-five degree angle, thrust out the *Provo.*

Sub-Governor, Captains, and guards alike, sweeping off their caps, fell on their knees in the mud; the Sub-Governor, who alone was unencumbered with a rifle, crossing himself repeatedly.

The Governor himself stood on the inner parapet, shouting at the prisoners below. All along the platform were guards, rifles pointing down into the yard. But no one could hear a word the

Baron was saying over the noise of the shouting and the ringing chains of the convicts. He turned his head, as Eszterhazy approached, and his mouth fell silent. That is, presumably it fell silent. At any rate, his mouth ceased to move. Eszterhazy stepped next to him and held up the *Provo.*

With one great and simultaneous crash of chains, the convicts fell on their knees.

A ringing, echoing silence followed.

"I have received this from the Emperor," Eszterhazy said. "I bring you assurance that the bread ration is not to be reduced."

They did not, after all, give three cheers for the Emperor. Perhaps it was shock. One man, however, in a loud, hoarse voice, half growl, half-shout: *"Good old Bobbo!"*

"No punitive measures will be taken .... this time .... but you are to return to your cells, *at once!"* The words were Eszterhazy's. The Governor, speechless, gestured to the Sub-Governor. The Sub-Governor barked an order. All the rifles went up — straight up. And stayed so. Down in the yard, someone (a trusty, by his red patch) cried, *"Hump, tump, thrump, fump!"* The convicts fell into ranks, turned about, and, line by line, in lock-step, began to file out of the yard.

Clash-clash-clash-clash.
Clash-clash-clash-clash ....
The riot was over. This time.

The Sub-Governor gave a long look at the sketch which Eszterhazy showed him. (The *Gov*-ernor was drinking brandy and looking at nothing.)

"Why, yes, Sir Doctor," said Sub-Governor Smits. "Yes, I *do* remember him. You says to me, 'This one's got a bad lung, so keep him out of the damp if you possibly can.' Which I done, Sir Doctor, which I done, inasmuch as we of the Administration of Guards are human beings after all, and not aminals like some would have it said." Even up here, in the middle story of the old tower, far above the cell-blocks, the smell of sweat and urine and of disinfectant seemed very strong. "Consequently is why he left here alive and in better health than he come in."

Eszterhazy stared. "It has been a fatiguing week, Sub-Governor. A fatiguing week." On the mottled wall, Ignats Louis, bifurcated beard and all, looked down, benignly. "Assist my memory, please. When did I say this?"

Smits raised a rough, red hand to his rough, red chin. "Why .... Strange that I should remember, Sir — his face, not his name — and you not, with your great mind. But, then, I never was one much for

writing and for reading. But I could remember by sight, as a boy, every beast in our township. — Well. When. Why, when you examine his noggin, Sir. Excuse me, Sir Doctor, we are rough men here. — When you give the first of them free no-logical examinations. Is when."

And so, after much digging up of old records and after much checking and cross-checking of the prison files, it was found.

Number 8727-6. Gogor, Teodro. *Age,* 25.

Offense, Forgery, 2nd class. *State,* Confused. *Remarks,* Perhaps Dement.Prae.

And so on. And so on. And so on.

"Well, well ... I am much obliged. And now I must get back to Bella, and to think about this."

The Sub-Governor rose along with him, said, casually, "And so you think, Sir Doctor, that this old lag, Gogor, he might be the one that's tooken the Holy Jewels?"

Eszterhazy once again looked at his Sovereign's face. After a moment, he turned back to Smits. "Why do you think that?"

Smits shrugged, began to hold up Eszterhazy's overcoat for him. "Well, I dunno for sure, of course. But they were cracked from old St. Sophie's Crypt, it's been in all the papers. They say, the papers, that it was an amateurish job. Which it succeeded because the crib they were in, it was so old, the mortar was crumbly, and so on. "Amateurish,' but the same time they say, 'Professional tools may have been employed,' Yes."

Eszterhazy buttoned his coat. "Thank you, Smits. Yes — and so?"

"Well, Sir Doctor. It come into my mind as we were talking, this Gogor, he was in old cell 36-E-2. And who was in there with him? Szemowits, another fancy-writer (forger, that is). A chap I can't recall his name, up for Rape, Second. And Old Bleiweisz. Do you recollect Old Bleiweisz? Well, he was a cracksman. One of the best, they tell me. Anyways, *he* said he was. Always talking about How To Do it, and how *he* Done It. And so, well, just perhaps, now the thought came to me, maybe that is how this Gogor — if it *was* him — how he got the idea of how to do it. You see...."

Eszterhazy, nodding, buttoned his gloves. "I see. An interesting thought. Would it be possible to speak to this Bleiweisz?"

But the Sub-Governor said it would not be possible. "He's drawn the Big Pardon, as the lags say. He's under the flagstone now. What was it, now, as done for him? *Ah,* yes."

He opened the door, gestured Eszterhazy to pass ahead of him.

"It was lungs, that was it. Dunno why. He was healthy when he come in."

Lobats did not seem to have gotten enough sleep, lately. He looked at the paper Eszterhazy had given him, blinked, shook his head. "What is this? Something about somebody sent up for a Forgery, Second, seven years ago? — Better take this downstairs to records, Doctor. I've got something, well, a lot bigger to worry about."

Eszterhazy said that he was sure of that ... that he had suspected as much ever since he had seen Commissioner of the Detective Police Karrol-Francos Lobats so deep in conversation in the Pearl Market. Conversation with Jewellers' Association President De Hooft. So deep that Lobats had not even time for a word with his old aquaintance and so-often companion, Dr. Engelbert Eszterhazy ....

Was it unfair for him to be rubbing it in like this? Maybe. Maybe not. Eszterhazy did not want it thought that he, and everything that his immense knowledge and capacity had to offer, could be regarded as the toy of an idle moment, to be picked up, and to be set aside or ignored when someone else might want to ....

"This Forgery, Second, fellow may be the fellow you are so worried about. We will both need all the information on him you can find ... in Records ... or out of Records. Do you take my word for it? Or shall I show, shall we say, Authority?" He had begun to have a superstitious notion that he ought to be chary about displaying the *Provo*, lest overexposure might ... somehow ... dissipate its power.

Lobats said, heavily, "I take your word for just about anything. But I am not worried about a forger. I'm worried about —"

"A jewel theft. Yes."

For all his heaviness, Lobats got up quickly from his chair. "Well, it has been known for crooks to change styles. I sure hope you are right."

Records, however, had only records. Old records. Seven years old.

If Gogor, Teodro, had committed any more recent offenses against his Royal and Imperial Majesty, His Realm, His Crown and Staff, he had not been apprehended for the crime.

Those other and perhaps equally important sources of information upon which the police of the world's great cities (and, perhaps, their small ones, too) depend — to wit: informers — had nothing to say upon the subject,

either. His former employers, against whom the fogery had been committed (and, interestingly enough, they did deal in job-lots of oil-cloth), had heard nothing of him since. And wanted to hear nothing of him now. His family, consisting of an exceedingly respectable brother and sister in the provincial city of Praz (and no city is more respectable than Praz), knew nothing of his present or recent or post-prison career, either. They did offer the suggestion that he might have gone to America. Or to Australia.

"He was in Gross-Kroplets this same year," Eszterhazy insisted. "Well. You keep onto that. I have some loose ends of my own which I must try to tie together. I shall see you tomorrow."

On the third floor of the house at 33, Turkling Street, Herra Hugo von Sltski was (after Dr. Eszterhazy himself) supreme. Here was Dr. Eszterhazy's Library. And Herra von Sltski was Dr. Eszterhazy's Librarian. This scholar had a bad complexion, a bad breath, and a worse temper; but he was familiar with all the languages and dialects of the Triune Monarchy — plus French, English, Latin, Greek, and Sanksrit — he was absolutely indefatigable. His employer had only to send him, via the pneumatic tube, a message to this effect: *Gogor, Teo, in the Criminal Phrenological Examinations, First Series:* for the envelope to reach him, via the same tube, in less than five minutes.

He opened it and drew out the yellow-paper chart. Down the left-hand margin were listed the Proclivities, Propensities, and Faculties. Across the top were the ratings, ranging from Overdeveloped through Underdeveloped to Absent, with graduations between. At the bottom, in a series of small boxes, were the cranial measurements, taken by Eszterhazy himself, with calipers and other instruments (one of them, of his own invention). But he was not foremostly interested in the measurements, a glance at them showing that Gogor had an average head as far as size and shape went. It had been his intention, after taking the readings of each quarter, to assess each one, and to make a Summary on the inner leaf of the chart. However, that year — the year he had first taken such readings of a large number of criminals — that year had also been an Epidemic Year. He had not had time to make the assessments. He had made them each quarter-year afterwards. Somehow, he had never gone back to the First Series.

Ah, well. So, then, now to it.

PHRENOLOGICAL ASSESS-

MENT OF TEODRO GOGOR, AGED 25, NATIONAL SUBJECT. The Region of the lower Back of the Head: *SOCIAL PROCLIVITIES. Amativeness:* Very large. *Conjugality: Underdeveloped. Philoprogenitiveness:* Absent. *Adhesiveness:* Deficient. *Inhabitiveness:* Oddly developed. *Continuity:* Overdeveloped.

The Regions behind and above the Ears: *SELFISH PROPENSITIES. Vitativeness:* Average *Combativeness:* Uncertain. *Destructiveness:* Weak. *Alimentiveness:* Deficient. *Acquisitiveness:* Strongly but oddly developed. *Cuatiousness:* Deficient.

The regions approaching and reaching the Crown of the head: *THE ASPIRING FACULTIES,* or *LOWER SENTIMENTS. Approbativeness:* strongly developed. *Self-esteem:* Overdeveloped. *Firmness:* Overdeveloped.

The Coronal Region: *THE MORAL SENTIMENTS: Conscientiousness:* Deficient. *Hope:* Excessive development. *Sprituality:* Excessive. *Veneration:* Excessive. *Benevolence:* Deficient.

The Region of the Temples: *THE SEMI-INTELLECTUAL* or *PERFECTIVE FACULTIES. Constructiveness:* Slightly underdeveloped. *Ideality:* Strong. *Sublimity:* Overdeveloped. *Imitation:* Overdeveloped. *Mirthfulness:* Absent.

The Region of the Upper Forehead: *THE REASONING FACULTIES. Causalty:* Excessive. *Comparison:* Weak. *Human Nature:* Deficient. *Agreeableness:* Average.

The Region of the Center of the Forehead. *THE LITERARY FACULTIES. Eventuality:* Well-developed. *Time:* Average. *Tune:* Defective. *Language:* Average.

The Region of the Brows: *THE PERCEPTIVE FACULTIES. Individuality:* Slightly underdeveloped. *Form:* Average. *Size:* Average. *Color:* Average. *Order:* Developed. *Calculation:* Odd. *Locality:* Average.

Eszterhazy considered a segar, decided to let the plesure await him at the end of his task. But he did allow himself the pleasure of addressing an observation to himself. "I foresee," he said aloud, "that great possibility, amounting almost to probability, that phrenology must give way to newer and younger sciences, which even now stand waiting at the door to accept, and without acknowledgement, the hard-won discoveries of their elder sister. The intangible aspects, the

immaterial ones, will be taken over by psychology. The material and tangible ones, by physical anthropology. Calculations based upon the cephalic index and other cranial measurements have already taught us much about primitive man and will try to teach us even more about his modern descendants." He bent to his work, then, lifting his head once more, said, slowly, "And it may be that these younger sisters of the sciences will find others, younger yet, waiting to suplant them ...."

Long he pondered over the yellow-paper chart, and much he pondered. Overhead, in the great gasoliers wrought in red bronze in the shapes of mermaids with naked bosoms, the gas flames (each one cupped in the hands of one mermaid) cast their golden light all about.

One man may look at a mountain and see only rock. Most men, looking at a mountain, would see only rock. That one man in hundreds of thousands, trained in observation by geology, looking at the self-same mountain, will see half-a-hundred different kinds of rock, will see indications of ores buried in mine and matrix deep below the surface (though not that deep as to be beyond delving and discovering), will know what ancient writhings of the earth — ancient-most of mothers — sent which stratum buckling up, or down, and which stratum lying level as a rule-yard.

So it was in this case of Teodro Gogor.

And Eszterhazy, having been the first man, now proceeded to be the other.

The faculty of Location was merely averagely developed. The fugitive (if such were the proper term) was thus not greatly attached to his native place, which now knew him not. He might indeed have gone to Australia (or to America), but nothing in his innate nature compelled him to be a rolling-stone. The faculties of Form, Size, Weight, and Color were also average. His sense of Order was developed, naturally, or he could neither have planned nor carried out the audacious theft, however 'amateurishly.' His faculty of Calculation, now. It had been marked "odd." His was no common covetousness, obviously; no desire for mere gold coin had moved him. He had been able to calculate how to commit the crime and how to — for the present, anyway — get away with it. Individuality, slightly under-developed. That fit. He had a conception of himself as an individual — but as the wrong individual. For, whoever might (or might not) be the true King of Jerusalem, it was surely not he.

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Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.

Dovetailing with this was the fact that both Approbativeness, comprising "the desire for fame and acclaim," and Self-esteem, were both overdeveloped: indeed, excessively so. And so was Firmness. No collywhobbler could have set out to steal a national treasure ... and done so. He was deficient in the quality of Conscientiousness, but in that of Hope, he had far too much. When the faculty of spirituality is excessive, as here, there is an inevitable tendency towards the fanatic.

All true, all — now — obvious. And all, so far, just so-much locking the stable-door after the horse was gone. What did it avail, here and now, to realize that Gogor's sentiment of veneration was excessive? He might indeed be venerating the antique treasures. The point now was, *where?*

"Deficient in Benevolence.'" Very well, he would not fence the jewels in order to give the money to the poor. Indeed!

"Sublimity excessive, tending towards exaggeration." Obviously. "Imitation, overdeveloped." As true as anything could be true. Mirthfulness, entirely absent. Hmmm. No use to look for him enjoying a comedy turn in a music hall, then.

Well. Now for the Reasoning Faculties.

Excessive in Causalty: his talents lay more towards the theoretical. He had little analytical ability, for his faculty of Comparison was weak. Deficient in Human Nature, he would have no discrimination — Eszterhazy sighed, shifted in his seat. So far, all of *this* seemed theoretical. "Merely average in the qualities of Time and Lanugage, deficient in that of Tune." So no use expecting to find him at a concert, either. And surely a mere yawn and a nod of the head to see that, owing to a well-developed faculty of Eventuality, he, Gogor, would probably possess a great interest in history.

"Deficient in Cautiousness." This might be to the good. He might very well tip his hand. "Acquisitiveness strongly but oddly developed." This was but a double-confirmation of what had been disclosed in connection with Calculation. "Alimentiveness deficient," eh. Merely eats to live. Not likely to haunt the better restaurants, nor send out for caviare, goose-liver, or champagne. Likely to drink little alcohol, or none. "Combativeness uncertain." Would he fight for his "cause"? — or not? In the propensity towards "Destructiveness, very weak." This was somewhat favorable, it seemed to add up to "Not Dangerous."

And in Vitativeness, Gogor was

merely average. He had had a bad lung, but he had recovered from it. Mm, well, so, nothing here, no point in posting watches before the apothecaries'.

And thus, so much for the Selfish Propensities. Now for the Social ones. And now for a quick prayer that Something, at least *Some*thing, would turn up which would be of help —

"Continuity, overdeveloped." Again: an indication of a possible fanatical devotion to some one thing. Inhabitiveness, or attachment to a place or cause, oddly developed. In other words — now we have all the *other* evidence — a tendency to form strong attachment to an odd cause. Bully. How often to plow this same furrow.

And now, oh God, only four left!

Adhesiveness (that is, friendship or affection) deficient.

Philoprogenitiveness, absent.

Conjugality, undeveloped.

Amativeness, very large.

And there it was. There it all was. And he might almost as well have skipped all the rest of it.

Eszterhazy clapped his hands in pleasure.

If one rules out Conjugality and Philoprogenitiveness, one rules out desire for home, wife, children. If even Adhesiveness is ruled out, a mistress is also ruled out. And so, what is left? *Amativeness is left. In* fact: "*Amativeness is very large.*" Here we have a man with strong sexual passions, who has neither wife nor mistress. And so —

"Lord."

Eszterhazy, slightly startled, looked up. "Ah, Herrek, what —? Ah, yes, I clapped, didn't I. Ah ... no ... I had not meant — Wait! Herrek —"

"Lord."

Eszterhazy thought for a moment. Then, "Herrek. In the lumber-room. The old pig-skin travelling-bag. The one with the Paris stickers on it. Bring it, please. But, first — take the stickers off ...."

"Lord."

As the evening express from Praz was drawing into the Great Central Terminal, a man dressed in the height of the fashions of fifteen years earlier, and carrying a pig-skin travelling-bag of even earlier style, went up the side-steps to the central platform. He walked slowly across, mingling with the crowds getting off the express, and went down the main steps and out the main gates —

— and drew back, nervously, from what wits called "the artillery attack."

"*Fiacre, sir? Fiacre?*"

"*High-born Sir! This way! This way!*"

"*Fiacre, High-born Sir! Any-*

where for a half-a-ducat!"

It seemed that half of the hackney-coaches in Bella had assembled in the wide street outside the station. And as though, now, half of their drivers had flung down their leathers and, leaping to the pavement, were intent on rushing the newly arrived passengers into their hacks by main force and what was called "grabbage."

And now see a tall and stalwart figure, an ex-hussar by the height and carriage of him, and resplendent in the uniform of a railroad terminal commissionaire, approach the newly arrived provincial. "All right, Sir. Just please to tell me where it is as you'd like to go, and I'll take care of everything."

And he seems to interpose himself between the newcomer and the mob of coachmen, who, seeing this, go bawling off and howling for other custom. Of which, after all, there seems no lack.

"Uh, I want, uh, I want to go, uh, to go, uh," and he gropes in his pockets for an address which is not there. Of course not. It never is when wanted. The commissionaire looks at this familiar scene indulgently. And he glances, with the barest trace of a smile, hid before it begins to show, almost, at the faded dandy.

"Did you want to go to a hotel, Sir? I'm afraid one hears that the Grand Beatrix is full-up just now."

Oh, what a relief for the visitor! Not to have to explain that he does not really *want* the famous (and justly so) Hotel Grand Beatrix, which would bankrupt him one day: besides being, really, much, much, much too, well, grand. And yet, how flattering to hear that he is obviously thought to be a Grand Beatrix type! "There is the Austerlitz and the Vienna, of course, Sir. Nice quiet places." The commissionaire knows full well that the visitor does not want a nice quiet place. "And there's the Hotel de France, very reasonable rates, the gentry tells me, Sir. Of course," here he gives a very slightly roguish look, "of course, some say it's rather a bit too gay and fast there. But I daresay that the gentleman might not find it so."

Hotel de France! Gay and fast! Almost before he knows it, the commissionaire's whistle has blown, and there the gentleman is, and his luggage, too, luggage with not a single sticker to mar or mark its sturdy old sides, in a fiacre, and rattling over the stonepaved streets. But not rattling so very loudly. The stone paving-blocks are such smooth stone paving-blocks — quite unlike the streets of Praz, where ghastly primordial cobble-stones, shaped like eggs, constitute the paving of the central plaza and adjacent streets; and

everywhere else the natural soil and earth allow the streets to be as dusty, or muddy, as it pleases the Good Lord to ordain.

The sides of the Hotel de France are painted with enormous letters, three stories in height, which inform the world that *"Every room is furnished with the gas-light."*

"A room for *Monsieur?* But certainly! Delighted!" The clerk slaps his hand on the desk-bell. *"Garcon!* Take *Monsieur's* bags up to Room 30-D!"

Monsieur! And garcon!

Sure enough, 30-D, at least, is furnished with gas-light. Sure enough, they rode up in a hydraulic elevator, started and stopped (and, for all the visitor knows to the contrary, Praz not even having a grain-elevator, *propelled*) by a cable running through the center from floor to roof.

And, in an alcove in the hallway, only a few doors from 30-D, *there is even running water,* should one's pitcher run dry!

The French know how to live.

Lobats, meanwhile, had started at the bottom. Not, to be sure, at the very bottom. He did not bother with the two-penny drabs, poor wretched things, who plied their trade under the land arches of the Italian Bridge or in the doorways of the alleys round the Rag Market. He had engravings made of a series of sketches by Eszterhazy, and he was now out directing their distribution — not in broadside quantities or by broadside methods; he did not want them on lamp-posts; it was not intended to take such fairly desperate methods ... yet. He was having them distributed where he thought they might do the most good.

In a dirty coffee-house by the Old Fish Wharf, for instance.

"Hallo, Rosa."

"Oh, God, I'm not even awake yet" — it was two in the afternoon — "he wants to take me to jail. *I haven't done nothing!*"

"Oh, we know that, Rosa. Look here. Ever see this mug? No? Sure? Well, if you do ... or think you do ... well, you know how to pass the word along. Somebody might do herself a very good turn. Particularly if she needed one done. 'Bye, Rosa."

In a shebeen behind the Freight Yards, for instance.

"Hallo, Genau."

A greasy, shriveled little man in a torn jacket of the same description seems about to dive beneath the counter. But he only dives deep enough to come up with a piece of paper. Also greasy and shriveled.

"Oh, I don't want to see your tax-receipt, Genau. Look here.

Ever see this mug? No? Sure? Well, if you do .... Somebody might be able to make a very good deal for himself, if you know what I mean."

Genau seems to know what he means.

In front of a cheap bakery in the South Ward.

"Hey, you, Tobacco. Come here."

Tobacco comes there, eyes bulging with honesty. "I'm clean, Your Worship. Search me, 'few like. Haven't picked a tap since —"

"— since last night. Never mind. Take a look here. Eh?"

Tobacco takes a look. Shakes his head. "Not a regular."

"We'd like to see him just the same. Twig? Secret fund. Twig?"

Tobacco twigs. "I'll be sure and letcha know. We don't like irregulars, anyway. Mucking things up and making things difficult for the trained hands. *Sure.* I'll letcha know."

"Hallo, Lou —"

"Hallo, Frou —"

"Hallo, Gretchen —"

"Hallo, Marishka —"

Marishka blinks her painted eyes. Gives a nod. A very tired nod. Genteely smothers a yawn. "Sure. He's a bit dotty, ain't he? But not *dangerous.*"

Lobtas: "You *have* seen him, then? When?"

Marishka sips, licks beaten cream off her painted lip. "Last night," she says, indifferently. "All night. Nothing special." She means, first, that her last night's guest had no very *odd* habits and, second, that he had paid only a standard fee.

"Where? Know where he might be?"

Marishka no longer even bothers to shrug. "He came in from the street," she says. "And he went back out into the street." She returns to her cup of coffee. It is all so very dull, life and its demands. They come in from the street. And they go back out into the street.

Over and over. However. Others can do that work. There is one thing more, which Doctor Eszterhazy had advised not be neglected. And Lobats, who has a little list (written, this time — he has many little lists, and quite a few long ones, in his head). One by one he checks them off, shop after shop, and fitting-room after fitting-room. Then, scratching his head, he goes farther afield.

Frow Widow Higgins, Theatrical Costumiere, was not from England, as the rich accents of her native South Ward indicated. But the late Higgins had been born there. The late Higgins, however, was very late indeed, and his widow made little mention of him. She

looked up from her sewing-machine, through which she was running a tunic of 16th-century design ... one which much needed the restorative attentions of the machine and which, in fact, might indeed have been in semi-continual use since that century. She looked up from her sewing-machine and, for a moment, rested her foot at the treadle.

"Heah," she said.

"When?"

"Oh .... Maybe last month...."

Lobats wants her to tell him all about it. And, politely, for Frow Widow Higgins is of an entirely respectable and, God knows, hard-working, character, he asks that she understand that he means *all* about it. Frow Widow Higgins runs her fingers over her tired eyes. Then she sums it up.

"He paid in cash," she says.

Many are the brightly dressed ladies who pass in and out of the saloon bar of the Hotel de France. Rich in lace, with very rich color in their cheeks, and with very large hats that many egrets have died to adorn. They are agreeable to letting the gentleman from Praz buy them a richly colored drink. They listen with arch interest to his story. After all, every gentleman has a story. They make remarks indicating interest. "And you can't settle the estate without him?" they repeat. "*Oh*-what-a-*shame!*" Well, any excuse will serve when a dandyish gent from the provinces wants to come up and have his bit of fun. There are few nicer pigeons to pluck than these dandyish gents from the provinces, after all. But the gentleman from Praz can't seem to take a hint. And so, one after another, hints as to dinner ... the theater ... supper ... champagne ... the opera ... not only not being forthcoming, all such hints even on the ladies' parts meeting with no more response than, "Yes, but surely *some*-one must know my brother: *he has lived in Bella for years!*" ...well, sooner or later, the richly dressed ladies sigh and excuse themselves and move on.

Even if only to another table.

It is late.

Mlle. Toscanelli.

Mlle. Toscanelli is from Corsica. And if that is not French enough to suit any of the customers of the saloon bar of the Hotel de France, well, oh-*là-là!* Mlle. Toscanelli has no intention of wasting the evening over a peppermint shnops. She looks at the tin-type of the brother of the gentleman from Praz. "This has been retouched," says Mlle. Toscanelli.

"It is my brother Georg. We cannot settle the estate, you see, without him."

Mlle. Toscanelli has a question,

one which seems to indicate that emotions other than the purely sentimental sometimes animate the bosoms of the daughters of the warm South.

"How much is it worth to you to find him?"

A faint change seems to come over the gentleman from Praz, in his obsolete finery, and with his funny-fancy manners. He meets the hard, bright, black light eyes of Mlle. Toscanelli.

"Fifty ducats," he says. *"But no tricks!"*

Mlle. Toscanelli says, *"En avance."*

She counts the five notes of ten ducats each, snaps the tiny beaded and be-bijou'd reticule, starts to rise. "One moment, I wish to send a note," says the gentleman from Praz. "He is — where?"

He is in Hunyadi Street, Lower Hunyadi Street, Mlle. Toscanelli does not recollect the number, but there was an apthecary on the corner, and a bicycle shop next door to it.

It was as she said. However, the entire block had been erected by a builder who had used one set of house-plans. All the houses look alike; Mlle. Toscanelli could not remember which one it was. Not even the sight of the police, while she was still gazing up and down the block, aided her memory. And, when even the offer of another fifty ducats failed, it had to be assumed she was telling the truth.

Ah, how many police, and so suddenly, in Lower Hunyadi Street! And in the streets behind. And all around —

The apothecary's lips trembled. "But there was nothing illegal about it," he protested. "I have a *license* to sell opium. Fifty pillules of the anhydrous, here, all properly noted in my Record Book. See? See? Well, if I am shouted at, I cannot *think* what house!"

By the time he had gotten his nerves and his memory together, the police were being reinforced by soldiery. The residents of Lower Hunyadi Street seemed divided between a desire to utilize the best seats, those by their windows, and view the show — whatever its purpose might be — and a desire to barricade their windows with bedding, china-closets, and clothes-cabinets.

"Open up, Number Forty-four! Open up! Concierge! Porter!"

Fifty years of almost-unbroken peace under the Triune Monarchy had not fully persuaded the inhabitants out of the habit formed during fifty pervious decades of almost-unbroken war. The gates of the houses in Bella tend to be thick.

"Well," said Lobats, "we may as well send for the Firemen." Axes, ladders, a full siege.

Eszterhazy was sure that the porter — or someone — was watching. Someone who could open the doors without a violent assault — if he — or she — wished to.

"Hold up," he said. The police drew back. Then the soldiers. Eszterhazy walked across the street towards Number 44. Halfway across he stopped, drew his hand from his pocket, and, arm at the traditional forty-five degree angle, held up the *Provo.* A great sigh seemed to go up all around him. A moment later the gates swung open. He gestured to Lobats. They walked in.

A woman, not so old as concièrges are generally assumed to be, stood to one side, sobbing. "The poor man!" she cried. "The poor man! So suppose — suppose he *is* cracked. What if he does think he is King? Does that hurt the real King?" The two men went on through the empty courtyard, started up the stairs. "Don't be hurting him!" the woman screamed. "Don'you be hurting him ... the poor man ...."

He sat facing them, as they went in — and it had not taken them long to get in — but, in a moment, they realized that he was not really facing *them* at all. He was facing a full-length mirror. Somehow he had made shift to fix up a dais, and he had draped the chair all in crimson. It made do for a throne. He sat in his sleazy "robes" of state, cape and gown and collar of cotton-wool spotted with black tufts to resemble ermine. It was all false, even across foot-lights it would have looked almost false. His head was slumped to one side.

But the crown was on his head, his tell-tale head, the crown with its pendants was on his head, so tightly that it had not fallen off; and the orb and sceptre, though his hands had slid into his lap, still his hands clenched them tightly.

For most of his life he had been no one and nobody. For now, however, he was as much King of Jerusalem as the Crown Jewels could make him — or anyone — King of Jerusalem.

The crown and orb and sceptre of the ancient and mysterious Regalia. They, and the fully fatal dose of fifty pillules of anhydrous opium.

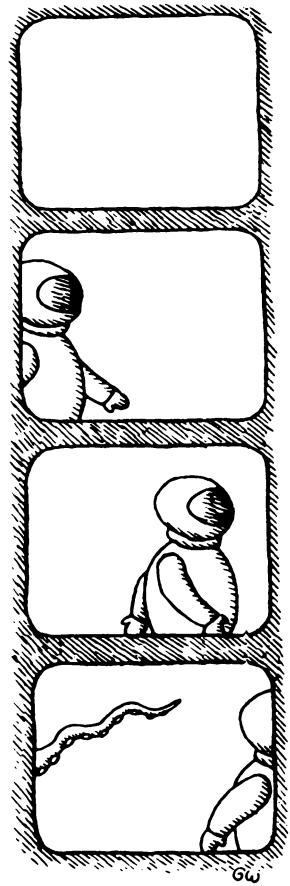
ELECTRA AND THE BEAST, or INCEST, LIKE CHARITY, BEGINS AT HOME

Of all the speculative literary subgenres, pure fantasy is the one that has reached the screen least often. There are numerous examples, of course, but still far fewer than the many sf and supernatural films. The heyday of the fantasy film was, oddly, the '40's, and they ranged from the whimsical (boys with blue hair and dancing caterpillars) through the saccharine (epitomally "Portrait of Jenny" despite its gorgous craftsmanship) to the cutely cloying (most of the Disney abominations).

During the late '40's, however, a film appeared from France that was free from whimsey and sugar; whose plot evinced the dark power of the best fantasy and whose visual production in scene after scene brought forth the sense of wonder — pure magic unfolding before your eyes. That film was, of course, Jean Cocteau's "Beauty and the Beast," and can one ever forget Beauty floating down the corridor of the Beast's castle (in slow motion, long before it was a fashionable cinematic device) as living arms extended from the walls, bearing candelabras that burst into spontaneous flame?

BAIRD SEARLES

Films



I'd known that a film had been made in France recently that was an *homage* to BatB; it has finally been relased here. Called *Donkey Skin* (*Peau d-Ane*), it has moments as magical as any in the Cocteau film, but some near-fatal flaws, also.

It, too, retells a classic Charles Perrault fairy tale (but not quite so straightforwardly) which has some startling touches. A king tells his dying wife that he will not marry again until he finds a princess more beautiful than she. Unfortunately, there seem to be no more beautiful princesses left — except one, his own daughter, to whom he dutifully proposes marriage. Being a girl of apparently normal psychology, she is rather taken by the idea, but is advised against it by her fairy godmother. So she flees the castle, disguised in the skin of the donkey whose droppings have been a financial mainstay of the kingdom (they are jewels and gold), and takes refuge as a neighboring king's scullery maid. There is a prince around, and after various complications (a ring-trying-on contest, etc.), everybody lives happily ever after.

There is much magic here — red and blue horses, a nicely casual conversation between the prince and a talking rose, an evil old woman who spits toads. and, above all, one of those effects that totally convinces the eye: a magnificent Baroque gown "the color of weather," into the fabric of which is woven moving clouds against an emerald sky. The sets are lavish and appropriate: castles and throne rooms (the throne of the one king is a great white cat) and peacocks on the footrails of the beds. The costumes are more than lavish: wonderful fairy tale gowns for the women, with towering ruffs and collars, and magnificent doublets for the men, an encasing as beetles' wings, with shoulders out to *there* and slashed sleeves down to *there.*

What removes the film from the stature of "Beauty and the Beast" is a persistent hint of the cute. I'm ambiguous about the fairy godmother, who has a dangerous tendency toward anachronism, obviously based on T. H. White's Merlin and Morgause (the FG has a telephone in her woodland bower, talks about run-down batteries, and arrives at the wedding in a helicopter).

But I am thoroughly *un*ambiguous about the nasty little songs that the characters tend to break into like a collective rash. They are by Michel Legrand, and would give Cocteau a severe attack of the vapors, evoking, as they inevitably do, the Disney approach to the fairy tale film.

Nonetheless, the film is more than worth it for its lavishness and magical moments. And to close, a specialist's view: for those who know Cocteau's film well, there *are* many little references to it and him to look for. First and foremost, the Beast himself, Jean Marais; but also living statues who follow the action with their heads and eyes, laundry hanging in the farmyard, the princess on a dream journey with the prince trying a pipe, and other *auteurish* touches that are fun to try to catch.

I think my kindly editor will let me get away with a brief reference to a theatrical event, since it is *about* genre film and since it is the basis for an upcoming movie itself. In fact, if "Donkey Skin" hadn't come along, I might have done the major part of this piece on it and called it "Frankenstein Rererere-dux" (which might just have led to a revolt by you gentle readers, not to mention my kindly editor) since it is yet *another* Frankenspinoff. Called *The Rocky Horror Show*, it hit Broadway after a great success in England; vaguely akin to "Young Frankenstein" in being a satire on bad Frankensequels, it seems slightly derivitive but in conception predated that film. It has music — some good hard rock — and some fine mad moments (the creature's slab is a vintage gas station Coca Cola cooler), but the major interest is a sort of philosophical analog between obscenity in the 19th century sense (which is what experiments such as Frankenstein's were considered) and obscenity in the 20th century sense, i. e. purely sexual matters. So the doctor is a "transvestite from transsexual Transylvania" and the matters the square couple who wander into the castle get involved in are perversely sexual as well as perversely scientific. Tim Curry, as the tftT, gives a knockout performance, somehow combining Katharine Hepburn, Judy Canova, and Boris Karloff, which I hope comes across as well on screen.

Late - late - late - show - dept ... Speaking of fantasies, I discovered a real oldie (1934) the other night that is quite interesting. Called "Death Takes a Holiday," it is stagy, over-dramatic and dated, but still has a mystical, poetic quality. It tells how Death takes flesh and joins an aristocrats' house party to find out what living is, and does so by finding love. It is the old story of the virginal girl in love with Death that dates back to Pluto and Persephone — it was said to be a rape, but who can say what passed between the two privately?

Dr. Asimov's Black Widowers stories are primarily mysteries, but after the fine reaction to "Nothing Like Murder," (October 1974, the first of the well known series to appear here) we persuaded the good doctor to contribute an occasional tale with an sf angle. And so here for your enjoyment is a brand new Black Widower ...

Earthset and Evening Star

by ISAAC ASIMOV

Emmanuel Rubin, whose latest mystery novel was clearly proceeding smoothly, lifted his drink with satisfaction and let his eyes gleam genially through his thick-lensed glasses.

"The mystery story," he pontificated, "has its rules which, when broken, make it an artistic failure, whatever success it may have in the marketplace."

Mario Gonzalo, whose hair had been recently cut to allow a glimpse of the back of his neck, said, as though to no one, "It always amuses me to hear a writer describe something he scrawls on paper as art." He looked with some complacency at the cartoon he was making of the guest for that month's banquet session of the Black Widowers.

"If what you do is the definition of art," said Rubin, "I withdraw the term in connection with the writer's craft. — One thing to avoid, for instance, is the idiot plot."

"In that case," said Thomas Trumbull, helping himself to another roll and buttering it lavishly, "aren't you at a disadvantage?"

Rubin said loftily, "By an idiot plot, I mean one in which the solution would come at once if an idiot investigator would but ask a logical question, or in which an idiot witness would but tell something he knows and which he has no reason to hide."

Geoffrey Avalon, who had left a neatly cleaned bone on his plate as the only witness of the slab of roast beef that had once rested there, said, "But no skilled practitioner would do that, Manny. What you do is set up some reason to prevent the asking or telling of the obvious."

"Exactly," said Rubin. "For instance, what I've been writing is

essentially a short story if one moves in a straight line. The trouble is the line is so straight, the reader will see its end before I'm halfway. So I have to hide one crucial piece of evidence, and do it in such a way that I don't make an idiot plot out of it. So I invent a reason to hide that piece, and in order to make the reason plausible, I have to build a supporting structure around it — and I end with a novel, and a damn good one." His sparse beard quivered with self-satisfaction.

Henry, the perennial waiter at the Black Widower banquets, removed the plate from in front of Rubin with his usual dexterity. Rubin, without turning, said, "Am I right, Henry?"

Henry said softly, "As a mystery reader, Mr. Rubin, I find it more satisfying to have the piece of information delivered to me and to find that I have been insufficiently clever and did not notice."

"I just read a mystery," said James Drake, in his softly hoarse smoker's voice, "in which the whole point rested on character 1 being really character 2, because the *real* character 1 was dead. I was put on to it at once because in the list of characters at the start, character 1 was not listed. Ruined the story for me."

"Yes," said Rubin, "but that wasn't the author's fault. Some flunky did that. I once wrote a story which was accompanied by one illustration that no one thought to show me in advance. It happened to give away the point."

The guest had been listening quietly to all this. His hair was just light enough to be considered blond, and it had a careful wave in it that looked, somehow, as though it belonged there. He turned his rather narrow but clearly good-humored face to Roger Halsted, his neighbor, and said, "Pardon me, but since Mannie Rubin is my friend, I know he is a mystery writer. Is this true of the rest of you as well? Is this a mystery writer organization?"

Halsted, who had been looking with somber approval at the generous slab of Black Forest torte that had been placed before him as dessert, withdrew his attention with some difficulty and said, "Not at all. Rubin is the only mystery writer here. I'm a mathematics teacher myself; Drake is a chemist; Avalon is a lawyer; Gonzalo is an artist; and Trumbull is a code expert with the government.

"On the other hand," he went on, "we do have an interest in this sort of thing. Our guests often have problems they bring up for discussion, some sort of mystery, and we've been rather lucky —"

The guest leaned back with a small laugh. "Nothing of the sort

here, alas. Of the mystery, the murder, the fearful hand clutching from behind the curtain, there is nothing in my life. It is all very straightforward, alas, very dull. I am not even married." He laughed again.

The guest had been introduced as Jean Servais, and Halsted, who had attacked the torte with vigor and who felt a friendly glow filling him in consequence, said, "Does it matter to you if I call you John?"

"I would not strike you, sir, if you did, but I pray you not to. It is not my name. Jean, please."

Halsted nodded. "I'll try. I can manage that 'zh' sound, but getting it properly nasal is another thing. Zhohng," he said.

"But that is excellent. Most formidable."

"You speak English very well," said Halsted, returning the politeness.

"Europeans require linguistic talent," said Servais. "Besides, I have lived in the United States for nearly ten years now. You are all Americans, I suppose. Mr. Avalong looks British somehow."

"Yes, I think he likes to look British," said Halsted. And, with a certain hidden pleasure, he said, "And it's Avalon. Accent on the first syllable and nothing nasal at the end."

But Servais only laughed. "Ah, yes, I will try. When I first knew Mannie, I called him 'Roo-bang' with the accent on the last syllable and a strong nasalization. He corrected me very vigorously and at great length. He is full of pepper, that one."

The conversation had grown rather heated by this time over a general dispute concerning the relative merits of Agatha Christie and Raymond Chandler, with Rubin maintaining a rather lofty silence as though he knew someone who was better than either but would not mention the name out of modesty.

Rubin seemed almost relieved when, with the coffee well in progress and Henry ready to supply the postprandial brandy, the time came for him to tap the water glass with his spoon and say, "Cool it, cool it, gentlemen. We are coming now to the time when our guest, Jean Servais, is to pay for his dinner. Tom, it's all yours."

Tom scowled and said, "If you don't mind, Mr. Servais," giving the final "s" just enough of a hiss to make his point, "I'm not going to try to display my French accent and make the kind of jackass of myself that my friend, Manny Rubin, does. — Tell me, sir, how do you justify your existence?"

"Why, easily," said Servais, pleasantly, "did I not exist, you would be without a guest today."

"Please leave us out of it.

Answer in more general terms."

"In general, then, I build dreams. I design things that cannot be built, things I will never see, things that may never be."

"All right," said Trumbull, looking glum, "you're a science fiction writer like Manny's pal, what's his name — uh — Asimov."

"No friend of mine," said Rubin, swiftly. "I just help him out now and then when he's stuck on some elementary scientific point."

Gonzalo said, "Is he the one you once said carried the *Columbia Encyclopedia* around with him because he was listed there?"

"It's worse now," said Rubin. "He's bribed someone at the *Britannica* to put him into the new 15th edition, and these days he drags the whole set with him wherever he goes."

"The new 15th edition —" began Avalon.

"For God's sake," said Trumbull, "will you let our guest speak?"

"No, Mr. Trumbull," said Servais, as though there had been no interruption at all, "I am no science fiction writer, though I read it sometimes. I read Ray Bradbury, for instance, and Harlan Ellison." (He nasalized both names.) "I don't think I have ever read Asimov."

"I'll tell him that," muttered Rubin. "He'll love it."

"But," continued Servais, "I suppose you might call me a science fiction engineer."

"What does that mean?" asked Trumbull.

"I do not write of Lunar colonies. I design them."

"You *design* them!"

"Oh, yes, and not Lunar colonies only, though that is our major task right now. We work in every field of imaginative design for private industry, Hollywood, even NASA."

Gonzalo said, "Do you really think people can live on the Moon?"

"Why not? It depends on what mankind is willing to do, how large an initial advancement it is ready to make. The environment on the Moon can be engineered to the precise equivalent of Earth, over restricted underground areas, except for gravity. We must be content with a Lunar gravity that is one-sixth our own. Except for that, we need only allow for original supplies from Earth and for clever engineering — and that is where we come in, my partner and I."

"You're a two-man firm?"

"Essentially. — While my partner remains my partner, of course."

"Are you breaking up?"

"No, no. But we quarrel over small points. It is not surprising. It is a bad time for him. But, no, we will not break up. I have made up

my mind to give in to him, perhaps. Of course, I am entirely in the right, and it is a pity to lose what I would have."

Trumbull leaned back in his chair, folded his arms, and said, "Will you tell us what the argument is all about? We can then state our own preferences, whether for you or for your partner."

"It would not be a hard choice, Mr. Trumbull, for the sane," said Servais. "I swear it. — This is the way it is. We are designing a full Lunar colony, in complete detail. It is for a motion picture company and it is for a good fee. They will make use of some of it in a grand science fiction spectacle they are planning. We naturally supply far more than they can use, but the idea is that if they have a totally self-consistent picture of what may be — and, for a wonder, they want it as scientifically accurate as possible — they can choose what they wish of it for use."

"I'll bet they bollix it up," said Drake, pessimistically, "no matter how careful you are. They'll give the Moon an atmosphere."

"Oh, no," said Servais, "not after six Lunar landings. That error we need not fear. Yet I have no doubt they will make mistakes. They will find it impossible to handle low-gravity effects properly throughout, and the exigencies of the plot will force some infelicities.

"Still that cannot be helped, and our job is merely to supply them with material of the most imaginative possible. This is my point, as you will see in a moment. — We plan a city, a small city, and it will be against the inner lip of a crater. This is unavoidable because the plot of the movie demands it. However, we have our choice as to the identity and location of the crater, and my partner, perhaps because he is an American, goes for the obvious with an American directness. He wishes to use the crater, Copernicus.

"He says that it is a name that is familiar; that if the city is called 'Camp Copernicus,' that alone will breathe the Moon, exotic adventure, and so on. Everyone knows, he says, the name of the astronomer who first placed the Sun at the center of the planetary system, and it is a name, moreover, that sounds impressive.

"I, on the other hand, am not impressed with this. As seen from Copernicus, the Earth is high in the sky and stays there. As you all know, the Moon faces one side always to the Earth, so that from any spot on the Moon's surface, the Earth is always more or less in the same spot in the sky."

Gonzalo said suddenly, "If you want the Lunar city to be on the other side of the Moon so that the Earth *isn't* in the sky, you're crazy.

The audience will absolutely want the Earth there."

Servais held up his hand in agreement. "Absolutely! I agree. But if it is always there, it is almost as though it is *not* there. One gets too used to it. No, I choose a more subtle approach. I wish the city to be in a crater that is on the boundary of the visible side. From there, of course, you will see the Earth at the horizon.

"Consider what this introduces. The Moon does not keep the same side to the Earth exactly. It swings back and forth by a very small amount. For fourteen days it swings one way and then for fourteen days it swings back. This is called 'libration'" (he had paused here as though to make sure he was pronouncing it correctly in English) "and it comes about because the Moon does not move in a perfect circle about the Earth.

"Now, you see, if we establish Camp Bahyee in the crater of that name, the Earth is not only at the horizon, but it moves up and down in a 28-day cycle. Properly located, the Lunar colonists will see the Earth rise and set, slowly, of course. This lends itself to imaginative exploitation. The characters can arrange for some important action at Earthset, and the different positions of the Earth can indicate passage of time and raise the suspense. Some terrific special effects are possible, too. If Venus is near the Earth and Earth is in a fat crescent stage, Venus will then be at its brightest; and when Earth sets, we can show Venus in the airless sky of the Moon, to be a very tiny crescent itself."

"Earthset and evening star, and one clear call for me," muttered Avalon.

Gonzalo said, "Is there really a crater called Bahyee."

"Absolutely," said Servais. "It is, in fact, the largest crater that can be seen from the Earth's surface. It is 290 kilometers across — 180 miles."

"It sounds like a Chinese name," said Gonzalo.

"French! said Servais, solemnly. "A French astronomer of that name was mayor of Paris in 1789 at the time of the Revolution."

"That wasn't a good time to be mayor," said Gonzalo.

"So he discovered," said Servais. "He was guillotined in 1793."

Avalon said, "I am rather on your side, Mr. Servais. Your proposal lends scope. What was your partner's objection?"

Servais shrugged in a gesture that was more Gallic than anything he had yet said or done. "Foolish ones. He says that it will be too complicated for the movie people. They will confuse things, he says. He also points out that the Earth

moves too slowly in the Moon's sky. It would take days for the Earth to lift its entire globe above the horizon, and days for it to lower entirely below the horizon."

"Is that right?" asked Gonzalo.

"It's right, but what of that? It will still be interesting."

Halsted said, "They can fudge that. Make the Earth move a little faster. So what?"

Servais looked discontented. "That's not so good. My partner says this is precisely what the movie people will do, and this alteration of astronomical fact will be disgraceful. He is very violent about it, finding fault with everything, even with the name of the crater, which he says is ridiculous and laughable so that he will not endure it in our report. We have never had arguments like this. He is like a madman."

"Remember," said Avalon, "you said you would give in."

"Well, I will have to," said Servais, "but I am not pleased. Of course, it is a bad time for him."

Rubin said, "You've said that twice now, Jean. I've never met your partner, so I can't judge the personalities involved. Why is it a bad time?"

Servais shook his head. "A month ago, or a little more, his wife killed herself. She took sleeping pills. My partner was a devoted husband, most uxorious. Naturally, it is terrible for him and, just as naturally, he is not himself."

Drake coughed gently, "Should he be working?"

"I would not dare suggest he not work. The work is keeping him sane."

Halsted said, "Why did she kill herself?"

Servais didn't answer in words but gestured with his eyebrows in a fashion that might be interpreted in almost any way.

Halsted persisted. "Was she incurably ill?"

"Who can say?" said Servais, sighing. "For a while, poor Howard —" He paused in embarrassment. "It was not my intention to mention his name."

Trumbull said, "You can say anything here. Whatever is mentioned in this room is completely confidential — Our waiter, too, before you ask, is completely trustworthy."

"Well," said Servais, "his name doesn't matter in any case. It is Howard Kaufman. In a way, work has been very good for him. Except at work, he is almost dead, himself. Nothing is any longer important to him."

"Yes," said Trumbull, "but now something *is* important to him. He wants his crater, not your crater."

"True," said Servais. "I have thought of that. I have told myself

it is a good sign: He throws himself into something. It is a beginning. And perhaps all the more reason, then, that I should give in. Yes, I will. — It's settled, I will. There's no reason for you gentlemen to try to decide between us. The decision is made, and in his favor."

Avalon was frowning. "I suppose we should go on to question you further on the work you do, and I suppose, moreover, that we should not intrude on a private misfortune. Here at the Black Widowers, however, no questions are barred, and there is no fifth amendment to plead. I am dissatisfied, sir, with your remarks concerning the unfortunate woman who committed suicide. As a happily married man, I am puzzled at the combination of love and suicide. You said she wasn't ill?"

"Actually, I didn't," said Servais, "and I am uncomfortable at discussing the matter."

Rubin struck the empty glass before him with his spoon. "Host's privilege," he said vigorously. There was silence.

"Jean," he said, "you are my guest and my friend. We can't force you to answer questions, but in offering our hospitality, I made it clear that the price was the grilling. If you have been guilty of a criminal act and don't wish to discuss it, leave now and we will say nothing. If you will talk, then, whatever you say, we will still say nothing."

"Though if it is indeed a criminal act," said Avalon, "we would certainly strongly advise confession."

Servais laughed rather shakily. He said, "For one minute there, for one frightened minute, I thought I had found myself in a Kafka novel and would be tried and condemned for some crime you would drag out of me against my will. Gentlemen, I have committed no crime of importance. A speeding ticket, a bit of creative imagination on my tax return — all that is, so I hear it said, as American as apple pie. But if you're thinking I killed that woman and made it look like suicide — please put it out of your heads at once. It *was* suicide. The police did not question it."

Halsted said, "Was she ill?"

"All right, then, I will answer. She was not ill as far as I know. But, after all, I am not a doctor and I did not examine her."

Halsted said, "Did she have children?"

"No. No children. — Ah, Mr. Halsted, I suddenly remember that you spoke earlier that your guests had problems which they brought up for discussion, and I said I had none. I see you have found one anyway."

Trumbull said, "If you're so sure it was suicide, I suppose she left a note."

"Yes," said Servais, "she left one."

"What did it say?"

"I couldn't quote it exactly. I did not myself see it. According to Howard, it was merely an apology for causing unhappiness but that she could not go on. It was quite banal, and I assure you it satisfied the police."

Avalon said, "But if it was a happy marriage and there was no illness and no complications with children, then — Or were there complications with children? Did she want children badly and did her husband refuse —"

Gonzalo interposed. "No one kills themselves because they don't have kids."

"People kill themselves for the stupidest reasons," said Rubin. "I remember —"

Trumbull cried out with stentorian rage, "Damn it, you guys, Jeff has the floor."

Avalon said, "Was the lack of children a disturbing influence?"

"Not as far as I know," said Servais. "Look, Mr. Avalon, I am careful in what I say, and I did *not* say it was a happy marriage."

"You said your partner was devoted to his wife," said Avalon, gravely, "and you used that fine old word 'uxorious' to describe him."

"Love," said Servais "is insufficient if it flows but one way. I did not say that *she* loved *him.*"

Drake lit another cigarette. "Ah," he said, "the plot thickens."

Avalon said, "Then it is your opinion that that had something to do with the suicide."

Servais looked harassed. "It is more than my opinion, sir. I *know* it had something to do with the suicide."

"Would you tell us the details?" asked Avalon, unbending just slightly from his usual stiff posture as though to convert his question into a courtly invitation.

Servais hesitated, then said, "I remind you that you have promised me all is confidential. Mary — Madame Kaufman and my partner were married for seven years, and it seemed a comfortable marriage, but who can tell in affairs of this sort?

"There was another man. He is older than Howard and to my eyes not as good-looking — but again who can tell in affairs of this sort? What she found in him is not likely to be there on the surface for all to see."

Halsted said, "How did your partner take *that?*"

Servais looked up and flushed distinctly. "He never knew. Surely, you are not of the opinion that I told him this? I am not the type, I assure you. It is not for me to interfere between husband and wife. And, frankly, if I had told Howard, he would not have

believed me. It is more likely he would have attempted to strike me. And then what was I to do? Present proof? Was I to arrange matters so as to have them caught under conditions that could not be mistaken? No, I said nothing."

"And he really didn't know?" asked Avalon, clearly embarrassed.

"He did not. It had not been going on long. The pair were excessively cautious. The husband was blindly devoted. What would you?"

"The husband is always the last to know," said Gonzalo, sententiously.

Drake said, "If the affair was so well hidden, how did you find out, Mr. Servais?"

"Purest accident, I assure you," said Servais. "An incredible stroke of misfortune for her in a way. I had a date for the evening. I did not know the girl well, and it did not, after all, work out. I was anxious to be rid of her, but first — what would you have, it would not be gentlemanly to abandon her — I took her home in an odd corner of the city. And, having said good-by in a most perfunctory manner, I went into a nearby diner to have a cup of coffee and recover somewhat. And there I saw Mary Kaufman and a man.

"Alas, it jumped to the eye. It was late; her husband, I remembered at once, was out of town, her attitude toward the man — Accept my assurances that there is a way a woman has of looking at a man that is completely unmistakable, and I saw it then. And if I were at all unsure, the expression on her face, when she looked up and saw me frozen in surprise, gave it all away.

"I left at once, of course, with no greeting of any kind, but the damage was done. She called me the next day, in agony of mind, the fool, fearful that I would carry stories to her husband, and gave me a totally unconvincing explanation. I assured her that it was a matter in which I did not interest myself in the least, that it was something so unimportant that I had already forgotten it. — I am glad, however, I did not have to face the man. Him, I would have knocked down."

Drake said, "Did you know the man?"

"Slightly," said Servais. "He moved in our circles in a very distant way. I knew his name; I could recognize him. — It didn't matter, for I never saw him after that. He was wise to stay away."

Avalon said, "But why did she commit suicide? Was she afraid her husband would find out?"

"Is one ever afraid of that in such a case?" demanded Servais, with a slight lifting of his lip. "And if she were, surely she would end the affair. No, no, it was something far more common than that. Some-

thing inevitable. In such an affair, gentlemen, there are strains and risks which are great and which actually add an element of romance. I am not entirely unaware of such things, I assure you.

"But the romance does not continue forever, whatever the story books may say, and it is bound to fade for one faster than for the other. Well, then, it faded for the man in this case before it did for the woman — and the man took the kind of action one sometimes does in such affairs. He left — went — disappeared. And so the lady killed herself."

Trumbull drew himself up and frowned ferociously. "For that reason?"

"I assume for that reason, sir. It has been known to happen. I did not know of the man's disappearance, you understand, till afterward. After the suicide, I went in search of him, feeling he was in some way responsible, and rather promising myself to relieve my feelings by bloodying his nose — I have a strong affection for my partner, you understand, and I felt his sufferings — but I discovered the fine lover had left two weeks before and left no forwarding address. He had no family and it was easy for him to leave, that blackguard. I could have tracked him down, I suppose, but my feelings were not strong enough to push me that far. And yet, I feel the guilt —"

"What guilt?" asked Avalon.

"It occurred to me that when I surprised them — quite unintentionally, of course — the element of risk to the man became unacceptably high. He knew I knew him. He may have felt that sooner or later it would come out, and he did not wish to await results. If I had not stumbled into that diner, they might still be together, she might still be alive, who knows?"

Rubin said, "That is farfetched, Jean. You can't deal rationally with the ifs of history. — But I have a thought."

"Yes, Mannie."

"After the suicide, your partner was very quiet, nothing is important to him. I think you said that. But now he is quarreling with you violently, though he has never done that before, I gather. Something may have happened in addition to the suicide. Perhaps *now* he has discovered his wife's infidelity and the thought drives him mad."

Servais shook his head. "No, no. If you think I have told him, you are quote wrong. I admit I think of telling him now and then. It is difficult to see him, my dear friend, wasting away over a woman who, after all, was not worthy of him. It is not proper to pine away for one who was not faithful to him in life. Ought I not tell him this?

Frequently, it seems to me that I should and even must. He will face the truth and begin life anew. — But then I think and even *know* that he will not believe me, that our friendship will be broken, and he will be worse off than before."

Rubin said, "You don't understand me. Might it not be that someone *else* has told him? How do you know you were the only one who knew?"

Servais seemed a bit startled. He considered it and said, "No. He would, in that case, certainly have told me the news. And, I assure you, he would have told it to me with the highest degree of indignation and informed me that he at once attempted to strike the villain who would so malign his dead angel."

"Not," said Rubin, "if he had been told that *you* were his wife's lover. Even if he refused to believe it, even if he beat the informant to the ground, could he tell *you* the tale under such circumstances? And could he be entirely certain? Would he not find it impossible to avoid picking fights with you in such a case?"

Servais seemed still more startled. He said slowly, "It was, of course, not I. No one could possibly have thought so. Howard's wife did not in the least appeal to me, you understand." He looked up and said fiercely, "You must accept the fact that I am telling you the truth about all this. It was *not* I, and I will *not* be suspected. If anyone had said it was I, it could only be out of deliberate malice."

"Maybe it was," said Rubin. "Might it not be the real lover who would make the accusation — out of fear you would give him away. By getting in his story first —"

"Why should he do this? He is away. No one suspects him. No one pursues him."

"He might not know that." said Rubin.

"Pardon me." Henry's voice sounded softly from the direction of the sideboard. "May I ask a question?"

"Certainly," said Rubin, and the odd silence fell that always did when the quiet waiter, whose presence rarely obtruded on the festivities, made himself heard.

Servais looked startled, but his politeness held. He said, "Can I do anything for you, waiter?"

Henry said, "I'm not sure, sir, that I quite understand the nature of the quarrel between yourself and your partner. Surely, there must have been decisions of complexity to make as far as the details of the colony were concerned."

"You don't know even a small part of it," said Servais, indulgently.

"Did your partner and you

quarrel over all those details, sir?"

"N-no," said Servais. "We did not quarrel. There were discussions, of course. It is useless to believe that two men, each with a strong will and pronounced opinions, will agree everywhere, or even anywhere, but it all worked out reasonably. We discussed, and eventually we came to some conclusion. Sometimes I had the better of it, sometimes he, sometimes neither or both."

"But then," said Henry, "there was this one argument over the actual location of the colony, over the crater, and there it was all different. He attacked even the name of the crater fiercely and, in this one case, left no room for the slightest compromise."

"No room at all. And you are right. Only in this one case."

Henry said, "Then I am to understand that at this time, when Mr. Rubin suspects that your partner is being irritated by suspicion of you, he was completely reasonable and civilized over every delicate point of Lunar engineering and was wildly and unbearably stubborn only over the single matter of the site — over whether Copernicus or the other crater was to be the place where the colony was to be built."

"Yes," said Servais, with satisfaction. "That is precisely how it was, and I see the point you are making, waiter. It is quite unbelievable to suppose that he would quarrel with me over the site out of ill-humor over suspicions that I have placed horns on him, when he does not quarrel with me on any other point. Assuredly, he does not suspect me of ill-dealing. I thank you, waiter."

Henry said, "May I go a little further, sir?"

"By all means," said Servais.

"Earlier in the evening," said Henry, "Mr. Rubin was kind enough to ask my opinion over the techniques of his profession. There was the question of deliberate omission of details by witnesses."

"Yes," said Servais, "I remember the discussion. But I did not deliberately omit any details."

"You did not mention the name of Mrs. Kaufman's lover."

Servais frowned. "I suppose I didn't, but it wasn't deliberate. It is entirely irrelevant."

"Perhaps it is," said Henry, "unless his name happens to be Bailey."

Servais froze in his chair. Then he said anxiously. "I don't recall mentioning it. Dieu! — I see your point again, waiter. If it slips out now without my remembering it, it is possible to suppose that without quite realizing it, I may have said something that led Howard to suspect —"

Gonzalo said, "Hey, Henry, I

don't recall Jean giving us any name."

"Nor I," said Henry. "You did not give the name, sir."

Servais relaxed slowly and then said, frowning, "Then how did you know? Do you know these people?"

Henry shook his head. "No, sir, it was just a notion of mine that arose out of the story you told. From your reaction, I take it his name *is* Bailey?"

"Martin Bailey," said Servais, "how did you know?"

"The name of the crater in which you wished to place the site is Bahyee; the name of the city would be Camp Bahyee."

"Yes."

"But that is the French pronunciation of the name of a French astronomer. How is it spelled?"

Servais said, "B-a-i-l-l-y. — Great God, *Bailly!*"

Henry said. "In English pronunciation, pronounced like the not uncommon surname, Bailey. I am quite certain American astronomers use the English pronunciation and that Mr. Kaufman does, too. You hid that piece of information from us because you never thought of the crater in any other way than Bahyee. Even looking at it, you would hear the French sound in your mind, and make no connection with Bailey, the American surname."

Servais said, "But I still don't understand."

"Would your partner wish to publicize the name and place the site of a lunar colony in Bailly? Would he want to have the colony called Camp Bailly, after what a Bailey has done to him?"

"But he didn't *know* what Bailey had done to him," said Servais.

"How do you know that? Because there's an old saw that says the husband is always the last to know? How else can you explain his

utterly irrational opposition to this one point, even his insistence that the name itself is horrible. It is too much to expect of coincidence."

"But if he knew — if he knew — He didn't tell me. Why fight over it? Why not explain?"

"I assume," said Henry, "he didn't know you knew. Would he shame his dead wife by telling you?"

Servais clutched at his hair. "I never thought — Not for a moment."

"There is more to think," said Henry, sadly.

"What?"

"One might wonder how Bailey came to disappear, if your partner knew the tale. One might wonder if Bailey is alive? Is it not conceivable that Mr. Kaufman, placing all the blame on the other man, confronted his wife to tell her he had driven her lover away, even killed him, perhaps, and asked her to come back to him — and the response was suicide?"

"No," said Servais. "That is impossible."

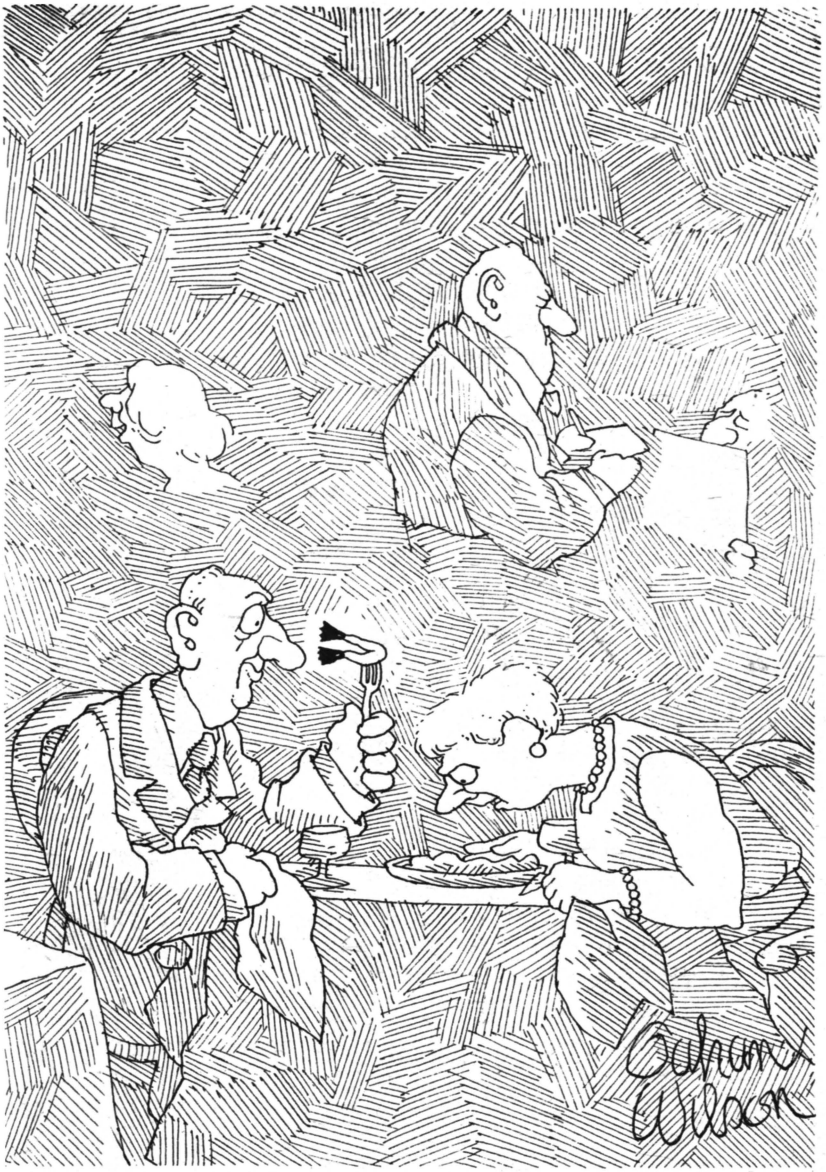
"It would be best, then, to find Mr. Bailey and make sure he is alive. It is the one way of proving your partner's innocence. It may be a task for the police."

Servais had turned very pale. "I can't go to the police with a story like that."

"If you do not," said Henry, "it may be that your partner, brooding over what he has done — if indeed he has done it — will eventually take justice into his own hands."

"You mean kill himself?" whispered Servais. "Is that the choice you are facing me with: accuse him to the police or wait for him to kill himself?"

"Or both," said Henry. "Life is cruel."



". . . and this looks like a tiny pair of aqualungs!"

The incredible account of one Henry Dickens of Salem, Mass. and what happened on Orbital Excursion Flight Number 54 . . .

The Curious Case of Henry Dickens

by ROBERT F. YOUNG

The gaunt individual wearing the seedy black business suit and the shabby black homburg, lugging the antiquated portmanteau whose existence the boarding inspector later so vehemently denied, was listed on the Orbital Flight 54 passenger roster as Henry Dickens of Salem, Mass. Other than for the discordant note struck by his archaic apparel among their gay slacks and shorts and skirts and shirts, he did not markedly stand out from the other excursionists swarming up the boarding ramp, although Miss Shaw, the senior stewardess, later recalled having noted a certain arrogant air about him that "one seldom encounters among the middle classes."

Upon gaining the OEV passenger compartment, he sat down in the exact center of the rearmost double seat on the starboard side— "like he wanted people to think it was a single one so he could hog it all to himself," to quote one of the other excursionists, a Mrs. Halloran, who had entered just behind him — and shoved his portmanteau underneath it. Mrs. Halloran may or may not be right. It does seem unlikely, however, that, knowing as he must have from spending two months on the Celestial Excursions, Inc., waiting list how difficult even one such seat was to obtain, Henry Dickens would have been naive enough to believe that by means of so childish a stratagem he could retain possession of two.

An OEV (Orbital Excursion Vehicle) passenger compartment, as anyone who has ever gone on an orbital excursion flight knows, is distressingly reminiscent of the interior of a species of ground-transportation vehicle, now extinct, known as the Greyhound Bus. While it is true that the "driver's

seat" (read cockpit) is in the "rear" rather than in the "front," there are still the same two rows of double seats with the same narrow aisle in between; and while it is true that the ladies' and the men's rooms are located in the vehicle's nose rather than its rear end, the emergency airlock occupies almost the exact position the emergency door did. Augmenting still further one's instinctive conviction upon entering such a compartment that he has stepped into the past are the square portholes distributed at even intervals along the hull, one to each double seat. Not only do they look like windows, they are called windows.

At this point, however, the Space Age asserts itself with a vengeance, and one is suitably impressed by the rectangular floorviewers, inset in the deck in front of each double seat, and downright dazzled by the ceiling, which from fore to aft and from port to starboard consists of a single mammoth viewscreen that, once orbit is attained, relays the Heavens and all Its Wonders with such uncanny accuracy that the awed excursionist forgets for the duration of the five celestial circuits which excursion flights comprise that there *is* a ceiling.

The question of whether Henry Dickens meant to pre-empt both the window and the outside-seat is academic in any case; at any rate, he retained sole possession of them till the last excursionist entered and, for want of any other place to sit, sat down beside him. Dickens made room readily enough, but it was immediately evident to the latecomer — a Mr. Artemus Solnitz of Pittsburgh, Pa. — that his seatmate was a loner — "a misanthropist," as he later expressed it, "of the first magnitude." (Mr. Solnitz is a retired sanitation engineer who lives with his mother and who dedicated the best years of his life to collecting the variegated and inevitable by-products of civilized living (his phrase) and who now collects rare volumes. He is a member of the Holy Brethren Society of the New Reformed Presbyterian Church and sings in the choir every Sunday.)

Shortly after Mr. Solnitz's arrival, Miss Shaw entered the compartment, delivered her little spiel about the Heavenly Fare everyone was soon to partake of, explained how, in the unlikely event of an emergency, to unfold and get into the lightweight spacesuits hidden under the seat cushions, flicked a little switch next to the emergency airlock that caused the seats to tilt back into couches, and ordered everyone to relax while "Big G" was in

command, promising it would only be a short while before "Arty G" replaced "him." She then re-entered the cockpit, drew the steelflex curtains separating it from the compartment and arranged herself becomingly on the double acceleration-couch she shared with Miss Nicely, the junior stewardess, and that flanked the padded tilt-back seats occupied by Astro-pilot Archie Murdock and Astro-copilot Bix Braxton. Moments later, GO came through, and the OEV started starward.

The ion drive functioned flawlessly, and in no time at all "Big G" relinquished command, and everyone felt a faint, rather pleasant tug as "Arty G" took over. Miss Shaw re-entered the compartment and returned the little switch to its original position, retransforming the couches into seats. "Whew!" exclaimed Mr. Solnitz, who is rather portly and frequently suffers from shortness of breath, "that was really something, wasn't it!" Henry Dickens didn't say anything.

He was staring out the window. "It was as though," Mr. Solnitz observed afterward, "he had stopped breathing and turned into a statue."

Gradually the compartment filled with "Oooh's" and "Ahhh's" as pair after pair of eager eyes took in the Wonders the Celestial Excursions Baedeker had promised — those contained in the ceiling viewscreen, those visible through the windows, and, most of all, the blue-green one that had exploded into being at everyone's toe tips. "Why," someone exclaimed, "it looks just like a great big beachball!" Everyone laughed.

Everyone except Henry Dickens.

He was still staring out the window. Fixedly.

"Although I could not see his face directly," Miss Shaw stated at the inquest, "I was able to determine from its reflection in the glass that his gaze was inclined at a slight downward angle, not enough of a one to bring Earth into his ken, but one that strongly suggested that whatever it was that was so acutely fascinating him was located at but a brief distance below the orbital path the OEV was pursuing. Moreover, both the velocity at which we were traveling and the rigidity of his stare suggested that the source of his fascination was a panorama of some kind, rather than a single object. "Following his gaze," she went on to add, "I could see nothing — nothing, that is, other than a handful of distant stars which, to me at least, were singularly uninspiring and could not conceivably be responsible for his absorption."

In addition to being a most

attractive young lady, Miss Shaw is a most astute observer. We owe a great deal to her. It may very well be true, as Miss Nicely has so cattily pointed out on more than one occasion since the tragedy, that the senior stewardess sleeps with Astro-pilot Archie Murdock one night and Astro-copilot Bix Braxton the next, except on Tuesday, which is her day off, when, presumably, she sleeps with her fiancé; however, Miss Shaw's putative promiscuity in no way detracts from her qualities as a reliable reporter and, in any case, may very well amount to no more than a malicious fabrication on the part of Miss Nicely, whose facility for turning men off is surpassed only by Miss Shaw's facility for turning them on.

It is to Mr. Solnitz, who, having sat next to Dickens for almost one and one-half orbits, was provided with the maximum opportunity to observe him at close range, that we are most indebted for our intimate knowledge of this strange and disquieting personage. "I estimated his age at fortyish," Mr. Solnitz, numbered among whose many rare volumes are the Complete Works of Warwick Deeping, Somerset Maugham and John Galsworthy, said at the inquest. "But sometimes when I'd glance sideways at him, I'd get the devilish notion that he was either much younger or vastly older than I had initially surmised. I had to go by profile exclusively, because he never once looked in my direction — not even when he got up and stepped past me into the aisle."

"When he did this," asked J.P. Modd, the coroner who conducted the inquest, "did you suspect from his manner or his mien what his true intentions might be?"

"Why, no, of course not," Mr. Solnitz replied. "I simply took it for granted that he was going to 'the little boy's room.'"

OEV orbits are always equatorial and have a perigee of about one hundred and thirty miles and an apogee of about one hundred and forty. Thus, the celestial path followed by the OEV that carried Henry Dickens to his doom was a well-traveled one. So whatever he saw that ultimately moved him to act as he did cannot be imputed to the vehicle's happening to pass through a previously untraveled sector of space. Besides which, all of the excursionists — with the exception of Mr. Solnitz — were and are agreed that he couldn't have seen anything. "Why, my gosh," Jennifer Grossi, the pretty teen-ager who occupied the window seat just ahead of him remarked afterward, "there was nothing out there *to* see except a lot of silly

stars, a cheesy old moon and big fat old Earth! If there had been, I'd have seen it too!"

Her opinion, if not the way she expressed it, is typical of those voiced by the other excursionists before, during and after the inquest — again with the exception of Mr. Solnitz.

We have it from the last mentioned that not once during the one and just-under one-half orbits he observed his seatmate did Dickens remove his gaze from the window other than to give his head a quarter turn every fifteen minutes or so, presumably to relieve a crick in his neck. And when Mr. Solnitz called his attention to a particularly fine view of the Himalayas during the early part of orbit no. 2, all the rare-volume collector got for his gesture of friendship was a cantankerous, "Bah! Shove the f------ Himalayas! Shove the whole f------ Earth!"

Understandably, Mr. Solnitz made no further attempts at striking up a conversation. "There was no need for me to, in any case," he stated during his testimony, "for not long after his foul outburst, Dickens struck up a sporadic conversation with himself. A mumbling sort of affair conducted, or so it seemed to my uninitiated ear, throughout the entire linguistic spectrum. Limited as I am to a smattering of Latin and a smidgen of French surviving from my halcyon high-school days, my comprehension was confined to those parts of his monologue uttered in English. Once, in this latter language, he said, 'I could swear that throne was bigger than that!' On another occasion, he said, 'The lazy bastards have let the whole place go to pot. Believe you me, they'll snap shit when *I* take over!' And on a third, 'Bet he'll be surprised to see *me* after all these years! The bad penny — ha-ha! He never figured on the Space Age ... we'll see who kicks out who this time!'" All three of these odd utterances were corroborated by Jennifer Grossi, who overheard them also.

Our admiration of Miss Shaw's astuteness in the art of observation has already been noted. Exonerated *ex officio* from such time-consuming chores as preparing the midflight snack in the kitchenette aft of the cockpit and inventorying supplies in the adjacent larder, she could and did spend a great deal of her time in the passenger compartment, commenting knowledgeably on this Heavenly Wonder and that, and pointing out the Pleiades, Messier 31, the Magellanic Clouds and other such celestial sights to her attentive — with one exception audience. "Both his posture and his indifference to what I was

saying," she said of Dickens afterward, "reminded me of a time when I was a little girl and had been away to pre-finishing school for what seemed an eternity to my youthful perspective and was returning by monorail to my suburban home. Throughout the latter half of the return trip I kept my nose flattened against the window pane and my eyes glued to the familiar buildings and malls and shopping centers whisking by, utterly unresponsive to the repeated attempts on the part of my older sister to engage me in small talk. I was oblivious to all save those nostalgic touchstones I had once so blithely taken for granted and which now seemed so dear to me; and whenever there swam into my ken a building in need of repair or a mall whose greensward was overgrown, I felt personally affronted, fiercely indignant that the powers-that-were could have permitted such beauty to become tarnished out of sheer neglect.

"However," she went on to add, "subsequent self-analysis has revealed to me that this sentimental journey back to my childhood was sparked neither by Dickens' posture nor his indifference, but by the stark loneliness a young girl sometimes experiences while aspace, even when she is safe aboard a vessel surrounded by members of her own kind."

Toward the halfway point of orbit no. 2 when Henry Dickens retrieved his portmanteau from beneath the seat and stepped past Mr. Solnitz into the aisle ostensibly to go to "the little boy's room," the rare-volume collector was provided with a closer view of his seat mate's face. He was particularly struck by the size and markings of Henry Dickens' nose. "Actually, it was more like a snout than a nose," he told the coroner. "Reddish, as though he'd had a cold for some time and had been blowing it rather frequently, and pitted with pores as large as pockmarks. His face and neck, or at least those portions of them that were visible to me, were also pitted with pockmarklike pores. I couldn't see his ears — or rather, the one turned toward me (the other, of course, I couldn't see at all) — very well. Not only was a great deal of reddish hair growing out of it, it was partially hidden by more reddish hair sticking down from under his homburg. It was at this time, incidentally, that I at last located the source of the subtle odor which I had been half aware of ever since sitting down beside him and which I had absent-mindedly attrbitued to an unpleasant enamation from one or other of the various pieces of mechanical equipment endemic to an OEV."

This last remark (together with

several subsequent statements Mr. Solnitz gave utterance to) was at the behest of J.P. Modd erased from the inquest tapes. "In view of the fact that none of the other passengers nor any of the crew detected this 'faint sulfurous emanation,'" the coroner said, "it is my considered opinion that in all probability its sole source was Mr. Solnitz's imagination."

After gaining the aisle, Henry Dickens began walking in the direction of the rest rooms, unnoticed initially, save by two of the other excursionists (in addition, of course, to Mr. Solnitz), both of whom instinctively assumed, just as had the rare-volume collector, that his destination was "the little boy's room" (although, as one of them recalled later, it certainly seemed strange that he should have needed to take his suitcase with him). Unfortunately, during the weird sequence of events that rapidly ensued, Miss Shaw was in the cockpit (playing grabass with the crew, if we are to believe Miss Nicely), thus depriving us of a first-rate witness to the tragedy; however, by piecing together the accounts given by the excursionists and by adding to Mr. Solnitz's a large grain of salt, it is possible to reconstruct with reasonable accuracy Henry Dickens' final moments inside and outside the OEV.

He did *not* go to "the little boy's room" or anywhere near it. Instead, he proceeded up the aisle only as far as the emergency airlock, whereupon he stopped, grabbed the lever that secured the inner door and gave it a powerful yank. Nothing happened.

The lock protruded some three feet into the passenger compartment. Seated just aft of it were a Ms. Mary Hentz and her small son Vinnie. "Mary, Mary!" the little boy cried, "the bad man's eyes are buring!" At first Mary Hentz merely stared. Then, as a stream of "the foulest, vilest imprecations I ever heard in my life" began issuing from Henry Dickens' lips, she grabbed her son and "clutched him protectively to her breast."

Henry Dickens gave the lever another powerful yank. Another. The execrations issuing from his lips grew both in variety and volume, filling the entire compartment and bringing every eye to bear on this gaunt, terrible, blackclad figure wrestling wrathfully with a recalcitrant technological device "that would have tried the patience of a saint."

"With all that commotion going on in the passenger compartment," J.P. Modd demanded of Archie Murdock when it came the Astro-pilot's turn to testify, "how could you people in the cockpit possibly have heard nothing?"

A faint flush was seen to creep upward from Archie Murdock's neck and into his boyish cheeks. "We were completely absorbed, Bix and I, computing re-entry point, over coffee Miss Nicely had perked in the kitchenette and which Miss Shaw had just brought us, besides which those steelflex curtains they use nowadays are virtually soundproof. Also —"

The coroner cut him short. "Let's get back to the airlock lever. I won't go into the incongruity of the presence of such a relatively crude technological contraption aboard an OEV in an age wherein miniaturization has become a religion, but will you kindly tell me how such a device — upon whose successful manipulation the lives of an OEV's passengers could very well depend — could stick so tightly a grown man couldn't even budge it?"

Astro-pilot Archie Murdock shrugged. "I don't build OEVs — I only orbit 'em. Besides, he did get the lever unstuck finally."

When the lever yielded and the door swung open, Henry Dickens rushed into the lock and slammed the door behind him. Immediately, a red light began blinking just above it. "Oh, my God!" Ms. Mary Hentz screamed, "he's going to do it!"

Stenciled in big black letters on the door were the words, DO NOT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES ATTEMPT TO ENTER LOCK WHILE RED LIGHT IS NICTITATING. Perhaps this was why no one tried to abort the mad course of action Henry Dickens had apparently embarked upon.

More likely it was because everyone — port and starboard excursionists alike — was staring out the starboard windows.

Presently the mass vigil was rewarded: Henry Dickens floated into view.

"Floated" is the correct word. For even though he'd jettisoned himself, he was still part and parcel of the OEV's trajectory. Logically, he should have remained part of it throughout the remainder of the flight, or at least until re-entry took place. That he did not do so represents yet another irksome aspect of this already irksome case.

True, he continued to float for some time in full view of his enthralled audience. Visibility wasn't of the best, because Earth at this phase of the flight was between the OEV and the sun, and the only light there was to see by was the pale light of the stars. So, while Henry Dickens was indubitably dead, no trace of his ruptured lungs could be discerned upon his lips. As a matter of fact, he appeared quite comfortable, float-

ing there. He floated for a while on his back — or at least with his back toward Earth — his portmanteau resting on his stomach. At this stage, he rather resembled a large otter. Then, through some quirk of space, or perhaps as a result of a slight vacillation in the OEV's orbit, he rolled over onto his stomach, miraculously retaining possession of his portmanteau, and drifted rapidly away at a slight "downward" angle. Mere moments later, he winked out of sight.

With regard to the manner of Dickens' departure and disappearance, Mr. Solnitz's account differs radically from those given by the other excursionists and is responsible for the disproportionate amount of publicity accorded the inquest. "As I watched spellbound," he testified, "a pair of great reptilianlike wings sprouted suddenly from his shoulders and spread out gracefully on either side. He then quite matter-of-factly flew away from the OEV till he arrived at his destination, whereupon he quite naturally became as invisible to our mortal eyes as is the ethereal world upon which he landed. I am fully aware," Mr. Solnitz continued, in response, perhaps, to J.P. Modd's elevated eyebrows, "that in a vacuum, wings cannot function. But it is my contention that Henry Dickens' wings were not — are not — of the ordinary variety — that they are of a kind that function *only* in a vacuum; that indeed, in order even to manifest themselves, they *require* a vacuum. It is my further contention that encompassing the planet Earth at a mean elevation of some one hundred and twenty-nine and one-half miles there exists a reality we are incapable of perceiving physically but whose existence we have been aware of spiritually all our lives but have located, when we bothered to locate it at all, much closer to the surface of our globe. Generally, just above the clouds."

At this point, J.P. Modd posed a rather odd question: "Do you happen to have among your many rare volumes, Mr. Solnitz, an 1866 edition of *Paradise Lost* illustrated by Gustave Doré?"

"Indeed, I do," replied Mr. Solnitz. "It is one of my proudest possessions."

"Thank you, Mr. Solnitz. And thank you for your co-operation. You may be excused."

"Whether," the coroner said when he summed up, "Mr. Solnitz saw what he thought he saw or substituted for what he really saw a rather well-known Gustave Doré illustration is irrelevant. The 'Fallen Angel Theory' which he

implied in his testimony simply will not stand. Logic confutes it. Consider: Would a Fallen Angel with workable if invisible wings require a spaceship to get back into Heaven? And even if he did — even if, as Mr. Solnitz would have us believe, his wings work only in a vacuum — would he have needed to wait for millenniums for mere mortals like ourselves to create a vehicle which he, merely by applying his vaunted supernatural powers, could have created in a trice? Furthermore, would he have needed to wait more years yet for a less energy-consuming drive to be developed so the vehicle could be made available to the public, *and then have needed to wait two whole months to obtain a seat on it?*

"I maintain that he would not. I maintain that the reason Henry Dickens acted as he did is simplicity itself: he was tired of living. Just like the rest of us. In the absence of any evidence of foul play, there can be no other answer. Why he chose to make his quietus in so spectacular a fashion, we will never know, any more than we will ever know why he considered it necessary to take his personal belongings with him, or, for that matter, how he managed to get both them and the receptacle that contained them on board the OEV without the boarding inspector's knowledge. However, it isn't necessary for us *to* know these things.

"I think that I should also point out that the failure of the investigative authorities to unearth the slightest evidence that Henry Dickens lived in Salem, Mass., or ever did, cannot be construed as proof that Salem, Mass. was not his place of abode. There isn't a city in this country that doesn't have at least one recluse holed up somewhere of whom virtually no one is aware and of whom no official records exist.

"It is my decision, after considering all aspects of the case, that Henry Dickens was a perfectly ordinary, if somewhat eccentric, human being, who died by his own hand, of his own free will. I will so advise the appropriate authorities."

The coroner was right, of course. Just as we, as a race of people, were right in taking the initiative in the present Confrontation. There are some, of course, who insist that we didn't take it. That the mini-bomb that reduced Moscow to its basic molecules came from On High. The romantics, it would seem, are always with us. A pox on them!

THE WICKED WITCH IS DEAD

Good heavens, I've become a household word. I suppose that's inevitable if one lives long enough and writes very prolifically on a wide variety of subjects in a wide variety of outlets. But I'm not sure I'm comfortable with it.

I'm constantly being quoted, for instance. In a recent three hour TV special on the role of women, Barbara Walters quoted "the famous science writer, Isaac Asimov" and, as usual, I missed it. The news was brought to me by others, and no one remembered *what* she had quoted. What can I have said, I wonder?

Then, a week ago, I came dashing out of a TV studio to grab a taxi for my next appointment, and the driver was curious enough to ask what I had been doing there. I explained that I was a writer who had just been interviewed, and the driver admitted that he himself was trying to be a writer but had had no luck so far.

"Well," I said, trying to be consoling, "don't feel bad. Writing is a mug's game, anyway. Hardly any writer can make a living out of it."

"Isaac Asimov does," said the driver, broodingly — and left me speechless.

My favorite story of this sort,

ISAAC ASIMOV

Science

however, took place about a year ago, when Janet and I had been at the theater for the evening. We were back by about 11:40 P.M. and I turned on WQXR in order to make sure I got the midnight news so that I might find out if there was any late word on Watergate. (I was an insatiable Watergate fan.)

A voice came out of the radio and, as I listened absently, I began to find the statements familiar. I called out, in annoyance, "Hey, Janet, there's a joker here who's spouting my ideas, word for word."

Janet came over, listened for a moment, and said, patiently, "It's *you*, dear."

And so it was. I had been interviewed and taped a month before and had been just in time, inadvertently, to catch myself. It's just so difficult to recognize one's own voice when it isn't resonating in one's own skull cavities.

It's just going to get worse, too, since I have every intention of continuing to express my views on every conceivable subject — the more controversial, the better.

As on the matter of witches*, for instance.

Witchcraft, apparently, involves the use of supernatural methods for controlling the energies of the Universe toward, supposedly, some evil or destructive end.

Those who admitted the existence of witchcraft had no doubt that there were indeed supernatural powers who could be controlled by human beings using appropriate methods. Indeed, what else is "true religion" in the Western tradition but an attempt to use supernatural methods for controlling the energies of the Universe toward, supposedly, some good or constructive end?

The attempt to control supernatural powers is known as "magic" (though the word has been weakened these days to signify mere prestidigitation or illusion.) The word is derived from "Magu," the name given by the ancient Persians to their Zoroastrian priests; and, indeed, magic is the priestly function.

We don't use the word in connection with our own religion, but, really, doesn't the use of prayer represent an example of magic? By using appropriate words and, sometimes, music, by using sonorous foreign languages, incense, and other impressive adjuncts, we hope to persuade,

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**This magazine, after all, deals with fantasy as well as with science fiction.*

cajole or irritate a particular supernatural power into suspending the natural laws of the Universe just long enough to arrange things to suit our immediate personal needs — to make it rain, for instance, when the supernatural plan may be for a long drought.

Well, then, if religion uses the supernatural to good ends, and if witchcraft uses it to evil ends, a lot depends on how we define good and evil.

It is not surprising that generally, the final decision comes to this: that what *we* do is good, and what *they* do is evil.

The Bible sanctions magical practices for foretelling the future or, to use an equivalent phrase, for ascertaining the will of God. The Urim and Thummim, for instance, seem to have been lots kept in the vestments of the High Priest, and these could be cast, with appropriate rites, in such a way as to yield a marking that could be interpreted as a direct indication of the Divine will.

Attempts to use similar devices by any methods or rites not sanctified by the dominant religion (whatever it happens to be) are, of course, roundly condemned as dealing with demons, who are usually known in our language, as "familiar spirits." — The word, familiar, refers to a spirit bound to the service of a single individual and hence part of the family, so to speak.

Those who possess such a familiar spirit are "wizards" or "warlocks." Since, in Anglo-Saxon, a wizard is a "wise man" and a warlock is a "deceiver," I suspect the two terms were used for "our" priests and "their" priests, originally. A "sorcerer" is from a Latin word for "lot" and is therefore someone who ascertains the future by the use of lots such as the Urim and Thummim.

A feminine practioner of these arts is a "sorceress" or a "witch." The word witch is from the Anglo-Saxon "wicca," which may be related to "victim," so that a witch is one who presided over sacrifices — "their" wicked sacrifices, of course, not "our" good ones. A female conductor of sacrifices according to "our" rites is, of course, a "priestess."

When a land comes under a strong rule, and the ruler is committed to one particular ritual, then the state-rite becomes "religion" and all other rites become "witchcraft" and must be suppressed. This was the case in Israel, for instance, when Saul was king. "And Saul had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land." (1 Samuel 28:3).

But when Saul was faced with a crisis and turned to the Lord for

guidance, he failed. "And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." (1 Samuel 28:6).

Saul was forced, by the gravity of the crisis, to turn to other methods. "Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at En-dor." (1 Samuel 28:7).

This woman is not specifically called a witch in the Bible, but she is commonly known today as "the witch of Endor." It is for that reason that, in the TV program "Bewitched," Agnes Moorehead played a witch whose name was "Endora."

The witch of Endor managed to bring up the spirit of the dead prophet, Samuel, who was questioned by Saul and who predicted disaster.

This tale is Biblical justification, if you care to use it, for the real existence of witches, for the effectiveness of magic and of familiar spirits, for the ability to raise the dead and predict the future.

If we interpret the Bible literally, we cannot think that witchcraft is a delusion. No, it is a competing religion making use of powerful supernatural forces, and, because it is competing, it is evil by definition.

Any religion which is certain it has the "truth" finds it very difficult to tolerate the existence of another religion, and, in the Bible, such toleration is not suggested.

In Leviticus 20:27, there is the following: "A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard, shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them."

In Exodus 22:18, there is the briefer: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."

These verses may be the first clearly expressed examples of religious intolerance in the world. They, and the spirit in which they were written, have been used to justify the spilling of rivers of blood and the infliction of countless horrors.

The attitude of intolerance toward competing religions continues, of course, into the New Testament, where the gospels are haunted by tales of demonic possession. There are references to exorcists capable of controlling evil spirits through their magical rites (see Acts 19:13-16).

During the Middle Ages, there remained remnants of pre-Christian religion in Europe, old peasant beliefs that harked back to pagan days.

The old paganism had not died, but had been driven, in more or less altered and debased form, underground, There were still rites, secretly practiced, involving a horned goat-god and actions designed to promote fertility in the customary fashion of primitive agricultural magic.

These practices were naturally stigmatized as witchcraft, but the Church, secure in its power, and concerned with more dangerous manifestations of competition, in the form of Moslems without and various Christian heresies within, did little, for many centuries, to combat these beliefs except through verbal denunciation.

The matter changed as strife grew within the Church, culminating in the Protestant schism that began in 1517. More and more there came to be the feeling of dangerous competition, of deep insecurity on both sides. Religious intolerance heightened and strengthened so that for a century, Catholics and Protests continually fought each other by battle when the two sides were roughly equal in strength, or by slaughter when one side or the other was overwhelmingly powerful.

The constant exercise of intolerance heightened both the feeling of self-righteousness in the pious and the conviction of infinite evil in all those who denied the "true religion." Both Catholics and Protestants amused themselves, therefore, in the intervals when they were not too busily engaged in killing each other, in hounding down all those who were accused (the accusation was usually enough) of dealing with the devil. From 1500 to 1750, the mania continued, with a faint echo in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1692.

And what brought an end to this? That which brought an end to all magic, whether the holy rites of "our" religion, or the blasphemous witchcraft of "their" religion.

Science, making use of the natural laws of the Universe, and doing so in a demonstrably workable fashion, became the approved method of forcing man's desires upon the world (see "The Fateful Lightning," F&SF, June, 1969).

If the president should fall ill, I am sure that the nation's houses of worship would organize prayers on his behalf as a matter of social reflex. I doubt, though, that any important churchman would urge that prayer be relied on exclusively. Even those with prayers on their lips are really counting on the doctors.

However much it may be that religion remains valuable as a system of ethics, its role as a controller of the Universe has been abandoned. And if the magic rites of the true religion are seen as useless, how much more

useless must the magic rites of the false religions be?

But let's look at the situation from another standpoint. We speak of witchcraft, of the persecution of witches — yet witch refers to women. Although, in actual history, men have been denounced and victimized as practitioners of witchcraft, though wizards, warlocks and sorcerers, have existed in plenty, it is not as wizardry or sorcery that the practices are most commonly known. It is *witch*craft, and in the popular mind, the pre-eminent practitioner of witchcraft is the *witch*, and she is clearly a *woman*. We have reached the point where the term witch is used almost exclusively, and where there is a strong temptation to define a practitioner of the male persuasion as a "he-witch."

In our present culture, we are most familiar with the witch as she is pictured in "Hansel and Gretel," in "Macbeth" and in "Snow White," and as she is caricatured at Halloween. Always, she is an ugly old woman, with a curved nose and a curved chin approaching each other.

In the course of the witch-mania of 1500 to 1750, though men and young women were tortured and killed, the percentage of old women persecuted was out of all proportion to the fraction of the total population they constituted.

Why? Was it male chauvinism, or was there some material difference between old women and old men, or between old women and young women, that made the old women particularly vulnerable?

Let's see.

To begin with, the human life-span was quite short prior to the present century. The average life-expectancy was anywhere from 25 to 35 depending on the time and the place. As a result, the percentage of old people was much lower than it is today, and that affected their role in society.

Because an old man was rarely found, he was valued when he was found. Because the chance of living a long time was greater if you were a member of the well-fed aristocracy, the percentage of old men who were of the upper classes was considerably out of proportion, and it was the easier to associate old men with rule.

In a pre-industrial and, particularly, in a pre-literate society, old men were pecularly valuable for their memories. In the absence of the kind of records we have in written or electronic form, it was the brain of the aged man that was the repository of tradition and the final court of decision. Old men remember how it was in the old days, and remembered the

consequences of numerous decisions in the past. Because of this experience it was natural to have them rule the tribe, conduct the rituals, act as advisors. The very word "priest" is from the Greek word for "old," and the word "senator" is from the Latin word for "old," so that to this day, we pay lip-service, at least, to the notion of rule by the old.

Consider, too, that men have beards. In most early Western cultures, beards were a universal masculine adornment and were widely regarded as signifying manhood. Right into recent times a standard sneer at a young man was that of being a "beardless youth."

The beard, since it was a symbol of manhood was untouchable except by those closest in affection. To touch the beard was an insult, to pluck hairs out of the beard was a deadly offense. When Hamlet is trying to chide himself to action by imagining insults he says:

"Who calls me villain? breaks my pate across?
Plucks off my beard and blows it in my face?"

Again, when in the time of David of Israel, the King of Ammon ordered David's ambassadors to be forcibly shaved, that was grounds for war.

The verb "to beard," meaning to pluck at the beard, therefore (since it invites instant retaliation) also means "to set at defiance." Hence the phrase "to beard the lion in his den," meaning to have the courage to defy one on his home ground where he is strongest.

The respect due the beard is magnified when the beard is white, since this marks not only the manhood of the wearer but the rare dignity and experience of age.

It seems to me, then, that all we know of earlier times leads us to suppose that old men, provided they maintained themselves with reasonable dignity, were reverenced.

And what about women?

To begin with, women differed from men, right down to contemporary times, in having a much shorter life-span. They suffered the risks of famine, infection and violence as man did, but on top of that they had to run the gauntlet of child-birth. Women were baby-machines in those days, and if one child did not kill a woman in its coming-forth, the next one might.

In fact, it was not until the germ theory of disease was developed, and it became reasonably safe for women to have children, that women could live out a normal life-time as a matter of course. It then turned out that they were more long-lived than men by five or ten percent. She was the

better biological specimen, thanks to an extra chromosome, once the threat of child-birth was removed.

But, in early times, when child-birth was the slaughterer of mothers and would-be mothers, old women were even rarer than old men.

Should old women, then, not be even more reverenced than old men? Perhaps not. In a male-dominated society, women are rarely, if ever, given a place in the ruling bodies of state and church. Their role was to have baby after baby and to stay indoors. Mere age, therefore, did not lend old women the valuable leadership qualities it lent old men.

Yet age and experience should lend old women some sort of specialized knowledge, shouldn't it?

Yes, of course. Since women spent their time in the society of infants and children and were required to amuse them with stories, they became the repository of folk-lore and of amusing beliefs that they lacked the experience and learning to see through. Self-righteous and self-superior man smiled at this and was always willing to maintain that women were more gullible, more superstitious, and more fearful than man so that it was only natural that they were all filled to their eyebrows with nonsense.

Therefore, while one could speak of old men's wisdom, one laughed at the scorned "old wives' tales." This is done even in the Bible, where the godly are warned to keep away from foolish superstition. "But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness." (1 Timothy 4:7).

There's something else, too. Women, having to deal with children's illnesses would pass on to each other a great many home remedies, most of which did no harm, at least, and helped psychologically. Sometimes the remedies were even legitimately valuable, and an occasional woman would add discoveries of her own and pass that on.

An old woman was, therefore, very often the village doctor, and was the local expert in herbs, infusions, decoctions and spells (like Grannie in "The Beverly Hillbillies").

The old woman, in her role as doctor, should have been respected — but she had to be feared as well. After all, spells and medicine can kill as well as cure, and with such powerful control over human life in her withered old hands, who could tell what an old woman might choose to do?

In this balance between respect and fear; fear won the day, in my opinion, for the very simple reason that a woman has no beard!

Remember that a good European beard can grow into a dense thicket

that obscures virtually the entire face. This is important since in doing so, it obscures the ravages of age, except for the whitening of the beard itself, and that, after all, is a mark of reverence.

As a beardless woman ages, however, the wrinkles that form on her face are not hidden! An old woman looks very different from a young woman under these conditions, while an old man does not look so much different from a young man except for the color of the beard.

Combine the rareness with which one finds an old woman and the startling difference in her face as compared with a young woman or with a man of any age, and you have a powerful incitement to fear. Merely because she is so different and so rare, an old woman will seem ugly and repulsive — and frightening.

There is more, too. Consider the consequence of that most common of all diseases, the one disease (apart from old age itself) that is almost universal, that strikes almost all people and is irreversible even today! If you haven't guessed, it's caries — tooth decay.

In earlier times, when sugar and all the sugar-riddled delicacies we eat today were rare or non-existent, there was less tendency to decay. But there was some, and with no dental care except for the yanking out of teeth by main force when they ached too badly — life meant a steady drizzle of lost teeth.

To the average man or woman this didn't matter. With the average life-span something like thirty, some of the teeth lasted. To those lucky few who endured into old age, however, the price might be a total lack of teeth, and this in an age when false teeth were just about unknown.

The toothless old man would get away with it to a certain extent. His facial hair obscured his jaws and hid the effects of an edentate mouth.

Not so for the old woman. Her hairless face leaves her jaws in full view. Her teeth no longer keep the opposing gums apart, and when her mouth closes, the nose and chin come far closer together than they were wont to do, or than they ever do in young women generally. The approach of nose and chin became the mark of the old woman, therefore, and this is easily exaggerated into a downward hook to the nose and an upward hook to the chin in any caricature.

Do you begin to recognize the witch? Just a toothless old woman.

The toothless jaw carefully gumming soft food, the wrinkled face, wrinkling further as the jaws move together, the slurred speech with some sounds distorted by the absence of teeth, the toothless smile of a weak old woman — can all be terrifying when it is a rare phenomenon.

And she is helpless. Her husband and children are probably dead because they have lived only the normal lifetimes of the day. If she has grandchildren, they may be indifferent to her. There is no feeling of any responsibility toward her on the part of society in general. How can she live?

She might beg. More likely, she would play her role as village doctor, as mid-wife, as potion-dealer, as spell-caster. In order to make sure that her fees were as high as possible, and were duly paid, she would certainly exaggerate her own powers, and try to seem as powerful as possible. Who wouldn't for heaven's sake?

But how dangerous that must have been. She was bound to lose patients (even modern doctors do) and how would that be accounted for? The more powerful she was thought to be, the more unlikely it would seem that someone would die unless she had deliberately brought it about out of malevolence.

Then, too, people and domestic animals frequently sickened without apparent cause in that time of non-existent hygiene. The cause had to be demons or evil spells, and who could best control these things but the strange, old, ugly, wrinkled, mumbling herb-woman who claimed fearsome powers and who must surely have been teased by children or turned away by adults at some time — and who had then wreaked her revenge.

So whenever people began to hunt down witches, it was the old women who were bound to suffer out of all proportion.

And what has saved old women from this sad and brutal hounding? Kindly philosophy? The rule of religion and morality? Never!

Nothing vicious in mankind has ever been cured, in my opinion, by anything but the advance of science. I have said already that science removed the fear of witchcraft by offering an alternate method of controlling the Universe. And science, by wiping out the dangers of childbirth and extending the life-span, made old woman much more common and therefore less strange and frightening.

Finally the advance of dentistry saved natural teeth into old age or substituted false teeth of efficient design for those that were lost. With that the mumbling, hook-nosed, hook-chinned caricature of feminine old age vanished. We have a new vision of old women, now, one that differs very little from the vision of young women, after all.

So the wicked witch is dead — thanks to dentistry.

A short and — we hope — not entirely serious account of the ultimate in university affirmative action programs for women.

Dr. Snow Maiden

by LARRY EISENBERG

I can still recall most vividly the first time I saw her. We were all in the faculty dining room, an oak-paneled vault replete with oil portraits of the academic dead, where luncheons were served to the accompaniment of hushed voices. The same five or six of us tended to meet daily at the same table, chaps who were involved in tracing out the diverse networks of the central nervous system.

She appeared in the doorway, and I can't say that her loveliness hit me like the opening of a Bach toccata and fugue. Still, she was strikingly beautiful. Her smile was as cool and noncommittal as that of a psychiatrist's receptionist. The soft cheeks were round and plump, the forehead smooth, the eyebrows very dark, the eyes a bright China blue, and absolutely no make-up at all.

"Don't be obvious about it," I said, poking Sam Danby, who sat at my immediate right. "Doesn't that girl in the doorway have an unusually pretty face?"

Sam stole a look and blushed. I wondered why. But then I saw that she was coming directly to our table, directly that is to the one vacant seat, which was at my left. She sat down and flashed a five-second smile at the group.

"Do you gentlemen mind if I join you?"

"Not at all," I said.

I went about the table and made the introductions.

"I'm Marilyn Ross," she said by way of acknowledgment. I'm a postdoc in genetics in the lab of Professor Heminway."

"You're very lucky," I said. "Heminway is not only a great scientist, but he's got the most marvelous sense of humor."

It was Heminway, a Nobel laureate, who had arranged with our instrument makers to fashion a

replica of his gold medal with a nail welded to the bottom. Just prior to a faculty-student ball, he had nailed this pseudo medal to the floor and then watched President Hinkle struggle to lift it from the highly polished floor.

I tried to involve our guest in conversation, but she answered monosyllabically. After a bit, all of us resumed our in-group dialogue. There was a brief scratching of a chair later on, and when I looked about, she was gone.

"Not very friendly, is she?" asked Danby.

"I suppose she's shy. It's not easy to join a table of total strangers."

I'd forgotten about her when, one day, as I descended to the fourth-sublevel floor of the university library, I almost stumbled over a dark mass in an unlit recess of the stacks. There was a scraping of feet, and then the mass turned into two people. One was Tom Shelby, a mustachioed student who was darkly handsome; the other was Marilyn Ross.

I reached out blindly and took a book from the shelves, any book. There was dust on the binding. I felt a hand on my wrist and half turned.

"Hello," she said.

Tom Shelby had gone.

"Hello," I replied, happy that the lights were off because I could feel the flush that had radiated upward from my neck to my ears.

"How's your work going?" she asked.

"Well," I mumbled. "And yours?"

"I'm doing exciting things," she said. "You must come and visit me one time."

"I'll do that," I said.

I didn't tell anyone of what I had seen. Ordinarily I'm not that close-mouthed and I've done my share of gossiping. But I didn't want to mention this episode. In some way that I couldn't fathom, it had upset me.

The shock wore off fairly rapidly. I was immersed in preparing a seminar on some work I had done on snail brain. There were over twenty people at my seminar, an unusually large turnout, and Marilyn was one of them. She came in to the lecture hall halfway through my talk but stayed afterward.

"That was fascinating," she said. "I admire the kind of skills you needed to dissect your preparation."

"It was hard to do," I acknowledged, flattered that she had stayed to talk with me.

"I think you'd admire my work, too," she said. "If you have time, why not come by tomorrow."

"I'd be delighted to."

Actually I had arranged to meet with the budget director to talk over my next year's budget. But I put that off to visit with Marilyn. And she was right. Her skills were fascinating.

"Most of my work is with fruit flies," she said. "*Drosophila melanogaster.*"

I smiled.

"I'd hate to do anatomical work with those tiny fellows."

"But that's just the point," she said. "Watch this."

She had deftly fixed one of the flies to her dissecting board and flipped her scalpel.

"You've just witnessed a total hysterectomy," she said.

"Fantastic," I admitted. "What's more, your patient seems to be up and about."

The amazing thing was that the fly had darted off upon its release and seemed to show no ill effects.

Marilyn seemed quite pleased at my remarks. She even smiled one of her rare smiles.

"It's nice to be appreciated by one's peers," she said. "You see, I'm searching for agents that will sterilize these flies, *naturally.*"

"Something besides radiation, I take it?"

"Exactly. It could make my fortune."

I was puzzled.

"Fortune?"

"There's a bushel of money waiting for the scientist who can wipe out flies and other pestilential insects. You have no idea of how much money."

I shrugged.

"I didn't expect you to be focused on money. After all, why go into research if it's wealth that you want?"

"I like both," said Marilyn.

I thought about her remarks, after, and decided that we were poles apart in our values. I would keep away from Marilyn Ross thereafter. Occasionally we passed in the hallways. I'd usually nod and sometimes she acknowledged it. She ignored my colleagues totally. Danby was quite angered at her snubs.

"She's a distant bitch, isn't she?" he remarked one day.

"Not really," I said. "I think she's just totally involved in her work."

"*Too* involved," said Danby. "There's nothing of the woman about her. Dr. Snow Maiden, if you ask me."

"Dr. Snow Maiden?"

I shook my head ruefully, remembering that day in the library stacks.

"You may be wrong," I said.

"I doubt it," said Danby.

She stopped me one afternoon.

"Would you like to see something really exciting?" she asked.

"Well, I don't know. I was just about to begin a critical experiment."

"Let it wait for ten minutes," she said. "I think you'll find it worthwhile."

I went with her to her laboratory. She picked out a fruit fly and fixed it to her dissecting stand with a bit of gel.

"Another female?" I asked.

"No," she said, frowning in concentration. "This one is male."

Her scalpel flashed.

"I've got his testes, now," she said.

I felt little beads of sweat pop out on my brow. Why had she dragged me over to witness this castration?

She took her sample over to a microtome and sliced several sections which she stained and mounted for viewing. Later, we examined them under an electron microscope.

"Do you see those darker bodies?" she asked. "It's a virus I introduced into the fly's circulatory system."

"What of it?"

"Don't you see?" she cried, exultant. "It went right to the testes of the fly. The virus goes to a *specific* location!"

"That's all very interesting. But after it gets there, what happens?"

Her fingers began to tremble as she turned away from the microscope. She looked at me and the dark eyebrows arched.

"It doesn't do a thing to the female, but it does make the male fly sterile," she said.

"Indeed," I said. "That is a great discovery."

The funny thing was that I didn't really feel that way at all. My sympathies lay with the goddamned fly although I knew that the identification was ridiculous.

I laughed to relieve the tension.

"I hope you haven't a similar virus for men," I said in a bantering tone.

She meditated for a moment.

"Don't you think it's possible?"

"My God!" I cried. "Have you made headway in *that* direction, too?"

She smiled.

"Not yet, but I have some ideas."

"Well, anyway," I said, "this all calls for a celebration. May I buy you a drink?"

She shrugged and went back to the eyepiece of the microscope.

"Why not?" she asked. "I'll meet you at the faculty bar at six."

She was prompt. She also put away five stiff drinks as though they were water.

"You were impressed this

afternoon, weren't you?" she asked.

"And also puzzled. I can understand your pursuit of the virus for the fruit fly? But why for men? Is there any glory in it, or money?"

"All of the birth control devices you see about relate to women. And all of them have their dangers. I think it's time to put the shoe on the other foot."

"Maybe so. What does Professor Heminway think about all of this?"

"I haven't told him yet. I don't want to jolt him off his male pedestal."

"Are you implying that he's biased?"

"Don't you think he is?"

I ordered another round of drinks.

"I don't think so," I said after fishing out my olive and munching on it. "I know that there's some discrimination against women at the university, but I don't support it."

"*Some* discrimination? Only one woman appointed as full professor and she's an emeritus? And have you compared our salary levels to those of the men? It's sickening."

"I agree. I've heard senior faculty people maintain that women are not primarily focused on science but on a husband and children. They use that pretext to deny women tenured positions. But I think that Heminway will be genuinely pleased by your discovery."

"Were you?"

I was jolted by the unexpectedness of the question.

"Well, I don't know. But really, it's not because you're a woman. I just feel some kind of personal upset over what took place. An idiosyncrasy of mine."

"The hysterectomy didn't bother you, did it?"

"No," I admitted.

Before we left the bar, I had begun to feel the effects of the liquor. Marilyn seemed her usual self. But there was one striking exception. She asked me if I would like to see her room.

"Where is it?" I asked.

"In the student dormitory," she said. "But it's quite private."

I sought her out the following afternoon, but she was distant again, even cold.

"I'm too busy," she said.

I was hurt and I suppose my face showed it as I turned away. But she didn't seem to care. Still, when I came out of my laboratory at six to have a look into my files, she was sitting at my desk. I walked past her and pulled out one of the file drawers.

"You're angry at me," she said.

"Shouldn't I be?"

"You make too much out of a single night," she said.

I looked away.

"You know," she said, "before I knew you better, I thought of you as stodgy and Victorian."

"And now?"

"Now I'm certain that you're stodgy and Victorian."

"It's an accurate appraisal," I admitted. "My reading ended with Tennyson's *Idylls of the King.*"

"Probably true," she said. "You're an incurable romantic. But I didn't come here to exchange boy-girl banter with you. I wanted to tell you something really important."

I winced.

"Go ahead," I said. "What do you want to say?"

"That you were right yesterday. I lied to you. I think I've already isolated the viral agent that sterilizes men."

I felt my jaw sagging.

"That isn't what I expected to hear. Yesterday you demonstrated your discovery on a fly. Today, you announce you may have its human counterpart."

"I could have told you yesterday," she said. "But I thought it might be more expedient to wait. You see, even now I still don't know if it works."

"I appreciate your consideration," I said. Then I drew a deep breath. "Now tell me how it is transmitted."

"Through the female," she said.

She was smiling at me. I can still remember that smile because it was only an instant later that I hit her.

"San Diego Lightfoot Sue"
(from page 45)

By the time he was eighteen he had grown a couple of inches and had filled out. He moved from the apartment on Beachwood and got a place of his own. He never saw Dwayne again.

The envelope with his name on it was soiled and frayed from much handling. He read it every night. "John Lee, my little lamb," it read. "I tried very hard, so very hard. I thought I had succeeded but something is going wrong. I can feel it. I wish you could have seen me when I was fifteen, John Lee. I wish you could have seen me when when I was fifteen. I'm afraid." It was unsigned.

In which man takes on many of the properties of machines, including assembly-line "efficiency," breakdown, and repossession.

Falling Apart

by RON GOULART

They didn't understand the scrawlings on the walls. Strange and clumsy, almost childish, drawings done in charcoal.

Well, burnt neowood firesticks actually.

I'm fairly certain I know what Bil was attempting down there. I haven't, though, volunteered to explain it. There's no one the telling would help.

Not Bil certainly, and Carla doesn't, I don't think, care.

We met Bil and Carla in the late summer of 2018, soon after we moved into Peaceable Estates. Or rather, I met them then. My wife had been required to lose forty pounds before we could be accepted to the supervised community. She spent much of our first weeks at Peaceable sulking in the sundome of our three-room ranchouse. It was just as well. I wasn't much impressed by her myself. I'd preferred her hefty.

I didn't admit this to the community paratherapist, or even to any of the medicorobots, but I was glad my wife stayed out there under the blue plexidome wrapped in lycra toweling and wearing those crimson-tinted goggles as much as she could. She was older than I was, too, which meant we'd be required to move out of Peaceable Estates in a shade over three years. It was one of the best 31-36-year-old supervised communities in that sector of Connecticut. I was only a few months beyond 31 myself.

During my second weekend there, while I was riding the ramp back from the Required 31-32-Year-Old Male Rec Swim, I encountered Bil Wilky for the first time. He was squatted down just beyond my offspot, slapping at the plyoturf with his extremely pink right hand. A long, lanky fellow with brindle-colored hair.

I nearly fell over him, since I'd

been watching, with my head twisted around, a Compulsory 33-34-Year-Old Female Doubles Match which was being played under a tennis dome. One of the girls, a tall redhead, certainly seemed to be as hefty as my wife once had been.

"Excuse me," said Bil as I collided with him. He had a grin, which seemed to touch his face at unexpected moments. "I was looking for my ear."

"Ear?" As I crouched down beside him I noticed now that there was a blank spot on the left side of his head.

"One of our new models, got a very good rating in last month's *Sight & Sound,*" explained Bill. "I work for Partz, Inc."

I'd been thinking about joining the mutual fund available to riders on my Amtrak. Partz, Inc., was one of the stocks in the portfolio. "You have to use your own products?"

"They don't insist, mostly they ask for volunteers." He grinned more broadly. "I always volunteer. Actually, the thing works a whole lot better than my real ear did, but it has a tendency to fall off. The pickup is really impressive, I'm hearing things I never heard before. Not that I was necessarily anxious to hear gnats coupling or—"

"There it is," I said, pointing.

"Nope, that's someone else's. It's a lady's ear, see how it's pierced."

I poked at the pink ear with my fingertip. "Should we turn this in to the Lawn Patrol?"

"No, leave it be, that's the rule. Pick up only your own lost property. Ah, there's mine." He scooped it off the turf, attached it to his head. "The plugs are what's a little faulty. With the Partz ear they drill little holes in your skull so you can plug the ear in."

Though I had, as a result of a riot on the Amtrak two years earlier, a false knee, I didn't like to talk about spare parts. Lately my wife had been agitating for a Partz nose for herself. I told Bil my name and what I did.

"You're down on Street 26A, aren't you?"

"Moved in a couple weeks ago."

"I thought I saw you at the last Compulsory Block Mixer," said Bil. "Since I'd talked to the required ten different people, I left before I got around to you."

"They tell me I need a new partner for the Compulsory Thursday Night Beer Bust at the Block Pub. Are you free?"

"Matter of fact, I am. I'll notify the Social Chairman for Block 26 and see you Thursday from 9:15 to 10:15."

That's how we became friends.

Bil was thirty-three. He'd worked for Partz for nearly seven years. In 2016 they'd transferred him to the New England Division of the company, asking him to head up the Deadbeat Department. Bil was in charge of a crack team of repossessors, even including a fellow with some telekinetic ability. This fellow wasn't good at heavy things, such as legs and arms, but he could take back a Partz ear or an eye from a distance of fifty feet. Bil worked on the tougher cases, the deadbeats who were cleverer than most. While his staff roamed the residential sectors of New Bridgeport and New Haven 2 taking back truckloads of unpaid for limbs and feet, plus an occasional heart or lung, Bil would be tracking down the more elusive skip.

The first night we got together for our required two mugs of beer or ale, Bil had just located a ballerina over in Hartford 3 who'd refused to pay for the right leg Partz had fitted her for.

"That damn leg is what made her," Bil told me. "Once she decided to get rid of her actual leg and have Partz, Inc., design her a new one, she became a star. She was Prima Ballerina with the Newtown Civic Ballet until she skipped out on us. I found her living with a tapdancer."

"How'd you repossess the leg?"

"Oh, you have different ways." He sipped his beer, eyes on the base of the mug.

"That's what I mean, how'd you do it in this particular case?"

"Stungun. I stunned her, and the tapdancer. Detached the leg, took it down and locked it in the trunk of my aircruiser."

"What'd she do when she came to? With only one leg."

"I always leave them a crutch," he said. "Look, you can't afford to be sentimental. This girl was six months behind in her payments. In the case of a first-class leg like this one, that's $6000 she owed." He drank a little more of his beer. "They're not putting the same additives in this stuff anymore." He finished it, ordered his second. "What's worse is a heart repo. There you have to remove the Partz heart, but replace it with a reconditioned one. Otherwise, under the Vital Organ Act of 2012, you're guilty of a felony. If you've ever had to switch hearts while some guy's family is whacking at you with ... well. let's talk about something else. How's your wife getting along?"

It was a deadbeat named Rutherford who contributed most to what eventually happened to Bil. Rutherford, an artist in his late forties, had been eluding Partz for nearly five years. A few weeks after

I got to know Bil, his company got a tip that Rutherford, and the $400,000 right hand he wasn't paying for anymore, was in the New England area. Bil was ordered to concentrate on the case.

I didn't see him for a few weeks. The Social Chairman changed my beer night, making Thursday from 9:15 to 10:15 the Required Sexual Encounter for my wife and myself.

When I did meet Bil again, at the Compulsory Monthly Male Lunch, he was grinning at even more inappropriate times.

"How goes your quest?" I asked him.

"Some very strange things are turning up. Wait, let me see if I can get us permission to have our syncaf out on the Country Club patio."

When we were out there under an orange-tinted sundome, I asked, "What sort of strange things?"

"Well, this Rutherford guy has written some very strange books."

"I've never heard of them."

"They've never been published. I found the talkspools in one of his hideout studios. Didn't catch him, but I was close enough to get a bundle of his effects. Talkspools, drawings, paintings." He grinned, his face a pale orange. "Did I ever tell you I wanted to be an artist once? No, probably not. Even Carla doesn't know that. I really enjoyed going through all the pictures he'd made. Of course, the bastard drew them with a hand he owes us $256,000 on, but they were great. There were sketches of kids playing in the .... Well, that's not the point, is it."

"Is it? I'm not quite clear what—"

"Never mind, you've got enough problems."

So I didn't hear about the strange things, not then.

I had one more conversation with Bil. That was a day or two before he managed to locate Rutherford. From what he told me then, from what I got from Carla and from a source I'd rather not mention, I've put together, mainly for my own satisfaction, an account of what Bill's last weeks were like.

"Suppose Rutherford does know what he's talking about?" Bil asked as we took our PreArranged After-Dinner Male Stroll that twilight evening.

"A runaway artist, he's probably exaggerating."

"I don't think so." Bill shook out a soyret, lit it with lighter built into the finger of his artificial right hand. "The details in what Rutherford says in those talkspools ... everything checks out."

"What did your superiors say

when you turned the spools over to them?"

"I haven't done that yet."

"I thought you had to give Partz—"

"They don't know yet I have the stuff. I want, as much as it annoys Carla, to listen to the whole thing a few more times."

One of the digital bricks set in the strollway flashed 7:42 as I stepped over it. "What's his theory exactly?"

"It's more than a theory," insisted Bil. "You know, before Rutherford bought the hand, he was teaching at Danbury Middle College. He picked up the research habit, a knack of digging and a knowledge of how to get the facts. He can even get information out of government computers." Stopping, he said, "Here I've been in charge of the Deadbeat Department all this time, and I never heard there was another group over me."

"Another group?"

"A group who have the responsibility for the really complex cases," said Bil. "They also handle people suspected of being troublemakers."

"Sounds like something Rutherford made up."

"No, I've been able to do a little checking at Partz, what he says is true."

"Why haven't they gone after Rutherford himself then?"

"For one thing, they don't know how much he's found out about them," said Bil. "Which is why I've ... well, this is the end of our stroll period."

He stepped from the brick path onto the ramp which would carry him to his ranchouse. I never saw him after that.

At the end of the week he ran Rutherford to ground in a Megavitamin Community in Greater Waterbury. The artist was posing as a religious tattoo artist, and when Bil confronted him in his subground shop, there were no other customers around.

"Ah, had you come but a few hours later," said the man, "I'd be away in Rebuilt Argentina. All my forged papers are ready and I'm awaiting —"

"You should have kept up your monthly payments. You ignored every notice Partz sent you," said Bil, quoting the Partz procedure manual.

"Listen, perhaps —"

Bil used his stungun.

Rutherford froze, bent over his lucite drawing table, a sheaf of illuminated capital letters beneath his $400,000 hand.

It may be that Bil had intended to talk to Rutherford more than he did, to question him about what he'd learned of the underside of Partz operations. But when he

actually saw the man there, I think, he stunned him almost at once. So he wouldn't have to listen.

Bil'd been with Partz a good long time, as things go these days. Perhaps he was hoping he could continue. The less he knew, the easier it would be to stay on.

As he began to detach the drawing hand, Bil noticed the drawings. A portfolio of them leaned against the leg of the table. He stooped, looked through them. "If I'd been able to draw like that I wouldn't ...."

Setting the drawings away, he picked up the artificial hand. He got it all the way around. Instead of putting it in the special satchel he'd brought along, though, Bil set it on the edge of the table.

Then he detached his own right hand and replaced it with Rutherford's.

Where he went next I'm not sure. He probably made use of Rutherford's expertly forged papers to get out of the country.

He and Carla, despite the efforts of the Peaceable staff, weren't too happy together. Carla's much too thin for my taste, but I don't believe that was one of Bill's problems with her. At any rate, he didn't mind leaving her behind.

Whether he ever actually went to Rebuilt Argentina or not is difficult, at least for me, to determine. He settled down, a few weeks after leaving Connecticut, in a village in Mexico 3. There he devoted his time to drawing and painting.

The $400,000 Partz arthand, in case · you've never seen one demonstrated, can draw in nearly five hundred different styles. Bil seems to have tried them all. He did, possibly under the influence, too, of the Mexican ambience, a series of murals in his living room in the style of Rivera. He turned out a dozen landscapes in the style of Cezanne, some portraits in the Renoir manner, six Corot studies of buildings and bridges, animal sketches in the style of Busino, several dozen Picassos of various periods, some pen and ink drawings in the Heinrich Kley vein and in the styles of both George Grosz and Milt Gross.

The hand made him very happy. A girl, an expatriate Norwegian working in neoprene furniture design, says he was always grinning during those first weeks of experimentation.

Then Partz, who'd long since located the stunned Rutherford and interrogated him, discovered where Bil was hiding out.

They were polite at first, using a faxgram to communicate with him. When he received the request to return to his office, Bil picked up, leaving most of his work

behind, and headed South into the jungles of Mexico 4.

They started talking to him next. As Rutherford had stated, Partz could do things most people aren't aware of.

When his ear spoke to him, Bil was sitting on the vernada of his cabin at the jungle edge, painting, in the manner of Rousseau, what he saw before him.

"Come back home, Wilky. This is an order," the ear told him. "If you disregard this notice, we shall be forced to —"

He unplugged the ear, tossed it toward the green foliage and resumed painting.

Nothing happened for a few days.

The malfunctions commenced late one afternoon when he was returning from a swim in the jungle pool behind his place. As he stepped out of the jungle onto the burnt grass in the little clearing, an intense pain started in his right knee. The knee, not his own, was one of the 2017 models Partz, Inc., had suggested all their people try.

Bil, howling, tried to run into his shack. The pain, zigzagging up and down his leg, causing his toes to contract and his thighs to quiver, was too much. He fell down.

Got up. Fell down once more.

He dragged himself into the bedroom and, using a palette knife, pried off the knee cap. The pain ceased.

This was exactly what Rutherford had talked about in his spools. The people at Partz who could, from any distance, cause pain, and worse. Rutherford gave, as further examples of their work, done often at the request of the National Security Office, the apparent suicide of King Norbert of Upper Sweden, the fatal Alpine plunge of League of Nations troubleshooter Gnordling and the unexplained death of President Frates of New Brazil.

It was all, Bil was certain now, true.

The next morning his right foot began throbbing. It had also developed, a surprise to Bil, the ability to talk.

"We can only allow you so many options, Wilky. Should you continue to refuse to return home, we must of —"

He unscrewed the foot, flung it out the window into the jungle.

"I should never have allowed them to replace so many parts of me with that junk of theirs."

Hobbling about the room, with only one foot and one complete knee, he talked the thing over with himself. The only way to stay down here and do what he wanted, the only way to escape from the pains and discomforts they might send

out was to detach all the Partz additions to himself. Get rid of them.

Even that wouldn't be enough, though. They'd be able to use the parts to locate him. So he must dismantle himself, then move on.

Unfortunately there were two additions he couldn't give up. One was the regulator implanted in his heart; the other was the hand he'd taken from Rutherford. The heart he had no substitute for; the hand he wasn't ready to give up.

I haven't been able, and I'm in no position to take the risks required, to see Bil's medical records. I'm not, therefore, certain how many parts had been replaced in his body during his tenure at Partz, Inc.

It took him several days to cross the small stretch of jungle to the next settlement. One account says he arrived in town in a small wheeled cart, the lower part of his body left behind. This is probably an exaggeration, since I'm sure he had at least one real leg of his own.

Bil, with his diminishing funds, rented a small hut with plaster walls. He continued drawing and painting.

The Partz remote control people found him again, of course, and started sending pains into the $400,000 hand.

He held out for two days. Two full days of yowling, grimacing, grinning at the wrong times, and drawing. He had to give in finally and detach the hand.

What went on over the next few days I'm not clear about, not in any detail. It's possible Partz gave him some final warning. They knew by now that Bil knew everything that Rutherford had unearthed. They had considerable proof Bil was no longer loyal to the company.

They sent him a heart attack.

Bil was found dead, sprawled out on the stone floor. There were strange, clumsy and childish, drawings all over the plaster walls. In his left hand, which was his, he clutched a stick of blackened neowood he'd taken from his cook fire.

They didn't understand about the drawings, but I do.

Bil had come to like the idea of being an artist. Even after he had to abandon the $400,000 hand, he kept at it.

Those drawings on the wall were his own work.

SOLUTION TO ACROSTIC PUZZLE IN JULY ISSUE

. . . there entered a masked man, clad in black from tip to toe, and carrying over his shoulder a great double-edged axe. He stood poised in the doorway as though unsure of his welcome.

Robert Sheckley: *Mindswap*

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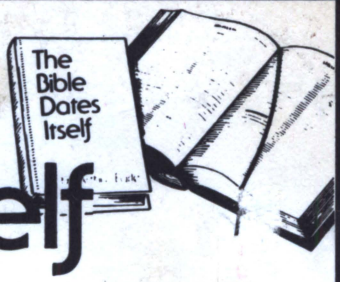

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