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Brother

Clifford D. Simak

He was sitting in his rocking chair on the stone-flagged patio when the car pulled off the road and stopped outside his gate. A stranger got out of it, unlatched the gate and came up the walk. The man coming up the walk was old - not as old, judged the man in the rocking chair, as he was, but old. White hair blowing in the wind and a slow, almost imperceptible, shuffle in his gait.

The man stopped before him. 'You are Edward Lambert?' he asked. Lambert nodded. 'I am Theodore Anderson,' said the man. 'From Madison. From the university.'

Lambert indicated the other rocker on the patio. 'Please sit down,' he said. 'You are far from home.'

Anderson chuckled. 'Not too far. A hundred miles or so.'

'To me, that's far,' said Lambert. 'In all my life I've never been more than twenty miles away. The spaceport across the river is as far as I've ever been.'

'You visit the port quite often?'

'At one time, I did. In my younger days. Not recently. From here, where I sit, I can see the ships come in and leave.'

'You sit and watch for them?'

'Once I did. Not now. I still see them now and then. I no longer watch for them.'

'You have a brother, I understand, who is out in space.'

'Yes, Phil. Phil is the wanderer of the family. There were just the two of us. Identical twins.'

'You see him now and then? I mean, he comes back to visit.'

'Occasionally. Three or four times, that is all. But not in recent years. The last time he was home was twenty years ago. He was always in a hurry. He

could only stay a day or two. He had great tales to tell.'

'But you, yourself, stayed home. Twenty miles, you said, the farthest you've ever been away.'

'There was a time,' said Lambert, 'when I wanted to go with him. But I couldn't. We were born late in our parents' life. They were old when we were still young. Someone had to stay here with them. And after they were gone, I found I couldn't leave. These hills, these woods, the streams had become too much a part of me.'

Anderson nodded. 'I can understand that. It is reflected in your writing. You became the pastoral spokesman of the century. I am quoting others, but certainly you know that.'

Lambert grunted. 'Nature writing. At one time, it was in the great American tradition. When I first started writing it, fifty years ago, it had gone out of style. No one understood it, no one wanted it. No one saw the need for it. But now it's back again. Every damn fool who can manage to put three words together is writing it again.'

'But none as well as you.'

'I've been at it longer. I have more practice doing it.'

'Now,' said Anderson, 'there is greater need of it. A reminder of a heritage that we almost lost.'

'Perhaps,' said Lambert.

'To get back to your brother...'

'A moment, please,' said Lambert. 'You have been asking me a lot of questions. No preliminaries. No easy build up. None of the usual conversational amenities. You simply came barging in and began asking questions. You tell me your name and that you are from the university, but that is all. For the record, Mr Anderson, please tell me what you are.'

'I am sorry,' said Anderson. 'I'll admit to little tact, despite the fact that is one of the basics of my profession. I should know its value. I'm with the psychology department and...'

'Psychology?'

'Yes, psychology.'

'I would have thought,' said Lambert, 'that you were in English or, perhaps, ecology or some subject dealing with the environment. How come a psychologist would drop by to talk with a nature writer?'

'Please bear with me,' Anderson pleaded. 'I went at this all wrong. Let us start again. I came, really, to talk about your brother.'

'What about my brother? How could you know about him? Folks hereabouts know, but no one else. In my writings, I have never mentioned him.'

'I spent a week last summer at a fishing camp only a few miles from here. I heard about him then.'

'And some of those you talked with told you I never had a brother.'

'That is it, exactly. You see, I have this study I have been working on for the last five years...'

'I don't know how the story ever got started,' said Lambert, 'that I never had a brother. I have paid no attention to it, and I don't see why you...'

'Mr Lambert,' said Anderson, 'please pardon me. I've checked the birth records at the county seat and the census...'

'I can remember it,' said Lambert, 'as if it were only yesterday, the day my brother left. We were working in the barn, there across the road. The barn is no longer used now and, as you can see, has fallen in upon itself. But then it was used. My father farmed the meadow over there that runs along the creek. That land grew, still would grow if someone used it, the most beautiful corn that you ever saw. Better corn than the Iowa prairie land. Better than any place on earth. I farmed it for years after my father died, but I no longer farm it. I went out of the farming business a good ten years ago. Sold off all the stock and machinery. Now I keep a little kitchen garden. Not too large. It needn't be too large. There is only...'

'You were saying about your brother?'

'Yes, I guess I was. Phil and I were working in the barn one day. It was a rainy day - no, not really a rainy day, just drizzling. We were repairing harness. Yes harness. My father was a strange man in many ways. Strange in reasonable sorts of ways. He didn't believe in using machinery any more than necessary. There was never a tractor on the place. He thought horses were better. On a small place like this, they were. I used them myself until I finally had to sell them. It was an emotional wrench to sell them. The horses and I were friends. But, anyhow, the two of us were working at the harness when Phil said to me, out of the thin air, that he was going to the port and try to get a job on one of the ships. We had talked about it, off and on, before, and both of us had a hankering to go, but it was a surprise to me when Phil spoke up and said that he was going. I had no idea that he had made up his mind. There is something about this that you have to understand - the time, the circumstance, the newness and excitement of travel to the stars in that day of more than fifty years ago. There were days, far back in our history, when New England boys ran off to sea. In that time of fifty years ago, they were running off to space...'

Telling it, he remembered it, as he had told Anderson, as if it were only yesterday. It all came clear and real again, even to the musty scent of last year's hay in the loft above them. Pigeons were cooing in the upper reaches of the barn, and, up in the hillside pasture, a lonesome cow was bawling. The horses stamped in their stalls and made small sounds, munching at the hay remaining in their mangers.

'I made up my mind last night,' said Phil, 'but I didn't tell you because I wanted to be sure. I could wait, of course, but if I wait, there's the chance I'll never go. I don't want to live out my life here wishing I had gone. You'll tell pa, won't you? After I am gone. Sometime this afternoon, giving me a chance to get away.'

'He wouldn't follow you,' said Edward Lambert. It would be best for you to tell him. He might reason with you, but he wouldn't stop your going.'

'If I tell him, I will never go,' said Phil. 'I'll see the look upon his face and I'll never go. You'll have to do this much for me, Ed. You'll have to tell him so I won't see the look upon his face.'

'How can you get on a ship? They don't want a green farm boy. They want people who are trained.'

'There'll be a ship,' said Phil, 'that is scheduled to lift off, but with a crew member or two not there. They won't wait for them, they won't waste the time to hunt them down. They'll take anyone who's there. In a day or two, I'll find that kind of ship.'

Lambert remembered once again how he had stood in the barn door, watching his brother walking down the road, his boots splashing in the puddles, his figure blurred by the mist-like drizzle. For a long time after he could no longer see him, long after the grayness of the drizzle had blotted out his form, he had still imagined he could see him, an ever smaller figure trudging down the road. He recalled the tightness in his chest, the choke within his throat, the terrible, gut-twisting heaviness of grief at his brother's leaving. As if a part of him were gone, as if he had been torn in two, as if only half of him were left.

'We were twins,' he told Anderson. 'Identical twins. We were closer than most brothers. We lived in one another's pocket. We did everything together. Each of us felt the same about the other. It took a lot of courage for Phil to walk away like that.'

'And a lot of courage and affection on your part,' said Anderson, 'to let him walk away. But he did come back again?'

'Not for a long time. Not until after both our parents were dead. Then he came walking down the road, just the way he'd left. But he didn't stay. Only for a day or two. He was anxious to be off. As if he were being driven.'

Although that was not exactly right, he told himself. Nervous. Jumpy. Looking back across his shoulder. As if he were being followed. Looking back to make sure the Follower was not there.

'He came a few more times,' he said. 'Years apart. He never stayed too long. He was anxious to get back.'

'How can you explain this idea that people have that you never had a brother?' asked Anderson. 'How do you explain the silence of the records?'

'I have no explanation,' Lambert said. 'People get some strange ideas. A thoughtless rumor starts - perhaps no more than a question: "About this brother of his? Does he really have a brother? Was there ever any brother?" And others pick it up and build it up and it goes on from there. Out in these hills there's not much to talk about. They grab at any thing there is. It would be an intriguing thing to talk about - that old fool down in the valley who thinks he has a brother that he never had, bragging about this nonexistent brother out among the stars. Although it seems to me that I never really bragged. I never traded on him.'

'And the records? Or the absence of the records?'

'I just don't know,' said Lambert. 'I didn't know about the records. I've never checked. There was never any reason to. You see, I know I have a brother.'

'Do you think that you may be getting up to Madison?'

'I know I won't,' said Lambert. 'I seldom leave this place. I no longer

have a car. I catch a ride with a neighbor when I can to go to the store and get the few things that I need. I'm satisfied right here. There's no need to go anywhere.'

'You've lived here alone since your parents died?'

'That is right,' said Lambert. 'And I think this has gone far enough. I am not sure I like you, Mr Anderson. Or should that be Dr Anderson? I suspect it should. I'm not going to the university to answer questions that you want me to or to submit to tests in this study of yours. I'm not sure what your interest is and I'm not even faintly interested. I have other, more important things to do.'

Anderson rose from the chair. 'I am sorry,' he said, 'I had not meant...'

'Don't apologize,' said I Lambert.

'I wish we could part on a happier note,' said Anderson.

'Don't let it bother you,' said Lambert. 'Just forget about it. That's what I plan to do.'

He continued sitting in the chair long after the visitor had left. A few cars went past, not many, for this was a lightly traveled road, one that really went nowhere, just an access for the few families that lived along the valley and back in the hills.

The gall of the man, he thought, the arrogance of him, to come storming in and asking all those questions. That study of his - perhaps a survey of the fantasies engaged in by an aged population. Although it need not be that; it might be any one of a number of other things.

There was, he cautioned himself, no reason to get upset by it. It was not important; bad manners never were important to anyone but those who practiced them.

He rocked gently back and forth, the rockers complaining on the stones, and gazed across the road and valley to the place along the opposite hill where the creek ran, its waters gurgling over stony shallows and swirling in deep pools. The creek held many memories. There, in long, hot summer days, he and Phil had fished for chubs, using crooked willow branches for rods because there was no money to buy regular fishing gear - not that they would have wanted it even if there had been. In the spring great shoals of suckers had come surging up the creek from the Wisconsin River to reach their spawning areas. He and Phil would go out and seine them, with a seine rigged from a gunny sack, its open end held open by a barrel hoop.

The creek held many memories for him and so did all the land, the towering hills, the little hidden valleys, the heavy hardwood forest that covered all except those few level areas that had been cleared for farming. He knew every path and byway of it. He knew what grew on and lived there and where it grew or lived. He knew of the secrets of the few surrounding square miles of countryside, but not all the secrets; no man was born who could know all the secrets.

He had, he told himself, the best of two worlds. Of two worlds, for he had not told Anderson, he had not told anyone, of that secret link that tied him to Phil. It was a link that never had seemed strange because it was something they had known from the time when they were small. Even apart, they had known what the other might be doing. It was no wondrous thing to them; it was

something they had taken very much for granted. Years later, he had read in learned journals the studies that had been made of identical twins with the academic speculation that in some strange manner they seemed to hold telepathic powers which operated only between the two of them - as if they were, in fact, one person in two different bodies.

That was the way of it, most certainly, with him and Phil, although whether it might be telepathy, he had never even wondered until he stumbled on the journals. It did not seem, he thought, rocking in the chair, much like telepathy, for telepathy, as he understood it, was the deliberate sending and receiving of mental messages; it had simply been a knowing of where the other was and what he might be doing. It had been that way when they were youngsters and that way ever since. Not a continued knowing, not continued contact, if it was contact. Through the years, however, it happened fairly often. He had known through all the years since Phil had gone walking down the road the many planets that Phil had visited, the ships he'd traveled on - had seen it all with Phil's eyes, had understood it with Phil's brain, had known the names of the places Phil had seen and understood, as Phil had understood, what had happened in each place. It had not been a conversation: they had not talked with one another; there had been no need to talk. And although Phil had never told him, he was certain Phil had known what he was doing and where he was and what he might be seeing. Even on the few occasions that Phil had come to visit, they had not talked about it; it was no subject for discussion since both accepted it.

In the middle of the afternoon, a beat-up car pulled up before the gate, the motor coughing to a stuttering halt. Jake Hopkins, one of his neighbors up the creek, climbed out, carrying a small basket. He came up on the patio and, setting the basket down, sat down in the other chair.

'Katie sent along a loaf of bread and a blackberry pie,' he said. 'This is about the last of the blackberries. Poor crop this year. The summer was too dry.'

'Didn't do much blackberrying myself this year,' said Lambert. 'Just out a time or two. The best ones are on that ridge over yonder, and I swear that hill gets steeper year by year.'

'It gets steeper for all of us,' said Hopkins. 'You and I, we've been here a long time, Ed.'

'Tell Katie thanks,' said Lambert. 'There ain't no one can make a better pie than she. Pies, I never bother with them, although I purely love them. I do some cooking, of course, but pies takes too much time and fuss.'

'Hear anything about this new critter in the hills?' asked Hopkins.

Lambert chuckled. 'Another one of those wild talks, Jake. Every so often, a couple of times a year, someone starts a story. Remember that one about the swamp beast down at Millville? Papers over in Milwaukee got hold of it, and a sportsman down in Texas read about it and came up with a pack of dogs. He spent three days at Millville, floundering around in the swamps, lost one dog to a rattler, and, so I was told, you never saw a madder white man in your life. He felt that he had been took, and I suppose he was, for there was never any beast. We get bear and panther stories, and there hasn't been a bear or panther in these parts for more than forty years. Once, some years ago some damn fool started a story about a big snake. Big around as a nail keg and thirty feet long. Half the county was out hunting it.'

'Yes, I know,' said Hopkins. 'There's nothing to most of the stories, but

Caleb Jones told me one of his boys saw this thing, whatever it may be. Like an ape, or a bear that isn't quite a bear. All over furry, naked. A snowman, Caleb thinks.'

'Well, at least,' said Lambert, 'that is something new. There hasn't been anyone, to my knowledge, claimed to see a snowman here. There have been a lot of reports, however, from the West Coast. It just took a little time to transfer a snowman here.'

'One could have wandered east.'

'I suppose so. If there are any of them out there, that is. I'm not too sure there are.'

'Well, anyhow,' said Hopkins, 'I thought I'd let you know. You are kind of isolated here. No telephone or nothing. You never even run in electricity.'

'I don't need either a telephone or electricity,' said Lambert. 'The only thing about electricity that would tempt me would be a refrigerator. And I don't need that. I got the springhouse over there. It's as good as any refrigerator. Keeps butter sweet for weeks. And a telephone. I don't need a telephone. I have no one to talk to.'

'I'll say this,' said Hopkins. 'You get along all right. Even without a telephone or the electric. Better than most folks.'

'I never wanted much,' said Lambert. 'That's the secret of it - I never wanted much.'

'You working on another book?'

'Jake, I'm always working on another book. Writing down the things I see and hear and the way I feel about them. I'd do it even if no one was interested in them. I'd write it down even if there were no books.'

'You read a lot,' said Hopkins. 'More than most of us.'

'Yes, I guess I do,' said Lambert. 'Reading is a comfort.'

And that was true, he thought. Books lined up on a shelf were a group of friends - not books, but men and women who talked with him across the span of continents and centuries of time. His books, he knew, would not live as some of the others had. They would not long outlast him, but at times he liked to think of the possibility that a hundred years from now someone might find one of his books, in a used book-store, perhaps, and, picking it up, read a few paragraphs of his, maybe liking it well enough to buy it and take it home, where it would rest on the shelves a while, and might, in time, find itself back in a used bookstore again, waiting for someone else to pick it up and read.

It was strange, he thought, that he had written of things close to home, of those things that most passed by without even seeing, when he could have written of the wonders to be found light-years from earth - the strangenesses that could be found on other planets circling other suns. But of these he had not even thought to write, for they were secret, an inner part of him that was of himself alone, a confidence between himself and Phil that he could not have brought himself to violate.

'We need some rain,' said Hopkins. 'The pastures are going. The pastures on the Jones place are almost bare. You don't see the grass; you see the

ground. Caleb has been feeding his cattle hay for the last two weeks, and if we don't get some rain, I'll be doing the same in another week or two. I've got one patch of corn I'll get some nubbins worth the picking, but the rest of it is only good for fodder. It does beat hell. A man can work his tail off some years and come to nothing in the end.'

They talked for another hour or so - the comfortable, easy talk of countrymen who were deeply concerned with the little things that loomed so large for them. Then Hopkins said good-bye and, kicking his ramshackle car into reluctant life, drove off down the road.

When the sun was just above the western hills, Lambert went inside and put on a pot of coffee to go with a couple of slices of Katie's bread and a big slice of Katie's pie. Sitting at the table in the kitchen - a table on which he'd eaten so long as memory served - he listened to the ticking of the ancient family clock. The clock, he realized as he listened to it, was symbolic of the house. When the clock talked to him, the house talked to him as well - the house using the clock as a means of communicating with him. Perhaps not talking to him, really, but keeping close in touch, reminding him that it still was there, that they were together, that they did not stand alone. It had been so through the years; it was more so than ever now, a closer relationship, perhaps arising from the greater need on both their parts.

Although stoutly built by his maternal great-grandfather, the house stood in a state of disrepair. There were boards that creaked and buckled when he stepped on them, shingles that leaked in the rainy season. Water streaks ran along the walls, and in the back part of the house, protected by the hill that rose abruptly behind it, where the sun's rays seldom reached, there was the smell of damp and mold.

But the house would last him out, he thought, and that was all that mattered. Once he was no longer here, there'd be no one for it to shelter. It would outlast both him and Phil, but perhaps there would be no need for it to outlast Phil. Out among the stars, Phil had no need of the house. Although, he told himself, Phil would be coming home soon. For he was old and so, he supposed, was Phil. They had, between the two of them, not too many years to wait.

Strange, he thought, that they, who were so much alike, should have lived such different lives - Phil, the wanderer, and he, the stay-at-home, and each of them, despite the differences in their lives, finding so much satisfaction in them.

His meal finished, he went out on the patio again. Behind him, back of the house, the wind souged through the row of mighty ever-greens, those alien trees planted so many years ago by that old great-grandfather. What a cross-grained conceit, he thought - to plant pines at the base of a hill that was heavy with an ancient growth of oaks and maples, as if to set off the house from the land on which it was erected.

The last of the fireflies were glimmering in the lilac bushes that flanked the gate, and the first of the whippoorwills were crying mournfully up the hollows. Small, wispy clouds partially obscured the skies, but a few stars could be seen. The moon would not rise for another hour or two.

To the north a brilliant star flared out, but watching it, he knew it was not a star. It was a spaceship coming in to land at the port across the river. The flare died out, then flickered on again, and this time did not die out but kept on flaring until the dark line of the horizon cut it off. A moment later,

the muted rumble of the landing came to him, and in time it too died out, and he was left alone with the whippoorwills and fireflies.

Someday, on one of those ships, he told himself, Phil would be coming home. He would come striding down the road as he always had before, unannounced but certain of the welcome that would be waiting for him. Coming with the fresh scent of space upon him, crammed with wondrous tales, carrying in his pocket some alien trinket as a gift that, when he was gone, would be placed on the shelf of the old breakfront in the living room, to stand there with the other gifts he had brought on other visits.

There had been a time when he had wished it had been he rather than Phil who had left. God knows, he had ached to go. But once one had gone, there had been no question that the other must stay on. One thing he was proud of - he had never hated Phil for going. They had been too close for hate. There could never be hate between them.

There was something messing around behind him in the pines. For some time now, he had been hearing the rustling but paying no attention to it. It was a coon, most likely, on its way to raid the cornfield that ran along the creek just east of his land. The little animal would find poor pickings there, although there should be enough to satisfy a coon. There seemed to be more rustling than a coon would make. Perhaps it was a family of coons, a mother and her cubs.

Finally, the moon came up, a splendor swimming over the great dark hill behind the house. It was a waning moon that, nevertheless, lightened up the dark. He sat for a while longer and began to feel the chill that every night, even in the summer, came creeping from the creek and flowing up the hollows.

He rubbed an aching knee, then got up slowly and went into the house. He had left a lamp burning on the kitchen table, and now he picked it up, carrying it into the living room and placing it on the table beside an easy chair. He'd read for an hour or so, he told himself, then be off to bed.

As he picked a book off the shelf behind the chair, a knock came at the kitchen door. He hesitated for a moment and the knock came again. Laying down the book, he started for the kitchen, but before he got there, the door opened, and a man came into the kitchen. Lambert stopped and stared at the indistinct blur of the man who'd come into the house. Only a little light came from the lamp in the living room, and he could not be sure.

'Phil?' he asked, uncertain, afraid that he was wrong.

The man stepped forward a pace or two. 'Yes, Ed,' he said. 'You did not recognize me. After all the years, you don't recognize me.'

'It was so dark,' said Lambert, 'that I could not be sure.'

He strode forward with his hand held out, and Phil's hand was there to grasp it. But when their hands met in the handshake, there was nothing there. Lambert's hand close upon itself.

He stood stricken, unable to move, tried to speak and couldn't, the words bubbling and dying and refusing to come out.

'Easy, Ed,' said Phil. 'Take it easy now. That's the way it's always been. Think back. That has to be the way it's always been. I am a shadow only. A shadow of yourself.'

But that could not be right, Lambert told himself. The man who stood there in the kitchen was a solid man, a man of flesh and bone, not a thing of shadow.

'A ghost,' he managed to say. 'You can't be a ghost.'

'Not a ghost,' said Phil. 'An extension of yourself. Surely you had known.'

'No,' said Lambert. 'I did not know. You are my brother, Phil.'

'Let's go into the living room,' said Phil. 'Let's sit down and talk. Let's be reasonable about this. I rather dreaded coming, for I knew you had this thing about a brother. You know as well as I do you never had a brother. You are an only child.'

'But when you were here before...'

'Ed, I've not been here before. If you are only honest with yourself, you'll know I've never been. I couldn't come back, you see, for then you would have known. And up until now, maybe not even now, there was no need for you to know. Maybe I made a mistake in coming back at all.'

'But you talk,' protested Lambert, 'in such a manner as to refute what you are telling me. You speak of yourself as an actual person.'

'And I am, of course,' said Phil. 'You made me such a person. You had to make me a separate person or you couldn't have believed in me. I've been to all the places you have known I've been, done all the things that you know I've done. Not in detail, maybe, but you know the broad outlines of it. Not at first, but later on within a short space of time I became a separate person. I was, in many ways, quite independent of you. Now let's go in and sit down and be comfortable. Let us have this out. Let me make you understand, although in all honesty, you should understand, yourself.'

Lambert turned and stumbled back into the living room and let himself down, fumblingly, into the chair beside the lamp. Phil remained standing, and Lambert, staring at him, saw that Phil was his second self, a man similar to himself, almost identical to himself - the same white hair, the same bushy eyebrows, the same crinkles at the corners of his eyes, the same planes to his face.

He fought for calmness and objectivity. 'A cup of coffee, Phil?' he asked. 'The pot's still on the stove, still warm.'

Phil laughed. 'I cannot drink,' he said, 'or eat. Or a lot of other things. I don't even need to breathe. It's been a trial sometimes, although there have been advantages. They have a name out in the stars for me. A legend. Most people don't believe in me. There are too many legends out there. Some people do believe in me. There are people who'll believe in anything at all.'

'Phil,' said Lambert, 'that day in the barn. When you told me you were leaving, I did stand in the door and watch you walk away.'

'Of course you did,' said Phil. 'You watched me walk away, but you knew then what it was you watched. It was only later that you made me into a brother - a twin brother, was it not?'

'There was a man here from the university,' said Lambert. 'A professor of

psychology. He was curious. He had some sort of study going. He'd hunted up the records. He said I never had a brother. I told him he was wrong.'

'You believed what you said,' Phil told him. 'You knew you had a brother. It was a defensive mechanism. You couldn't live with yourself if you had thought otherwise. You couldn't admit the kind of thing you are.'

'Phil, tell me. What kind of thing am I?'

'A breakthrough,' said Phil. 'An evolutionary breakthrough. I've had a lot of time to think about it, and I am sure I'm right. There was no compulsion on my part to hide and obscure the facts, for I was the end result. I hadn't done a thing; you were the one who did it. I had no guilt about it. And I suppose you must have. Otherwise, why all this smokescreen about dear brother Phil.'

'An evolutionary breakthrough, you say. Something like an amphibian becoming a dinosaur?'

'Not that drastic,' said Phil. 'Surely you have heard of people who had several personalities, changing back and forth without warning from one personality to another. But always in the same body. You read the literature on identical twins - one personality in two different bodies. There are stories about people who could mentally travel to distant places, able to report, quite accurately, what they had seen.'

'But this is different, Phil.'

'You still call me Phil.'

'Dammit, you are Phil.'

'Well, then, if you insist. And I am glad you do insist. I'd like to go on being Phil. Different, you say. Of course, it's different. A natural evolutionary progression beyond the other abilities I mentioned. The ability to split your personality and send it out on its own, to make another person that is a shadow of yourself. Not mind alone, something more than mind. Not quite another person, but almost another person. It is an ability that made you different, that set you off from the rest of the human race. You couldn't face that. No one could. You couldn't admit, not even to yourself, that you were a freak.'

'You've thought a lot about this.'

'Certainly I have. Someone had to. You couldn't, so it was up to me.'

'But I don't remember any of this ability. I still can see you walking off. I have never felt a freak.'

'Certainly not. You built yourself a cover so fast and so secure you even fooled yourself. A man's ability for self-deception is beyond belief.'

Something was scratching at the kitchen door, as a dog might scratch to be let in.

'That's the Follower,' said Phil. 'Go and let him in.'

'But a Follower...'

'That's all right,' said Phil. 'I'll take care of him. The bastard has been following me for years.'

'If it is all right...'

'Sure, it is all right. There's something that he wants, but we can't give it to him.'

Lambert went across the kitchen and opened the door. The Follower came in. Never looking at Lambert, he brushed past him into the living room and skidded to a halt in front of Phil.

'Finally,' shouted the Follower, 'I have run you to your den. Now you cannot elude me. The indignities that you have heaped upon me - the learning of your atrocious language so I could converse with you, the always keeping close behind you, but never catching up, the hilarity of my acquaintances who viewed my obsession with you as an utter madness. But always you fled before me, afraid of me when there was no need of fear. Talk with you, that is all I wanted.'

'I was not afraid of you,' said Phil. 'Why should I have been? You couldn't lay a mitt upon me.'

'Clinging to the outside of a ship when the way was barred inside to get away from me! Riding in the cold and emptiness of space to get away from me. Surviving the cold and space - what kind of creature are you?'

'I only did that once,' said Phil, 'and not to get away from you. I wanted to see what it would be like. I wanted to touch interstellar space, to find out what it was. But I never did find out. And I don't mind telling you that once one got over the wonder and the terror of it, there was very little there. Before the ship touched down, I damn near died of boredom.'

The Follower was a brute, but something about him said he was more than simple brute. In appearance, he was a cross between a bear and ape, but there was something manlike in him, too. He was a hairy creature, and the clothing that he wore was harness rather than clothing, and the stink of him was enough to make one gag.

'I followed you for years,' he bellowed, 'to ask you a simple question, prepared well to pay you if you give me a useful answer. But you always slip my grasp. If nothing else, you pale and disappear. Why did you do that? Why not wait for me: Why not speak to me? You force me to subterfuge, you force me to set up ambush. In very sneaky and expensive manner, which I deplore, I learned position of your planet and location where you home, so I could come and wait for you to trap you in your den, thinking that even such as you surely must come home again. I prowl the deep woodlands while I wait, and I frighten inhabitants of here, without wishing to, except they blunder on me, and I watch your den and I wait for you, seeing this other of you and thinking he was you, but realizing, upon due observation, he was not. So now...'

'Now just a minute,' said Phil. 'Hold up. There is no reason to explain.'

'But explain you must, for to apprehend you, I am forced to very scurvy trick in which I hold great shame. No open and above board. No honesty. Although one thing I have deduced from my observations. You are no more, I am convinced, than an extension of this other.'

'And now,' said Phil, 'you want to know how it was done. This is the question that you wish to ask.'

'I thank you,' said the Follower, 'for your keen perception, for not

forcing me to ask.'

'But first,' said Phil, 'I have a question for you. If we could tell you how it might be done, if we were able to tell you and if you could turn this information to your use, what kind of use would you make of it?'

'Not myself,' said the Follower. 'Not for myself alone, but for my people, for my race. You see, I never laughed at you; I did not jest about you as so many others did. I did not term you ghost or spook. I knew more to it than that. I saw ability that if rightly used...'

'Now you're getting around to it,' said Phil. 'Now tell us the use.'

'My race,' said the Follower, 'is concerned with many different art forms, working with crude tools and varying skills and in stubborn materials that often take unkindly to the shaping. But I tell myself that if each of us could project ourselves and use our second selves as medium for the art, we could shape as we could wish, creating art forms that are highly plastic, that can be worked over and over again until they attain perfection. And, once perfected, would be immune against time and pilferage...'

'With never a thought,' said Phil, 'as to its use in other ways. In war, in thievery...'

The Follower said, sanctimoniously, 'You cast unworthy aspersions upon my noble race.'

'I am sorry if I do,' said Phil. 'Perhaps it was uncouth of me. And now, as to your question, we simply cannot tell you. Or I don't think that we can tell you. How about it, Ed?'

Lambert shook his head. 'If what both of you say is true, if Phil really is an extension of myself, then I must tell you I do not have the least idea of how it might be done. If I did it, I just did it, that was all. No particular way of doing it. No ritual to perform. No technique I'm aware of.'

'Ridiculous that is,' cried the Follower. 'Surely you can give me hint or clue.'

'All right, then,' said Phil, 'I'll tell you how to do it. Take a species and give them two million years in which they can evolve, and you might come to it. Might, I say. You can't be certain of it. It would have to be the right species, and it must experience the right kind of social and psychological pressure, and it must have the right kind of brain to respond to these kinds of pressures. And if all of this should happen, then one day one member of the species may be able to do what Ed has done. But that one of them is able to do it does not mean that others will. It may be no more than a wild talent, and it may never occur again. So far as we know, it's not happened before. If it has, it's been hidden, as Ed has hidden his ability even from himself, forced to hide it from himself because of the human conditioning that would make such an ability unacceptable.'

'But all these years,' said the Follower, 'all these years, he has kept you as you are. That seems...'

'No,' said Phil. 'Not that at all. No conscious effort on his part. Once he created me, I was self-sustaining.'

'I sense,' the Follower said, sadly, 'that you tell me true. That you hold nothing back.'

'You sense it, hell,' said Phil. 'You read our minds, that is what you did. Why, instead of chasing me across the galaxy, didn't you read my mind long ago and have done with it?'

'You would not stand still,' said the Follower, accusingly. 'You would not talk with me. You never bring this matter to the forefront of your mind so I have a chance to read it.'

'I'm sorry,' said Phil, 'that it turned out this way for you. But until now, you must realize, I could not talk with you. You make the game too good. There was too much zest in it.'

The Follower said, stiffly, 'You look upon me and you think me brute. In your eyes I am. You see no man of honor, no creature of ethics. You know nothing of us and you care even less. Arrogant you are. But, please believe me, in all that's happened, I act with honor according to my light.'

'You must be weary and hungry,' said Lambert. 'Can you eat our food? I could cook up some ham and eggs, and the coffee is still hot. There is a bed for you. It would be an honor to have you as our guest.'

'I thank you for your confidence, for your acceptance of me,' said the Follower. 'It warms - how do you say it - the cockle of the heart. But the mission's done and I must be going now. I have wasted too much time. If you, perhaps, could offer me conveyance to the spaceport.'

'That's something I can't do,' said Lambert. 'You see, I have no car. When I need a ride, I bum one from a neighbor, otherwise I walk.'

'If you can walk, so can I,' said the Follower. 'The spaceport is not far. In a day or two, I'll find a ship that is going out.'

'I wish you'd stay the night,' said Lambert. 'Walking in the dark...'

'Dark is best for me,' said the Follower. 'Less likely to be seen. I gather that few people from other stars wander about this countryside. I have no wish to frighten your good neighbors.'

He turned briskly and went into the kitchen, heading for the door, not waiting for Lambert to open it for him.

'Good-bye, pal,' Phil called after him.

The Follower did not answer. He slammed the door behind him.

When Lambert came back into the living room, Phil was standing in front of the fireplace, his elbow on the mantel.

'You know, of course,' he said, 'that we have a problem.'

'Not that I can see,' said Lambert. 'You will stay, won't you. You will not leave again. We are both getting old.'

'If that is what you want. I could disappear, snuff myself out. As if I'd never been. That might be for the best, more comfortable for you. It could be disturbing to have me about. I do not eat or sleep. I can attain a satisfying solidity but only with an effort and only momentarily. I command enough energy to do certain tasks, but not over the long haul.'

'I have had a brother for a long, long time,' said Lambert. 'That's the way I want it. After all this time, I would not want to lose you.'

He glanced at the breakfront and saw that the trinkets Phil had brought on his other trips still stood solidly in place.

Thinking back, he could remember, as if it were only yesterday, watching from the barn door as Phil went trudging down the road through the grey veil of the drizzle.

'Why don't you sit down and tell me,' he said, 'about the incident out in the Coonskin system. I knew about it at the time, of course, but I never caught quite all of it.'