

The Dreamers

James Gunn

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Author Biography

James Gunn has worked as an editor of paperback reprints, as managing editor of Kansas University alumni publications, as director of K.U. public relations, as a professor of English, and now is professor emeritus of English and director of the Center for the Study of Science Fiction. He won national awards for his work as an editor and a director of public relations. He was awarded the Byron Caldwell Smith Award in recognition of literary achievement and the Edward Grier Award for excellence in teaching, was president of the Science Fiction Writers of America for 1971-72 and president of the Science Fiction Research Association from 1980-82, was guest of honor at many regional SF conventions, including SFeracon in Zagreb, Yugoslavia, and Polcon, the Polish National SF convention, in Katowice; was presented the Pilgrim Award of SFRA in 1976, a special award from the 1976 World SF Convention for Alternate Worlds; a Science Fiction Achievement Award (Hugo) by the 1983 World SF Convention for Isaac Asimov: *The Foundations of Science Fiction*; and the Eaton Award in 1992 for lifetime achievement; was a K.U. Mellon Fellow in 1981 and 1984; and served from 1978-80 and 1985-present as chairman of the Campbell Award jury to select the best science-fiction novel of the year. He has lectured in Denmark, China, Iceland, Japan, Poland, Romania, Singapore, Sweden, Taiwan, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union for the U.S. Information Agency.

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Crisis!

Future Imperfect

Kampus

Station In Space

The Listeners

The Magicians

This Fortress World

Preface

Sometime in the late 1950s I ran across accounts of what was then called “chemical memory.” The way in which memory is transferred to the neurons in the brain for storage was mysterious at that time (and no one really knows today how the brain remembers). Robert Jordan and James McConnell, while still graduate students, began doing experiments with planarian worms at the University of Texas, studies that McConnell continued while a professor at the University of Michigan. His work and those of others was published in a publication whimsically titled *The Worm-Runners Digest*.

Other researchers picked up the research: Holgar Hyden, George Ungar, David Krech... All that, if the reader is interested, is summarized (in quotes from journal and magazine articles) in the middle channel of the Mnemonist’s ruminations. The final statement in that brief history, in the Mnemonist’s last section, speculates about the future potential of chemical memory. Such speculations are the spark to the rocket of the writer’s imagination.

I included references to chemical memory in my novel *Kampus*, in which they became pills of instruction that students could pop instead of going to class — though there they became a metaphor for getting knowledge — or information — without having to work for it. But they also contained a central core of possibility: that learning itself could be encapsulated, so that one could learn to be a computer technician, say, or a surgeon by popping a pill. If that became possible, civilization would be transformed more radically than it was by the industrial revolution or by science.

The Dreamers assumes that the chemical memory revolution has already occurred. All the everyday problems of existence have been resolved. Now chemical memory is being applied to the arts, and people have the opportunity to indulge themselves in the ultimate escape fiction: the living of other people’s lives through memories that have been encapsulated for them.

But there still will be a need for a few people who hold themselves apart from the common pool of pleasure, who must make decisions, create dreams, and supply the basic materials for the dreamers and their poppets.

Even in the 1950s and early 1960s, the concept of chemical memory was viewed skeptically by most biologists and physiologists, and today has been discarded. An article in the January 2001 *Analog* by Kyle Kirkland, a postdoctoral scientist at the University of Pennsylvania, dismisses chemical memory and describes what scientists today think about the way memories are recorded in the brain. Synaptic physiology, he wrote, is one of the most important areas of neuro-science research. Just because you can’t inject other people’s memories, he goes on to say, doesn’t mean that you can’t *replicate* them. But chemical memory always was more potent in what it implied about the human condition than in what it might achieve in the real world. [Science fiction, editor John W. Campbell once wrote, exists in the gap between the laboratory and the marketplace.] Memory is what makes us individuals, and the creation of memories is what, when it structures our dreams, we call art.

James Gunn

To Steve Goldman,
my best reader

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The Dreamers

The Mnemonist I

Dreams, books, are each a world; and books, we know

Are a substantial world, both pure and good.

Round these, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,

Our pastime and our happiness will grow.

—WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

The Mnemonist stirred on his protective pallet, moving dreamlike in counterpoint to the thoughts that were more real than the room and the cocoon of flesh that enclosed them. “The question is,” the Mnemonist said, “is dreaming, like REM sleep, essential to a healthy society, or is it so ultimately satisfying that the dreams will consume the dreamers?” This question, like others that occurred to him, occupied a peaceful spot inside his head surrounded by turmoil, like a curious island in a troubled sea of data.

we are	robert thomson and	check
the music makers	james mcconnell were	pellet
and we are	graduate students at the	maker
the dreamers	university of texas	5
of dreams	In 1953	generator
wandering by	they started to teach	2
lone sea breakers	the planarian worm	is
and sitting	because it was	running

by desolate	the lowest animal	a bit
streams	with synapses	rough

The Mnemonist was like a spider at the heart of a web he had not spun. Slender tubes surrounded him, caressed him, nourished him with food and function, removed wastes, brought sleep and wakefulness. They adjusted themselves to his commands and to his unspoken needs and desires, such as they were. As the years passed, for instance, he slept less and less; now his moments of unconsciousness lasted no more than half an hour each period.

world losers and	at its head end	a lost
world forsakers	it had	child
on whom the	a concentration	is
pale moon gleams	of nerve cells	wandering
yet we are	called a ganglion	on
the movers	that could	the third
and shakers	be thought of	level
of the world forever	as a	of the
it seems	primitive brain	crèche

He was not uncomfortable. In fact, he seldom thought about that aspect of his existence. His life was information and decision and, most of all, the questions he asked to which stored data responded, but there were never any answers to the basic questions. He didn't know if he asked questions because he was a question asker — what once was called a philosopher — because questions were fed into his veins along with the information and the food, or because questions naturally emerged from the data.

courage he said	mcconnell continued	cultivator
and pointed	training planarians	421
toward the land	at michigan	is
this mounting wave	he cut them	destroying
will roll us	in half	plants
homeward soon	and waited	pull
in the afternoon	for the pieces	it
they came unto a land	to generate	in

in which it seemed	into	for
always afternoon	whole worms	overhaul

His body twitched where it rested on the fluid-filled mattress, but he was used to it. In fact he scarcely thought of it as his body anymore; it was more like part of the room in which he resided, an extension of the console's tubes, a conduit for information and food, and sometimes a nuisance. The computer took care of it while he concerned himself with important matters. "Did the discoverers of chemical memory," he asked, "have any notion of the potentials they were releasing?"

they sat them down	the original heads	textured
upon the yellow sand	remembered	protein
between the sun	but the old tails	shaper
and moon	also remembered	716
upon the shore	perhaps memory	is producing
and sweet it was	wasn't stored	irregular
to dream	in the brain	shapes
of fatherland	but was	replace
of child	a biochemical change	the
and wife	that took place	worn
and slave	throughout the body	nozzle

"What are the limits to the individual's ability to manipulate reality to his satisfaction?" the Mnemonist asked. His body was wrinkled and gray and wiry, like a spider's. His eyes were closed. He almost never opened them. There was never anything to see, and the only matters that interested him took shape inside his head or swam like small blind eels through his veins and arteries. The individual's personal power was one limit, he thought; the conflicting desires of others was another. And finally there had to be ultimate parameters within which reality permits itself to be manipulated. "Is the first limit a function of technology," he asked, "and the second a function of population density? And if these are so, insofar as population density is dependent upon technology, do these two limits vary inversely?"

but evermore	holger	generator 2
most weary seemed	hyden	may require
the sea weary the oar	at the	a complete
weary the wandering	university	overhaul
fields of barren foam	of goteborg	check the

then someone said	suggested	consequences
we will return no more	that	of pulling
and all at once	memories	it off the line
they sang	might be	and estimate
our island home	molecules of	how long
is far beyond the wave	ribonucleic	an overhaul
we will no longer roam	acid	will require

“If one limit to the manipulation of reality is a function of technology,” the Mnemonist said, “does the self-maintaining technology of this world provide nearly total independence from environment, and thus no meaningful limit at all?” His life system was a model of the urban center in miniature, the extensions of his nerves and his realm of action like the extensions of the urban center into the fields around it and under it, with their water and minerals and growing things. Like the urban center, he was a closed system. “If resistance to desires and consequences for action are lowered to the vanishing point, is only the final limit important? Do the parameters within which reality can be manipulated remain the final limit to human happiness?”

hateful is	long molecules of	lift
the dark blue sky	dioxyribonucleic	shaft
vaulted oer	acid	12
the dark blue sea	in the nucleus	is
death is the end	of the cell	malfunctioning
of life ah why	contain the complete plans	again
should life	for an animal	check
all labor be	parts are copied	the
let us alone	as molecules	controls
time driveth	of rna go into the cell	and
onward fast	with instructions for	repair
and in a little while	the manufacture	as
our lips are dumb	of protein	necessary

“On the other hand, does the easy and ultimate fulfillment of dreams result in enduring happiness?” the Mnemonist asked. His voice was rusty, like a bird cawing, in that reverberating room, but if he had not

asked himself questions over the years, it might long since have withered into uselessness. Once it had uttered foolishness, but that had been long ago, in another lifetime. Besides, no one heard it but him. “Is there a fundamental perversity to the human spirit that, no matter to what gods man sacrifices, refuses him his heart’s desire?”

let us alone	george ungar	the
what pleasure	discovered	pellets
can we have	memory transfer	are
to war with evil	accidentally	not
is there any peace	while studying	at
in ever climbing up	morphine addiction	fault
the climbing wave	in rats	generator
all things have rest	when he injected	2
and ripen	brain extract	is
toward the grave	from a	overheating
in silence ripen	habituated rat	pull
fall and cease	into a second animal	it
give us long rest	he seemed	off
or death	to transfer	the
dark death	the	line
or dreamful ease	habituation	now

“Is the genetic code a biological mechanism for remembering?” the Mnemonist asked. His body twitched again. Such malfunctions were getting to be an annoyance; the console would have to handle matters better than that. He did not know how old he was: In the midst of all the data that flowed through his body and all the relationships his brain created between them, this personal fact had been lost with all the other facts about himself as other than a living memory machine and decision maker. His age and the condition of his body were irrelevant. At least they had been until recently. “Why shouldn’t proteins carry memory? But what is the human body remembering?”

there was a time	he followed up	then
when meadow	this chance observation	this
drove and stream	by transferring	body

the earth and	habituation	is
every common sight	to a loud noise	wearing
to me did seem	and to a puff	out
appareled in	of air	check
celestial light	in the face	on
the glory	and then replaced their	its
and the freshness	natural fear of light	life
of a dream	with fear of darkness	expectancy

The Mnemonist's eyes creaked open, and he looked at the fluid-filled bed next to his, empty now these many cycles since his predecessor had given one last twitch inside his web and died, as quietly as he had lived. "Who will make the decisions that keep this urban center functioning?" the Mnemonist asked. He had been delinquent in not selecting and training a successor. Well, there still was time; he would live for many cycles yet. But it was not too soon to consider his replacement; it would take a man who loved what he loved, and not everyone in this world lived, as he did, for the pleasure of information, for the delight of knowing everything.

the world which seems	ungar	as
to lie before us like	still got	soon
a land of dreams	memory transfer	as
so various so	after treating	that
beautiful so new	brain extract	the search
hath really neither	with ribonuclease	begins
joy nor love nor light	to destroy	perhaps
nor certitude nor peace	the ma	someone
nor help for pain	but not	fascinated
and we are here as on	when treated	by
a darkling plain	with trypsin	facts
swept with confused	he concluded	might make
alarms of struggle	that the	a suitable
and flight where	memory molecule	successor

ignorant armies

was not rna

a historian

clash by night

but a peptide

perhaps

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The Historian

The beautiful bright children spilled into the room like a handful of golden coins.

How long had it been since anyone had held a golden coin? Laurence wondered. How long had it been since anyone had thought of a golden coin? Perhaps only a historian would remember what it was.

He sat in his study, interrupted at his work, not caring, smiling benignly at the young men and women as they streamed out of the lift shaft and filled the sterile room with life and laughter.

Golden coins spilling from the hand, turning as they fall, glinting in the light...

They seemed like actors, an Elizabethan company capering through Stratford shouting "Players!" or a commedia dell'arte troupe appropriating an Italian square.

The forgotten console clicked, and a new display appeared upon its screen.

Oh, happy people of the future who have not known these horrors and will, perhaps, class our testimonies with fables. We have, perhaps, deserved these punishments — but so did our forefathers. May posterity not merit the same.

One of the young men began to sing. The song was one of those contemporary melodies haunted by echoes of the past, but it was not the song or the words that brought tears to Laurence's eyes but the clear tenor itself. Beautiful, beautiful — like one of the legendary castrati.

Others took up the song, here and there, toying with it as if it were a colorful balloon — a red one, perhaps; yes, red would look right in the all-white room — tossing it here and there and then holding it up, steady, with their mingled voices and the intensity of their desires. And all the while they went about their games: in groups of twos or threes they danced or courted or walked about admiring the room as if it were a work of art, and it was all one whether they danced or walked. They moved with the grace of ballet dancers and the innocence of children.

Ching-a-ching go the golden coins. *Ching-a-ching* rings the music clear...

Not really children, Laurence thought, more like courtiers playing an elaborate game of manners without a thought of tomorrow, without a thought of the rest of the world, as if here and now were all the world. The boys were muscular and masculine, and the girls were rounded and feminine, but they all had an air of unstudied directness, like children, without lurking reservations or sullen needs...

One by one they wandered past his study to run their marveling fingers over the console's plastic top, to lean past the console and touch his hand or his shoulder, to murmur a word to him.

"Honor."

"Pleasure."

"Sweet."

“Adorable.”

“Keep working.”

“We love you.”

One of the blooming girls touched his cheek with her lips. She was slim and blue-eyed and beautiful. He had not been this close to anyone since his wife died, and he felt their human warmth as they passed and smelled the spice of their bodies, driving away the old stale odors that he never smelled anymore, the odors that the room could never quite exhaust.

Click.

When has any such thing ever been heard of or seen? In what histories has it been read that houses were left vacant, cities deserted, the country neglected, and a fearful and universal solitude over the whole earth? Will posterity ever believe these things when we, who have seen them, can hardly credit them?

Some of them made love like children, innocent and free, with no one to tell them shame, wherever they happened to be, or on the round bed that rose, at the touch of a button, like a white altar from the center of the floor.

“They wanted to meet you,” one of them said. She was standing beside the console in her brief suit, shining in his eyes until he had to blink. “Father,” she had added. “Father.” But he couldn’t be her father. It was only yesterday, wasn’t it, that he had taken a little girl to a crèche when her mother died? A few months? A few years? He had seen her, of course, looking in upon her through the console’s screen, visiting her remotely in her happiness, soft and gentle, and she had been pleased that she could see him in return and speak to him, and each time she was larger. But now — had it been so long?

He rose and embraced her. She wound her golden arms around his neck and held him against her yielding body and kissed him, and Laurence felt old.

Hold the coins tight in a sweaty hand, the knuckles white over the bone, the coins biting into the fingers.

“Particularly Virginia,” his daughter said as she released him at last, laughing, pleased. Geraldine? No, of course not. Genevieve. Jenny. “I bring you Virginia.”

Behind Jenny was another golden girl, slighter, quieter, but just as beautiful. Perhaps — if it was not unfatherly to think so — even lovelier, with short dark hair and eyes as big as sunflowers that looked at him as if they two were all alone in the room. The pupils of her eyes were black mirrors in which he could see himself reflected, doubled, enhanced.

“Women have served all these centuries,” Laurence said softly, “as looking glasses, possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size.”

“You are witty,” Virginia said. Laurence was pleased with her voice. It was soft and low, like the breath of a lover upon the ear.

His knees felt weak. He sat down again and ran his hands over the white plastic of the chair in which he spent most of his waking hours, feeling it moist and slick under his palms. “That wasn’t original with me,” he said. “A woman wrote that long ago. An author. Another Virginia.”

“You know so much,” Virginia said.

“You are famous, Father,” Jenny said happily. “You do not know how famous. Everybody knows your name. The author of this, the author of that. Your work is read by the dreamers, and we live their dreams. Your reality, Father.”

“I don’t understand,” Laurence said. He could not stop looking at Virginia, and at the eyes that looked at him.

“Not many historians are left,” Jenny said. “Without historians where would we be? And you’re the greatest of them.”

“I seem to recall a phrase like ‘history is irrelevant.’”

“That was cycles ago, Father. Now we know better. Without historians the past would be forgotten, and our way of life would be limited. Also, a recent cap of a historian was popular a few cycles ago. Anyway, everybody wanted to meet you.”

“An old man like me?” They made him feel old, Jenny, Virginia, and the rest, full of eager health and blossoming energy, their skins packed to bursting with self.

Click.

Imperfect as ancient history is, in regard to the accounts of diseases, and the extraordinary phenomena of nature, we find that between the years b.c.480 and the Christian era, a number of violent plagues occurred, most of which coincided in time with the following phenomena, comets, eruptions of volcanoes, earthquakes, drouth, severe winters, diseases among cattle....

“You’re not old,” Virginia said. “Just older.”

“Virginia has this thing about older men,” Jenny said wickedly, but her wickedness was like the face of a child determined to be stern but unable to keep the natural good humor from breaking through in smiles.

“About real people,” Virginia corrected. “It only happens that most of them are older.” The way she said “older” made it seem like an uncommon virtue. And all the while she spoke, she did not take her eyes from his face, as if she wished to memorize it and keep it with her always.

And then — moments later or hours? — Jenny was gone and the others were gone and the room was empty of all but Laurence and Virginia. She had talked — no, he had talked and she had listened, leading him on with a shy question when he paused, a discreet exclamation when he said something that pleased her.

It was he who had unfolded — or been unfolded with delicate golden hands — like a Chinese puzzle box, each box smaller and better hidden than the one before, until he lay all exposed before her sunflower eyes that seemed all black pupil, and she clapped her hands in delight and laughed. “You’re wonderful,” she said.

Stack the coins, one upon another, carefully, so that the tower does not topple....

He told her about his childhood. “Children were different then,” he said, but he didn’t really know that. He thought they were different, but he hadn’t known many other children when he was a child, and he didn’t know any now. “We had books.”

“Books!” she said as if they were the most marvelous objects.

“Histories, biographies, novels....”

“Imagine!” she said. “Reading!” Reading, too, was a miracle.

He told her how the people in the books had become real to him, more real than people.

“I know,” she said, as if she really knew.

He told her how their world — the world of the self-sufficient urban centers — had developed naturally out of early experiments with chemical memory. How chemical memory had been perfected until people no longer needed to learn things from books or how to do things from other people: They simply injected themselves with knowledge. Computers, too, were improved, and the computers created better machines; society became more productive, more efficient; the urban centers were built; and people were liberated from toil, freed to do whatever they wanted. Some pursued the pleasure of sensation, and some, like himself, sought out knowledge that had not yet been reduced to proteins. For him it was knowledge of the past.

He told her how he had thought about the past until it seemed like a living tapestry interwoven with the color of people’s lives, breathing the incense of their desires. He told her how he had come of age more curious about the past than the present until he met the woman who was to become his wife and the mother of Genevieve.

“How beautiful,” she said.

His wife had been older and more worldly.

Virginia approved of that.

They had met at the home of her parents when they first moved to the building in which his parents lived. She had made the decisions — that they would be married, where they would live in the building, that he would be a scholar and write, that they would have one child. She had taken care of all the practical concerns of life.

“She must have been a wonderful woman,” Virginia said.

“She was,” he agreed. “Lovely, too, with pale blue eyes and fair skin and long brown hair. Her name was Susan, and I loved her. And yet —”

“Yes?” Virginia said.

“Nothing.”

“Tell me,” she pleaded.

“Oh, sometimes I wonder if my life would have turned out the same. I’ve missed so much, you see.”

“Oh, no!” she said quickly. “You’re real, and you have made things real for other people. But Susan died.”

“Yes. It was a silly thing. She didn’t have to go out at all. We were happy here. We could have lived here forever and never gone anywhere. But she got bored and went out.”

“Outside the building?”

“Yes. It was a strange thing to do, and she was not that kind of person at all. I never understood it.”

Click.

Mezeray relates that in China, the disease originated from a vapor, which burst from the earth, was horribly offensive and consumed the face of the country through an extent of 200 leagues. This account may be inaccurate, but is not to be wholly rejected. That some action of subterranean heat was instrumental in generating the disease is very probable; or at least that some phenomena of fire accompanied it, because this supposition is consonant to the whole series of modern observations.

After that, he told her, he had taken Jenny to the crèche.

“The best place,” she said. “Most of us were raised there.”

And he had blinked, and he was middle-aged. Jenny was grown and the world had passed him by, and he did not know where life had gone.

“Our world is not so wonderful,” she said.

What is not wonderful about bright gold and its music? Add one more to the stack. One more.

“Without the caps we’d be nothing,” she said.

Nothing? This child, this girl, this creature of joy?

“And it is you who make the men who make the caps.”

He felt tears welling in his eyes and blinked them back. When he could see again, she was standing beside him, leaning toward him until he felt the radiant warmth of her body caressing his face and the sweet smell of her filled his head with fantasies. Her lips touched his cheek like a bubble bursting. And before he could think or move, she was gone.

The tower toppled *ching-a-ching*, the coins rolling in different directions, ending in corners and other hidden places. Impossible to catch, impossible to find, impossible to put back together.

The beautiful bright children spilled into the room like quicksilver. The shimmering stream broke into glistening beads, coruscating in the light like prisms, eternally moving, changing...

A week had passed since the children had first come to him. Laurence knew it was a week because he had marked off the days, like a prisoner scratching with a nail upon his prison wall.

What would they think of that, the children who knew nothing of prisoners and nails? There was so much, he realized, he did not know about them and the world they lived in, but there was as much or more that they did not know about him and the world they all had come from.

It was ironic, he thought, that a lifetime had passed while he was not looking and a week had struggled by so painfully. But now it was over, and he searched the glitter for a face he knew, a face with eyes as big as sunflowers.

Then he saw her, and he felt suddenly young and giddy. It was a ridiculous feeling, and he did not understand it, but he knew that he was happy, even though Virginia did not come to him, even though she dallied with a young man dressed in black, moving quickly around him, coming close to him and retreating in one fluid movement, speaking quickly, breathlessly, her eyes not black mirrors (did she save that for Laurence?) but surging pools flashing with light...

She looked so different, Laurence thought. No wonder he could not pick her out at once.

Click.

The symptoms of this fatal malady were — violent affection in the head and stomach, buboes and other glandular swellings; small swellings like pimples or blisters; usually a fever, and a vomiting or spitting of blood. — The swellings in the glands were infallible signs of the disease; but the most fatal symptom was, the pimples or blisters spread over the whole body. Hemorrhages from the mouth, nose, and other parts, indicated a universal and sudden disorganization of the blood. The patient usually died in three days or less — which denotes the virulence of the poison, or rather the activity of the disease, which destroyed the powers of life in half the time, which the bilious plague usually employs....

Laurence watched the flow of life through the room and was content. No one came to him as they had come before. It was as if a pageant were being continued before his eyes, a pageant that had started somewhere else and would go on in still another place when it had left his room. Momentarily it paused here to gleam in this white room, silver on white.

The beads flowed together into larger beads and split apart, clinging until the final separation, into smaller beads again, whole and complete in themselves.

Everything happened so swiftly that he could not understand it, but clearly the flow of the young people had a pattern. He tried to understand what was going on, tried to make sense of it, but it was too complex for him. He sighed. He was content that the room was full of life again, as if the world had opened a casual hand and let its protean stuff surge in around him. He filled his eyes with movement and his ears with the sound of their mercurial voices and his nostrils with the perfume of their bodies.

“Father,” someone said. Laurence looked up hopefully, but it was, of course, his daughter Jenny. “Someone else wanted to meet you,” she said in a silvery voice. “I bring you Samuel. Samuel is a dreamer, and he dreams the most exquisite adventures.”

Beside Jenny was the young man dressed in black, the young man around whom Virginia had danced her courtship. Now that he was near, Laurence could see that he was not so young but more an old-young man. He was thin, and he had a pale, drawn face and eyes that were weary and dark, and looked, sometimes, as if they were turned inward toward some interior vision of hell or heaven.

“I thought you would never return,” Laurence said to Jenny.

“You know, Father,” Jenny said, fidgeting on one foot as if staying in one place were painful. “Historians went out. Since then we have had musicians and painters and scientists and sculptors and composers and — oh, I forget them all. But now it is dreamers, and Samuel, Father, is the most precious dreamer.” Then she was gone.

Click.

The peripneumony which was epidemic about the same time, appeared in a burning fever, insatiable thirst, a black tongue, anxiety and pains about the heart, short breath, a cough, with expectoration of a mixed matter, open mouth, raging delirium, fury, red, turbid or black urine, restlessness, and watchings, black eruptions, anthracoses, buboes, and in some, corroding ulcers over the whole body. The disease usually terminated the 4th day, sometimes not till the 7th. The blood was black and thick; but sometimes greenish and watery or yellowish. — Venesection was certain death. The disease baffled medical skill — the only remedies that appeared to relieve, were laxatives early administered, cupping and scarification, leeches applied to the hemorrhoids, and inwardly, infusions of mild, diaphoretic, attenuating, pectoral vegetables.

“I did want to meet you,” Samuel said in a slow, soft voice that contrasted with Jenny’s volatility. “You have given me some of my most effective dreams — your Nero was magnificent, with all the intrigues and orgies and murders and persecutions and torture, and your Masada was almost as evocative, though of a different sort, of course.”

Laurence looked at him. “I do not understand.”

“You are my favorite historian,” Samuel said simply, turning out his hands as if to reveal their stigmata. “You must be very deep, full of exquisite passions, to make it all so real.”

“I don’t understand what you do,” Laurence said.

“I dream. That is all. I let your words — or someone else’s words — I must move with the fashions in dreams, after all — flow over me like lava, engulfing me, consuming me — music plays — incense drifts through the air — my bed embraces me — sometimes I pop a little — not much, you understand, or what I dream would be someone else’s dream, and what I produce would be secondhand, so to speak — just enough to get the juices flowing. But the most important part of the whole process is the material, and that you provide. We are sort of partners, you and I; you perform your research; you create a world and people it; and I produce the dream.”

“You dream,” Laurence repeated.

A dark eyebrow lifted on Samuel’s pale forehead. “You are an innocent, aren’t you? Jenny said you were out-of-it, and I didn’t believe her. You don’t pop and you don’t dream.”

“I dream,” Laurence said. Dreams slithered through his nights like serpents or crept like snails, leaving their slimy trails across his waking memory.

“They dream,” Samuel said, waving a casual hand at the quicksilver children shifting behind him, never stopping long enough to assume a fixed shape. “You live. You’re real.”

“That’s what Virginia said.”

Try to hold quicksilver and it slips away, slides into other forms, breaks into tiny fragments, forms itself into heavy little balloons flattened on one side, unable to fly; try to close your fingers around it and it is not there.

Laurence tried to identify Virginia again and found her at last. She was involved in a kind of flickering, intricate pattern of movement with a young man, like a kind of feathered courtship performed to an unheard arabesque.

“I have a talent,” Samuel said. “I dream. I dream so vividly that my dreams are like memory, my memory like knowledge. And while I am dreaming, the little needles come and drink my blood, and then the laboratories analyze the proteins — the peptides, to be precise — and synthesize them, just as the brain does, and put them into little capsules, and the poppets pop it, you see? And then they live my dreams.”

Click.

This plague was so deadly that at least half or two-thirds of the human race perished in about 8 years. It was most fatal in cities, but in no place died less than a third of the inhabitants. In many cities perished nine out of ten of the people, and many places were wholly depopulated. In London 50,000 dead bodies were buried in one grave yard. In Norwich died about the same number. In Venice died 100,000 — in Lubec, 90,000 — in Florence the same number. In the east perished twenty millions in one year. — In Spain, the disease raged three years and carried off two-thirds

of the people. Alfonso 2d. died with it while besieging Gibraltar.

“They feel my emotions, my fears, my anxieties, my hopes. Or someone else’s — whoever happens to be popular that cycle.”

“What are they dreaming now?” Laurence asked huskily, feeling his mouth and throat all dry. He put his hand on the slick console top. That, at least, was solid and real.

“The latest thing is some composer. They’re in the allegro phase right now. See how briskly they move? They hear music — heavenly music, I understand. I wouldn’t know. I don’t pop — well, hardly at all, you know. Honestly, it’s because I prefer my own dreams to someone else’s, and I do enjoy the status. We’re alike, we two. Real people. We keep the world spinning for the poppets.”

“Are they always like this?”

“Oh, no,” Samuel said. “The largo really drags. And sometimes there are darker caps, grimmer dreams.... Oh, I must go. They’re leaving. It must be time for another cycle to begin, and I don’t want to miss it. This is my hour, you see. Dreamers are in, and I should enjoy it while I can. I may add to my psychic energy, my dream stuff, so to speak.”

And then they disappeared, as if a time sequence had been reversed, and all the scattered silver beads drew back together into a liquid silver stream that poured back down the drop shaft and was gone....

The beautiful bright children poured into the room like honey, honey-slow and honey-sweet.

They were all languid grace and weary courtesy. They moved like dreamers, enraptured by events beyond their control.

Virginia came directly to Laurence, walking as if all the delicate bones in her delightful body were cushioned in oil.

Click.

Along the trade routes between China and Europe the Plague traveled. In 1346 it was passed on to a warrior horde, a band of Kipchaks who were besieging a Genoese trading post in the Crimea. Their own death was certain, but the Kipchak leader ordered that the plague-infected corpses be catapulted into the town, where the Plague immediately broke out.

Ten days had passed. Laurence had tried to work. He had studied the original documents, trying to get a feeling for the era, trying to get inside the doomed people, and he had even dictated a few paragraphs, but they were worthless. The past no longer seemed as important. The present pressed in upon him, and the possibilities that awaited him in the uncertain future tormented his waking moments and disturbed his sleep. Perhaps he was innocent, but he was not a fool. He recalled all the old men in history and their infatuations with young girls, and he told himself how foolish they had been — and how foolish he was — and how it always ended badly.

He was not worldly-wise, but he knew something about people from his studies and he knew something about himself from the experience of projecting himself into the historical characters about whom he wrote. In his way, he told himself, he had lived a thousand lives already, more than any of these children, with their capsule fictions, whatever they were, could imagine.

He knew, then, that his fantasies were foolish, but he could not put them away.

Sugar in the gourd and honey in the horn, I never was so happy since the hour I was born.

And Virginia said to him in her slow, sweet voice, "I have come back."

"Yes," Laurence said.

"I want you to talk to me again," she said.

"I will do anything you say," he said.

She sat at his feet while the rest of the children moved around them as if in an underwater ballet, and he spoke to her, at first hesitantly about generalities, and then as she listened attentively, her sunflower eyes focused on his face, he talked more swiftly, more confidently, almost as if he were dictating to the console. Only this console was a living creature, lovely and receptive.

He spoke to her about savages and civilizations, about wheels and wanderings, about monuments and minarets, about warriors and weapons, about serfs and soldiers, about farmers and farthings, about priests and prisoners, about philosophers and philanthropists, about forests and fortresses, about barristers and barbarians, about commerce and continents, about tigers and tarantulas, about alchemists and alloys, about scientists and sacrifices, about empires and emperors, about intrigue and incest ... about the vast movements of peoples, about changes in the earth, about the operation of chance or fate that put here a great idea, there a great discovery, and there a man or woman of iron will or whim, and things happened for good or ill and usually both.

But most of all he spoke about love and lovers, about kings and queens, about princes and princesses...

Click.

At the beginning of October, in the year of the Incarnation of the Son of God 1347, twelve Genoese galleys were fleeing from the vengeance which the Lord was taking on account of their nefarious deeds and entered the harbor of Messina in Sicily. In their bones they bore so virulent a disease that anyone who even spoke to them was seized by a mortal illness and in no manner could avoid death. When the citizens of Messina discovered that this sudden death came from the Genoese ships they hurriedly expelled them from the town and the harbor. But the evil remained in the town and caused a fearful outbreak of death.

While he was speaking, Virginia took his foot into her soft lap and stroked it. His voice shook then, and something in his chest trembled.

When his words slowed and he looked up, the others were gone. They were alone, he and Virginia, and she came slowly, liquidly, to her feet and said, "Come."

She took his hand and led him to the altar-bed and unbelted his robe and pushed it from his shoulders. He let it slide down his body to the floor, feeling his senses come alive to her. Slowly, languorously, she drew him down to her, and she was sweet, honey-sweet, until he thought that he would drown.

He awoke, his body still languid and slow with its memories, the taste of honey sweet upon his tongue, and she was gone.

Panic paralyzed him. The honey turned sour in his mouth. His throat tightened. A chilly hand squeezed his stomach.

He sat up and searched the room with his eyes. There was no place for her to hide. The only pieces of furniture in the room were the console and the bed. The lavatory door was open, and he could see from here that it was empty. The kitchenette, with its autochef, its little round table and chairs, was empty too.

And he was empty.

What he had known the past twelve hours had been a dream, as fleeting and as impermanent.

He was alone. Now it was different. Now he knew he was alone.

Slowly he gathered himself together. Slowly he moved toward the lavatory. Slowly he showered. Slowly he took a new robe from the dispenser in the lavatory wall. Slowly he put it on. And felt someone watching him. He swung quickly toward the door.

Virginia was standing in the doorway, her eyes like polished volcanic glass.

He knew happiness again.

Joy was a lump of tears in his throat.

He could not speak. He held out his arms, and she came into them like a child.

Click.

I say, then, that the years of the fruitful Incarnation of the Son of God had attained to the number of one thousand three hundred and forty-eight, when into the notable city of Florence, fair over every other of Italy, there came the death-dealing pestilence, which, through the operation of the heavenly bodies or of our own iniquitous dealings, being sent down upon mankind for our correction by the just wrath of God, had some years before appeared in parts of the East and after having bereft these latter of an innumerable number of inhabitants, extending without cease from one place to another, had now unhappily spread towards the West.

A bit later he noticed the small case she held.

“With all my worldly goods —” she said. “You’re wonderful in your way, Laurence, but you’re a bit out-of-it, you know. You have no cap catalog, no dispenser, no injector niche. We’ll have to fix that if I stay.”

“If you stay ...” he repeated.

She smiled at him, and he remembered sweetness. “Not to worry, Laurence. I’ll stay. For now. But I had to get my hand injector and my favorite caps. It took some thinking, too, I can tell you, to weed them down to those I could carry. If I need the latest, I’ll just have to go out.”

He was filled with unreasoning fear. “I never want you to go out.”

“Not out of the building, silly,” she said, putting both hands flat upon his chest. “You do fret! But I like that.”

“When will we be married?” he asked.

“You mustn’t get notions,” she said quickly. “That’s not our way. Things change too fast. Enjoy. Enjoy. Happiness is now. Don’t make it a prisoner.”

Laurence shook his head, trying not to be concerned, realizing that he was irritating her with his importuning, conscious that he might lose her. He held a butterfly in his hands and he could not hold it too tightly: it might break its wings or, when he relaxed for a moment, it would fly away. But he could not help himself. “And I don’t want you to take any more capsules.”

She patted his cheek and then reached up to kiss him. “But that’s what you like, Laurence,” she said as she leaned back. “And you’ll like it even more. When I’m Helen, Cleopatra, or Poppaea, Isolde or Héloïse, Madame Pompadour or Mata Hari, and a dozen other women who have no names in history but are just as entrancing...”

“What do you know of those women?” he asked.

“I know what they did and how they felt...”

“You know what some dreamer thought they did and how they felt.”

“But they’re very good, the dreamers,” Virginia said. “Besides, what do *you* know of those women?” She smiled.

Click.

In men and women alike there appeared at the beginning of the malady, certain swellings, either on the groin or under the armpits, whereof some waxed of the bigness of a common apple, others like unto an egg, some more and some less, and these the vulgar named plague-boils. From these two parts the aforesaid death-bearing plague-boils proceeded, in brief space, to appear and come indifferently in every part of the body; wherefrom, after awhile, the fashion of the contagion began to change into black or livid blotches, which showed themselves in many first on the arms and about the thighs and after spread to every other part of the person, in some large and sparse and in others small and thick-sown; and like as the plague-boils had been first (and yet were) a very certain token of coming death, even so were these for every one to whom they came....

She came to him as Helen and silenced his apprehensions with her consciousness of beauty that shone through her face and body like sunlight through alabaster.

She came to him as Cleopatra and the millennia-old incestuous royal blood heated her tutored body to an intensity that burned his flesh.

She came to him as Poppaea, and her corruption coiled around him like a leperous white snake.

She came to him as Isolde, and her guilt made their lovemaking a frantic coupling upon the slopes of smoking Mount Vesuvius.

She came to him as Héloïse, and her sin turned her to unresponsive ice that melted suddenly into boiling urgency and tears.

She came to him as Madame Pompadour, and her consciousness of courtly intrigue gave every word a dozen meanings, every act a myriad of purposes.

She came to him as Mata Hari, and her duplicity drove her to lay siege to his senses.

She came to him as a ballet dancer ...

A pubescent girl ...

A whore ...

A desperate virgin ...

A reluctant bride ...

An Amazon ...

A slave ...

She came to him as all women. Each one enraptured him, whipped him into new intensities of passion, and sickened him, for what he wanted beyond desire was the honey-sweet girl he had known first, the girl he thought of as the real Virginia. But the honey was gone, and what she gave him in its place was biting and sometimes bitter.

One morning he awoke with the consciousness that he was alone. He lay dully on the bed wondering where Virginia had gone. Finally he roused himself and looked around the room. She was gone, and he felt a moment of relief. Perhaps, he thought, she had gone to renew her supply of capsules. But he knew that he was telling himself fantasies. He sensed that she was gone for good, and relief turned into an old sickness that climbed from his loins into his chest.

Slowly he moved to the console and discovered that a week had passed. Virginia had stayed with him for a week.

A week. He had learned more in a week than he had learned from a lifetime of studying books and old manuscripts.

Click.

Some were of a more barbarous way of thinking, avouching that there was no remedy against pestilence better than to flee before them; wherefore, moved by this reasoning and recking of nought but themselves, very many, both men and women, abandoned their own city, their own houses and homes, their kinsfolk and possessions, and sought the country seats of others, or, at least, their own, as if the wrath of God, being moved to punish the iniquity of mankind, would not proceed to do so wheresoever they might be, but would content itself with afflicting those only who were found within the walls of their city, or as if they were persuaded that no person was to remain therein and that its last hour was come.... This tribulation had stricken such terror to the hearts of all, men and women alike, that brother forsook brother, uncle nephew, and sister brother and oftentimes wife husband; nay (what is yet more extraordinary and well nigh incredible) fathers and mothers refused to visit or tend their very children, as they had not been theirs.

Where was she, he wondered. Where was his honey-sweet girl?

The beautiful bright children came to his room no more.

He thought he could work again. He tried to work, but the manuscripts, the documents, the pages, kept flipping past his eyes on the screen, and he had not read them.

Click.

Of this abandonment of the sick by neighbors, kinsfolk and friends and of the scarcity of servants arose an usage before well nigh unheard, to wit, that no woman, how fair or lovesome or well-born soever she might be, once fallen sick, recked aught of having a man to tend her, whatever he might be, or young or old, and without any shame discovered to him every part of her body, no otherwise than she would have done to a woman, so but the necessity of her sickness required it; the which belike, in those who recovered, was the occasion of lesser modesty in time to come ...

He found himself telling the console about Virginia, recalling for this unmoved, unmoving, plastic machine all the intimate moments and surprises of their relationship. When he awoke to what he was doing and asked for the information to be recalled for him so that it could be wiped from memory, he was surprised to discover that what he had talked about was not obscene.

He was, he realized, not sensual but romantic. It was a remarkable discovery, because until a few weeks ago he had been neither and then for the past week he had thought he was all sensualist. Even the sick desires that plagued his waking moments and twisted his sleepless limbs at night faded beside the idealization of Virginia that grew in his imagination to something impossible to realize. He knew it. This was a worse sickness than the sickness of the flesh, he knew, but there was no cure.

The days passed like plague victims crawling to hiding places to avoid the pest house. Laurence was a patient man and a healthy, slender, agile man, but he found himself becoming more distracted and nervous; he lost interest in food and grew thinner; he developed a cough and he thought he ran a fever at times. At last he tried to call Virginia, but the room reported itself empty and without information as to the whereabouts of the inhabitant.

She's living with someone else, he thought, or reveling with the children through some euphoric masque.

He tried to contact his daughter, but Jenny, too, was not at home.

Until that moment he had not realized how free the society was in which he found himself. It was so free that people could cut themselves away from it without restraint, could drop out of it without concern, fade out, be unavailable, do whatever they wished whenever they wished.

He tried to think of someone else he could reach who might know where he could locate Virginia, but even the central computer was helpless.

Click.

Few, again, were they whose bodies were accompanied to the church by more than half a score or a dozen of their neighbors, and of these no more worshipful and illustrious citizens, but a sort of blood-suckers, sprung from the dregs of the people, who styled themselves pickmen and did such offices for hire, shouldered the bier and bore it with hurried steps, not to that church which the dead man had chosen before his death, but most times to the nearest, behind five or six priests, with little light and whiles none at all, which latter, with the aid of the said pickmen, thrust him into what grave soever they first found unoccupied, without troubling themselves with too long or too formal a service.... The consecrated ground sufficing not to the burial of the vast multitude of corpses aforesaid, which daily and well nigh hourly came carried in crowds to every church, — especially if it were sought to give each his own place, according to ancient usage, — there were made throughout the churchyards, after every other part was full, vast trenches, wherein those who came after were laid by the hundred and being heaped up therein by layers, as good as stored aboard ship, were covered with a little earth, till such time as they reached the top of the trench.

Laurence left a standing call for Virginia and Jenny, and turned to research — this time on the nature of the society in which he lived, about which, it seemed, he had known so little.

It had started with chemical memory. Memory, it was discovered, was first encoded in complex protein molecules, later engraved in synaptic pathways. Chemical memory had changed society more than the Industrial Revolution. Schools disappeared. Only the perverse individual learned to read.

Whatever anyone needed to know how to do was available in a capsule. If a computer broke down and some person had to fix it — nobody needed to do that anymore; the computers fixed themselves and

everything else as well — why, all he needed to do was inject the right capsule and he not only knew the technical information but how the technician felt when he was applying it. If brain surgery was necessary — few surgeons were left — all a person had to do, if he wanted to, was inject the right capsule and he knew what had to be done, how to do it, and how it felt to do it right.

But chemical memory had more exciting possibilities than supplying information or skills. A person could get out of a capsule the feeling itself without the burdensome information; he could feel like a surgeon or a technician. Or he could feel like more exciting people, people who lived vividly, felt intensely. Nothing remained for most of humanity to do but pursue sensation. Enjoy! Enjoy!

Hence the dreamers. Hence the beautiful bright children who had nothing to do with their time but pursue pleasure and, when pleasure palled, sensation beyond pleasure: guilt, humiliation, sin, degradation, decadence, sorrow, grief, pain...

He knew them by name; he had felt them all. And so long as people wanted them, dreamers would provide them.

Laurence knew all this, and yet he could not stop himself from wanting Virginia back.

Click.

Moreover I say that, whilst so sinister a time prevailed in the city, on no wise therefor was the surrounding country spared, wherein, throughout the scattered villages and in the fields, the poor and miserable husbandmen and their families, without succor of physician or aid of servitor, died, not like men, but well nigh like beasts, by the ways or in their tillages, or about the houses, indifferently by day and night.... To leave the country and return to the city, what more can be said save that such and so great was the cruelty of heaven (and in part, peradventure, that of men) that, between March and the following July, what with the virulence of that pestiferous sickness and the number of sick folk ill tended or forsaken in their need, through the fearfulness of those who were whole, it is believed for certain that upward of an hundred thousand human beings perished within the walls of the city of Florence, which, peradventure, before the advent of that death-dealing calamity had not been accounted to hold so many?

The dreamers ...

He remembered a dreamer named Samuel. Perhaps. Perhaps? He asked the computer to call Samuel's residence. No one answered, but the glass in Laurence's console lit up and revealed a scene.

For a moment Laurence could not interpret what his eyes saw. The room was darkly red; the walls and floors were red and the room was dimly lit so that it was difficult to see at all. Slowly, however, Laurence began to make out shapes and then figures. The figures seemed naked. They were men and women; they lay in tangled heaps about the floor. At first Laurence thought they all were dead, and then he saw, here and there, a figure moving slowly.

In the center of the room was a chair. Samuel was seated in it. He, too, seemed naked, although Laurence could not be sure. He was leaning back in the chair as if exhausted; his eyes were closed. One arm dangled over the arm of the chair. From Samuel's hand something was dripping, a dark fluid was dripping into the mouth of a girl lying on the floor.

The girl lying there with dark stains on her lips was Virginia.

The beautiful bright children crawled around the floor like dark-red slugs.

Somehow Laurence had found Samuel's residence. The computer had given him a map, but he had not left his room for so long that he soon became confused. He blundered into several other rooms by lift shaft or drop shaft before he came upon the red room he had seen upon his console screen.

The room was hot. Laurence could feel himself sweating as soon as he stepped into it. It smelled of incense and sweat and blood. It throbbed with a primitive beat like the still-living heart of a dead reptile.

Laurence threaded his way across the floor, not wanting to touch any of the bodies that undulated across his path. He arrived at the chair in which Samuel sat bleeding from his palms.

Laurence picked up Virginia and held her in his arms, trying not to look at the smears around her mouth or the way her tongue licked out across her lips. She seemed almost insensible and scarcely stirred.

Samuel opened dark, shadowed eyes in his pale face and smiled. "The ultimate dream," he said weakly. "We have eliminated the middle man. Straight from producer to consumer." And he closed his eyes again.

Click.

The Brotherhood of the Cross they called themselves. The Flagellants arose in Hungary and created an order, complete with regulations and uniform, out of the formless and spontaneous wanderings of homeless people. They were robed in sombre garments with red crosses on the breast, back and on the cap and bore triple scourges tied in three knots in which points of iron were fixed. On arrival at a town, they handed the citizens a copy of a remarkable letter from Jesus Christ which they claimed had fallen from heaven. It set forth a horrifying plan which they claimed God had devised for the punishment of man. The punishment could be avoided if the example of the Flagellants was followed. Each procession was to last for thirty-three and a half days — one day for each year of Christ's life. At every place they visited, they entered the church and closed the door and each one divested himself of his upper clothing. Then marching in procession around the church, each scourged himself until the blood ran down over his ankles.

Laurence could not remember later how he had maneuvered Virginia down drop shafts and up lift shafts, nor how he had found his way, thus burdened, back to his room. But she did not stir until he had placed her on the bed, had sealed and locked the room so that no one could enter and no one could leave without his voiced instructions, and had begun to clean her face and hands with a cloth from the lavatory. She moved then and tried to sit up, but he held her down by a shoulder. She blinked and tried to make out his features and squinted at the white walls and slowly relaxed.

"Laurence," she said. "It's all over, Laurence. You can't keep me here. The past is past. Enjoy! Enjoy!"

"I think you're mad," he said, "but I love you."

"I'm not mad just because our ways are different," she said. "What is normal is what people do, and everybody does what I've been doing, what we've been doing. Everybody pops but a few real people like you."

This time when she said "real people" it sounded like profanity.

"Let me go," she said, her body undulating a bit in spite of the position in which he held her. "This was a good cap."

"I'm not going to let you go until you're free of this need to be somebody else," he said. "I'm not going to let you go until you — the real you, not someone else — can decide what you want to do."

“That’s ridiculous,” she said. “You can’t keep me a prisoner. You can’t keep me from popping.”

“I can,” Laurence said grimly, foreseeing darkly what lay ahead, “and I will. I am going to speak to the real Virginia.”

She screamed. It was the scream of a wounded cat, filled with pain and anger and incredulity. But it was nothing to the way she screamed later.

With a robe pulled tight around her and her face contorted with anger, she screamed at him and reviled him with language Laurence had encountered only occasionally in his research. She was not beautiful now, he thought; indeed, she was not nice to look at, and yet he thought he loved her more. He felt a strange sense of pleasure that it was not her beauty that enslaved him.

He sat at his console and ignored her anger. He was not afraid, even when she pounded at him with her fists. Knowing she was there, he was not even distracted. His work went well.

Click.

NOTICE TO BE GIVEN OF THE SICKNESS.

The Master of every House, as soon as any one in his House complains either of Botch, or Purple, or Swelling in any part of his body, or falleth otherwife dangerously sick, without apparent cause of some other Disease, shall give knowledge thereof to the Examiner of Health within two hours after the said sign shall appear.

SEQUESTRATION OF THE SICK.

As soon as any man shall be found by this Examiner, Chirurgion or Searcher to be sick of the Plague, he shall the same night be sequestred in the same house. And in case he be so sequestred, then though he afterwards die not, the House wherein he sickened shall be shut up for a Moneth, after the use of due Preservatives taken by the rest.

A day later Virginia pleaded with him to let her go. “I will never be anything but a burden to you. I will never be anything but hateful. You will get no joy of me. Please let me go. Don’t do this to me.”

“You have enjoyed similar caps of imprisonment and suffering,” Laurence said. “Why can’t you enjoy this one?”

The next day she was sullen and would not speak. She sat on the edge of the bed, her back to him, her body bent over her hands.

She was not even attractive, Laurence thought. The golden girl with the quicksilver moods and the honey-sweet taste was gone. She had been replaced by this drab creature. But Laurence did not relent. Someday soon, he told himself, she would cast off the remnants of her capsule personas like a snake shedding its winter skin and she would be herself. That self, he knew, had to be beautiful and loving and kind.

The fourth day she crawled to him and kissed his feet and begged him for one little cap. “I’ll do anything,” she said. “Just one little cap. You can pick it out. And then we’ll be like we were before. I’ll be anything you want me to be. I’ll stay with you. I’ll —”

“All I want,” he said gently, “is the real you.”

An hour later she was back. She let her paper robe drop to the floor and tried to shape her shaking body

into an enticing pose. "You want me?" she said. "Take me. Do anything you want with me. Just let me have one cap."

He did not find her desirable. Her face was haggard and twisted; her body was dull and flaccid. She did not value it anymore, and he could not want it.

He shook his head.

"Damn you!" she screamed. "Damn you! What are you? What kind of fiend? What kind of pervert? You're getting even with me for what I did to you, aren't you! Admit it!"

"You didn't do anything to me," he said.

She laughed harshly: "I found you innocent and alone and contented, and I seduced you. I did it deliberately. I took you away from your studies and your writing and taught you what it is to feel things. Now you're no longer innocent. You're no longer contented. You feel dirty and betrayed, and you want to hurt me.

He shook his head again. "I love you," he said. "I don't want to hurt you. I want to find you. And if you must hurt for a little, it is only to let the real you come out from behind all the masks you've been putting between yourself and the world."

"The real me!" she said. "The real me! Don't you understand? There is no real me! I am what I pop. Strip that away and there's nothing left. I'm nothing. Nothing."

"I don't believe that," he said. But he was shaken.

"Believe this, then," she said. "I left you because you bored me. You're the most boring person I ever knew. You have only two emotions: tolerance and a pallid sort of pleasure. I thought perhaps I could find something else beneath that wishy-washy exterior, but there isn't anything else. Nothing I could do could induce you to let loose and enjoy. All the time holding back, preaching and disapproving! You're dull and boring, Laurence, that's all. And I couldn't stand it anymore. I had to go find something alive."

He was shaken now; what she accused him of confirmed all the fears he had ever known, all the self-doubts and inadequacies that had kept him from participating in life.

"What's more," she said, "I know why your wife left you. Jenny told me. She is too kind to tell you, but I'm not. Your wife left you because she was bored. She didn't die. She went to another building, a strange building. Can you imagine that? Rather than continue to live with dull, boring Laurence, she went to a strange building and found herself another life among strangers. Because she couldn't stand you anymore. She couldn't stand —"

Laurence slapped her. The blow was unpremeditated, and as soon as his hand touched her face, he was sorry. She sprawled on the floor and looked up at him, holding one hand to her cheek.

He did not speak. He sat down at the console and tried to read the manuscript page the computer had put before him.

Click.

EVERY VISITED HOUSE TO BE MARKED.

That every House visited, be marked with a Red Cross of a foot long, in the middle of the door, evident to be seen, and with these usual Printed words, that is to say, Lord have mercy upon us, to

be set close over the same Cross, there to continue until lawful opening of the same House.

When he awoke, the beautiful bright child was back, golden in his bed, quicksilver in his arms, honey-sweet to his lips, and for a moment he rejoiced. But then suspicion swept joy aside.

He unwound her from him and went to the lavatory. The capsule was gone — no doubt she had cast it into the waste disposal — but the injector was too big for the lavatory, and the waste disposal had rejected it because it was metal.

She could have obtained them only one way: in the night she had discovered how to instruct the console to provide her with what she craved.

When he turned, sickness trembling along every nerve, she was standing beside the bed, holding out her golden arms. “Love,” she said tenderly, “we’ve been cruel to each other when we should have been kind. People should make each other happy. Enjoy! Enjoy!”

He let her lead him back to bed and into paradise.

Later, when she was asleep, he sat at the console one last time. In one hand was the injector, in the other a capsule marked “Abélard.”

On the screen of the console was a new page of manuscript.

Click.

This day, much against my will, I did in Drury Lane see two or three houses marked with a red cross upon the doors, and “Lord have mercy upon us” writ there; which was a sad sight to me, being the first of the kind that, to my remembrance, I ever saw.

He inserted the capsule in the injector, pushed back his sleeve, and pressed the nozzle of the injector to his arm. For one brief moment, before the synthetic peptides began to reconstruct his memories, his eyes filled with tears and he could not read.

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The Mnemonist II

So I awoke, and behold it was a dream.

—JOHNBUNYAN

The spidery gray body of the Mnemonist stirred with the chemical echoes that reverberated through his old veins. He could not entirely resist the ancient emotions, but they no longer had the power to enslave his will — if they ever had. The philosophical questions disturbed him more. “If not a man in love with what I love,” the Mnemonist said, “where can I turn for help when I must have help?” He looked again at the empty mattress beside him, round like a symbol of nothingness, dusty like a reproach. “What kind of world do we live in, where even the strong succumb and the strength of their desires is the power that brings them down?”

it is not now

ungar said

analyze

as it hath been

first we have

all children

of yore	to break	for interest
turn wheresoeer i may	the code	in history
by night or day	in which memory	we are
the things	is recorded	going
which i have seen	in the brain	to need
i now can	in terms of	new
see no more	molecular structure	historians

“Is it possible,” the Mnemonist asked, “that the historian was not strong at all, only untested?” His eyes, weak and watering from the unusual demands placed upon them, regarded the rest of the room dispassionately. It was a small round space without doors or shafts, a bit dirty with the debris not of living but of time passing. Spiders wove webs in corners and waited with insufferable patience for prey that never came their way; perhaps they lived by eating each other. So the poppets lived by consuming each other’s dreams. So he lived by consuming dry data provided for him by the urban center and the dusty memories stirred up by the computers. Had there once been something else: other people, other places? Had his mouth once tasted food; had his parched throat once been wet by drink? Had his flesh touched other flesh?

swift as a shadow	ungar said	the
short as any dream	each molecule	brain
brief as the lightning	corresponds	tumor
in the collied night	to some	is
that in a spleen	different	inoperable
unfolds both heaven	specific type	for
and earth and ere	of information	now
a man hath power	or more exactly	put
to say behold	to the pathways	him
the jaws of darkness	which conduct	in
do devour it up	the nerve impulses	low
so quick bright things	representing	level
come to confusion	the information	maintenance

“Must a person’s character include a certain measure of self-sacrifice to occupy this position?” the

Mnemonist asked. He himself had entered this room once, long ago, not like a martyr but like a bridegroom to his bride. He had entered — and so, there must be a door. His predecessor had been removed — there must be a door. Somewhere in the room. He thought it strange that he could not remember where it was when he could remember everything else. Memory was his life, his chosen work. “Is it necessary,” he asked, “to shut out the world of sense in order to realize the world of understanding?”

a thousand	ungar said	soybean
fantasies begin	when the memory	storage
to throng	is acquired	bin 616
into my memory	during training	has
of calling shapes	the molecule	developed
and beckoning	is synthesized	a leak
shadows dire	in increased amounts	fumigate
of airy tongues	in the brain	for
that syllable	when we extract it	pests
men’s names	and inject the extract	and
on sands and shores	into another animal	fungal
and desert	we communicate	infections
wildernesses	it to him	and reseal

He searched his feelings. The process was unusual and awakened in him unexpected sensations, but he could not discover any trace of sacrifice. He had gained, not lost. True, he had not “lived” in the sense of the ordinary citizen, experiencing through his senses the pleasures and pains of existence. He had not touched others since he had left the crèche, nor had he popped the experiences of others, as the poppets did. But he had known all there was to know — no, not all, because information still flowed in him without cease; he was a turbine in the river of knowledge — and he remembered it all. “Am I unique,” he asked, “or only exceptional?”

we are	ungar said	room 1251
creatures	the only way	has exhibited
of a day	to make this information	no signs
what is one	practically useful	of life
what is one not	is to break the code	in five periods

man is	and learn	check to see
the dream	to synthesize	if the occupant
of a shadow	these molecules	has expired

He considered what had brought him to this room. It was not in one of the towers but in the central service core, not hidden away but tucked into a convenient and unfrequented area, where all the protein-coded information that flowed like life itself through the plastic arteries of this almost-living structure passed and was absorbed. As a young man he had injected a series of information capsules to satisfy his insatiable curiosity about the way things worked. Then, he remembered, with what he considered daring and ingenuity, he had plugged himself into a console to avoid the interruptions and delays in the delivery of what he craved: knowledge. And in that information flow a series of data clues had led him to the room in which he had found the old Mnemonist.

give me the old	ungar said	effluent
enthusiasms back	the transfer factors	pipe 4338
the ardent longings	are peptides	in field 313
that i lack	that is	is broken
the glorious dreams	small proteins	and
that fooled me	consisting of	spreading
in my youth	alignments of	its
the sweet mirage	amino acids	fertilizer
that lured me	twenty	unevenly
on its track	amino acids	replace
and take away	differently combined	the
the bitter barren	make up all the proteins	broken
truth	like an alphabet	piece

“Was I seduced?” the Mnemonist asked. Surely he was guided. He would not have found this place without assistance. But he had been pointed in this direction, he thought, ever since he could identify in himself hungers that were not satisfied by what appeased others. Not for him the food that fed others; the dreams that sated other minds; the eyes, the lips, the entwining limbs that drew other men into forgetfulness. Had there ever been that for him? Once, twice he had a fleeting glimpse of white flesh, a tactile sense of silken softness. But perhaps that was only someone else’s memory. And what he found in this room was the idealized version of what he had rigged up on his own. “Is all life a seduction,” he asked, “opening doors through which we can walk if we wish — but only if the ability to wish to walk through those particular doors is born in us?”

to die to sleep	ungar said	the
to sleep	he had calculated	information
perchance to dream	that there must be	is
ay theres the rub	in the brain	public
for in that sleep	something on the order of	knowledge
of death	ten to a hundred million	give her
what dreams may come	of these substances	the
when we have shuffled	so this is	list
off this mortal coil	a big dictionary	of
must give us pause	to compile	surgeons

“Would it be possible to shape someone else’s life so that he or she would choose this place of mine?” the Mnemonist asked. He could start early in the educational process of some appropriate child, insinuating an affection for data and a dislike for contact with others, and gradually nurture these inclinations into love and hate until it was time to bring the young adult to this room, as he had been brought. But he knew, with the certainty of a hundred million particles of information, that the seduction would not work without predisposition, and he thought that if it would he could not do it.

canst thou	ungar said	check
not minister	if we learn	all
to a mind diseased	how the brain	routine
pluck from the memory	works	blood
a rooted sorrow	how the mind	samples
raze out the written	works	for
troubles of the brain	we can help	innate
and with some sweet	in mental	tendencies
oblivious antidote	disease	toward
cleanse	and we also	altruism
the stuffed bosom	can improve	particularly
of that perilous stuff	the functioning	among

which weighs of the the
upon the heart normal mind volunteers

“On the other hand,” the Mnemonist said, “could the computer network maintain this urban center without human mediation?” He had never asked himself that question before, and it was tempting to believe that it might be true. Too tempting, perhaps. Certainly it could handle matters during his brief periods of sleep, but over entire periods and cycles could the computers and their dependent mechanisms make the necessary decisions and initiate the necessary actions without his direction? He doubted that it was possible, but he realized that his skepticism might stem from the fact that he had always decided and directed. It would make an interesting experiment.

while ungar said the
memory he did not know number
holds a seat whether of volunteers
in this we would be able in the
distracted globe to make geniuses creche
remember or whether has
thee we would dropped to
yea be able to raise the
from the table the general level danger
of my memory of morality level
ill wipe away but we could certainly check blood samples
all trivial raise the general for parental
fond records level of intelligence yearnings

“Is that where my successor must be found,” the Mnemonist asked, “among the volunteers? Among those who find fulfillment in service?” That was a broader group than that of the historians, though the group was getting smaller constantly. He knew them well: They were the men and women who seldom if ever popped, who served in the crèches, in the skill positions where human discrimination was desirable or even essential. Perhaps one of them might find his position of ultimate service uniquely satisfying. “Am I not a volunteer?” he asked.

if i two scientists the most likely
forget thee have isolated volunteer
o jerusalem the first known might be one

let	memory molecule	who has suffered
my right hand	in the brains of rats	much
forget	the fear molecule	and sacrificed
her cunning	scotophobin	more

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The Volunteer

THE ORIGIN OF LIFE

The waters soupy with proteins and amino acids splashed against the hot volcanic rock, steaming and pouring down, and splashing and steaming again and again and again over the centuries and over the millennia, until at last a chance linkage of proteins achieved the power of reproduction and began to eat and grow and divide and eat and grow and divide, to mutate and to differentiate and to compete ...and finally consciousness stirred.

The Man Who Hunts Alone returned through the forest with the deer across his shoulders, its legs dangling against his chest on either side of his broad neck. He could feel the soft hide of the young animal against his shoulders and the head bouncing against his back as he jogged along the trail. He could smell the slowly generating odors of decay in his kill and the nostril-flaring odor of new blood not yet congealed in the knife wound across the deer's throat. Beyond those he could smell the leaves of the forest, particularly the needles of the firs that grew thickly here and smelled the strongest. He could feel the leaves under his feet; he could hear them crunching as he trotted — but not loud enough for anyone to hear except the little animals who scurried away at his approach.

The Man Who Hunts Alone reached the clearing. He stopped just inside the edge of the forest with the caution that came from long experience with perils that lurked everywhere. On the far side of the clearing, like a shadow on the face of the wooded bluff, was the mouth of the cave. The clearing looked just as he had left it the day before, but it was silent — no voices, no movement. He circled the entire clearing, staying just out of sight among the trees, and found nothing — no trail, no intruders. From the nearest point he could see a few paces into the dark opening of the cave; nothing moved.

Soundlessly he put down the carcass of the deer and eased into the clearing and across it to the bluff. He glanced around one last time and then moved quickly and quietly through the opening and stopped just beyond the sunlight that spilled into the cave. The cave was dark and quiet, and it had the good familiar odors of smoke and meat and urine. In a moment his vision grew sharper and he saw the forms of his two children, a boy and a girl, lying stretched out beside the black remains of an old fire as if they were asleep. But they were lying too still.

Their throats had been cut like little pigs. The smell of blood was thick in the cave. The bodies were small and fragile beside the old fire, smaller even than the deer he had carried back for their meal, and they were dead. Sorrow was a cold fist in his throat, and the woman was gone.

He turned and left them behind, the dead who could feel nothing anymore, and began the search for those who were still alive, who could still feel joy and pain. He hunted for the path the woman would leave, the woman who did not hunt and had not the skills of the hunter, who would leave a trail that he could follow, because she had not died here with the children she had borne.

Finally he found it, a twig broken from a low bush, still damp with sap, and a few steps beyond, a woman's footprint in the soft ground near the stream. He went up the stream until he found another footprint where she had emerged from the cold water, her foot slipping from the stone where it should have stepped. An hour later he found the first faint indication that she was not alone, the imprint in the dust of the trail of a large toe that could not have been hers.

After that he jogged along, checking the trail only occasionally to make certain that they were still ahead. The trail went the easy way through the valleys away from the hills — the easy way because the woman was weak. Once, the tracks crossed a rocky patch, but he circled it until he found where they had left again.

On the evening of the third day he caught up with them. He could not follow the trail after dark, but neither could they travel by night without leaving a broad trail, and the woman slowed the other down. She needed food frequently, and they would stop to eat. He had found a few bones carelessly unburied, and a few fruit seeds cast aside. The Man Who Hunts Alone had eaten as he ran, gnawing at the raw meat of a rabbit he had come upon unexpectedly along the trail or stripping seeds and fruits from the bushes as he passed.

He knew the trail was minutes fresh, and he approached cautiously. They were lying under a bush, a strange hunter and the dark-haired, blue-eyed woman he had taken into his cave after stealing her from a family that lived many days' journey to the south. They could not wait, his woman and the strange hunter; they were mating with the frenzy of animals in heat. He could smell the sweat from their bodies and the love odors from the woman. They pounded their bodies together, her slenderness against his thick hips and thighs, and he could hear the *slap-slap-slap* of flesh against flesh and the leaves that crackled beneath them as they rolled carelessly beneath the bushes they thought concealed them.

He found a fist-sized stone beside the trail and hit the man on the back of the head before either of them knew he was there. Quickly, casually, he cut the man's tendons just above the heels and forgot him; he would awaken, but he could not crawl far. When he rolled the man away, the woman looked up at him with her blue eyes, looked at the bloody knife in his hand, and looked at his face again.

"He came upon me when I wasn't watching," she said. "He made me look while he killed the children, and he threatened me with his knife if I didn't do everything he said."

"You came with him."

"Only because I was afraid," she said. Her body was still sweaty and red from the lovemaking, but she lay there in the dust and the leaves, not covering herself while she lied to him.

"You helped him."

"No, no ..."

"You enjoyed it."

"I was crazy with fear. I couldn't help it."

"You killed the children," he said. "It was too neat for him. You got him to take you away. It was your idea. You did it all. You —"

"Yes," she said when she knew there was no hope. "I hated you. I hated you always. You don't know how much I hated you, hated looking at you, hated you touching me. I hated your children. The first chance, I got away. I hate you, hate you, hate you —"

She hated him while he cut off her toes one by one, and then her fingers, her ears, her eyelids, her nose... After the first hour she began to scream. Each scream sent a shudder of pleasure down his back. She was a strong woman and she lived for most of two days.

THE DISCOVERY OF SEX

The creature floated peacefully, contentedly, in a sea as warm and thick as blood, conscious of self and satiety but unthinking, pleased to drift and eat and drift until some inner pressure that it did not understand forced it to divide into two creatures that would eat and drift. Into this paradise came a need that grew not into division but into a desire to merge. Other creatures floated in the sea, and it sought one out and tried to join with it in a greater union. He found resistance, rejection, recoil, injury, pain.

The stone floor was cold and hard beneath his feet but not as cold nor as hard as the face of the man who sat upon the throne. Outside, the sun was hot and bright, but the palace was cold and dark. The smell of the burnt offerings was strong; the odor of fear was stronger. His skin felt clammy, and his robe raised bumps on his skin where it touched. He held his ceremonial headdress in his hand, and he said, "We must make sacrifices, O Mighty One. This is the only thing that will stop the white invaders, that will keep them from this holy city, from this palace itself."

The king's haughty mask slipped, and he squirmed irresolutely on his throne. The hangers-on of the court, in their fancy clothing, whispered to one another behind cautious hands. He was a weak king; it was tragic that he was king when the times demanded strength and decisiveness if the Kingdom of the Sun were to survive.

"We have sacrificed many times already, holy father," the king complained. "It has brought us no nearer to repelling the invaders, and the people grumble."

The priest did not look at the king's daughter seated on the dais beside the throne. She was dark and lovely, slender, not like the peasant women, but deep in the breast, and she looked at him now — the woman who was his by promise of the king, who had been allowed to reject him — from beneath the dark lashes that veiled her startling blue eyes. But he knew that she was there. Out of the corner of his eye he had seen her coquetting with the fancy young men of the court.

The invaders, it was reported, had blue eyes.

"The gods are not satisfied," he told the king. "They think we grudge our sacrifices, that we cheat them of their honor. They will not stop the white devils unless we are properly contrite, unless we humble ourselves before them, unless our hearts are open and worshipful."

"Perhaps," the king's daughter said, "the white soldiers are not devils but the gods of our legends come back to reclaim their world."

"Nonsense," the priest said. "The gods have never left us. You talk myth and superstition. The gods do not need to come like invaders."

"Perhaps," she said softly, "it is the white soldiers we should humble ourselves before."

"These white devils will destroy the Kingdom of the Sun," he said. "They will kill your father and all the members of his court. They will topple our temples and steal the tears of the gods. They will rape our women and scatter our people to the ends of the earth, and the land of our fathers will be peopled by peasants and half-castes; they will eat dirt and call it food, and our ancient glories will be lost forever."

Even the girl was shaken by the eloquence of his prophecies, and the whispering courtiers were silent. The words hung in the air like feathered serpents, for the wisdom was on him and they knew.

The king was terrified. "What do you want?" he asked. The words trembled from his mouth.

"What I want does not matter," the priest said. "What do the gods want?"

He could smell the king's fear from where he stood in front of the throne. Gradually the king regained some measure of control. "All right," he said, "you may have your sacrifices."

"With an open heart," the priest insisted.

"Yes, of course," the king said. "How many maidens do you want?"

"Just one," the priest said.

The king was surprised. "One?"

The priest nodded and lifted his head high as befitted the spokesman of the gods. "They ask for the king's daughter."

The smell of the gods was powerful in the king's house. The courtiers gasped. The king fell back in his throne. Even the daughter of the king paled and trembled and was silent. Now she knew her life was in his hands.

"No," the king said. "You are wrong. You have read their message wrong. They do not demand my daughter. This may not be. You may have a hundred peasant girls, but you may not have my daughter."

The priest lowered his head the appropriate small distance to show proper obedience but not enough to indicate submission. "I will do as the king commands," he said, but he could not conceal his triumph completely. "I fear it will not be sufficient to appease the gods. The white devils will continue their dreadful advance into our interior." Now she would come to him. Now she would agree to the promised union of priesthood and royalty. She had regained her composure after the king spoke, but now she knew who held the power.

A day later he stood before the high altar, weary with blood and death, his arm heavy with the weight of the ceremonial knife and the lives it had taken and the hearts ripped from still-heaving maiden breasts and deposited reverently before the gods. The smell of blood, the incense of the gods, was so thick it could almost be felt. But in spite of all the dark bodies that had been stretched before him, in spite of all the blood that had drenched his ceremonial apron and collected in the concave altar stone, in spite of the incense, he knew that the gods were unappeased; their thirst had not been quenched. He had been right about the gods, though he had not known it. He had been wrong about the daughter of the king. She had not come to him. She had sent no message. She thought she could defeat him. She thought she could evade her proper place, that she could flout his honor, that she could cheat the gods; and a feeling of hatred rose in him to replace the love that he had felt for her. A cold desire for revenge replaced the desire that had flowed like lava through his veins; an eagerness for her death replaced the yearning to touch her skin and join himself to her.

He was not surprised when the young priest came to him and whispered in his ear that news had come. The white devils had marched deeper into the kingdom; more villages had welcomed them; peasants and villagers were rising from their long submission; they were taking up clubs and implements and marching with the white devils toward the capital.

The priest felt the strength return to his arm, and the knife in his hand felt as if it had never tasted blood.

“And how does the king receive the news?” he asked.

“With rolling eyes and trembling hands,” the young priest replied.

“You must go to him,” the priest said. “You must tell him you bear a message from me. Tell him that he must send his daughter to me for sacrifice, that the gods are unappeased, that they will not destroy the invaders unless they know his heart is reverent. Tell him unless he does this the white devils will march through the streets of the city, and the king himself will be killed like a dog and thrown into the gutters for peasants to kick and urinate upon.”

Before the sun had climbed another arc of the sky, the daughter of the king was brought before him. There had been no doubt in his heart, and it was so. Unlike the peasant girls, awed by the magnificence of the altar, by his assuming the aspect of the gods, and by the honor about to be accorded to them, she came struggling in the hands of priests, cursing them, unbelieving and blasphemous.

Only when she was stripped of her royal clothing and stretched upon the altar before him did she finally realize that her fate was upon her. She fell silent then under his stern, remorseless gaze, and he looked upon her slender body, aristocratic and lovely, and saw it not as the body of a desirable woman but as an ultimate sacrifice, convulsed now with uncontrollable tremors as she looked up at him, surrender in her eyes.

“Please,” she said, her voice weak and shaking. “Please. I will do whatever you wish.”

But that possibility was as remote as the memory of another life. The power was upon him like a mantle, guiding his actions, controlling his arms as they raised above her and plunged the knife into the soft breast. The blood spurted like the blood of any peasant, and the heart lay in his hand like any heart, still throbbing with life for a moment. And he knew the great joy of serving as the instrument of divine forces to do that which his heart desired. He was like a god himself, and he was no longer tormented, like a man, by desire.

THE TERROR OF THE MUTANT

The darkness was pleasing and warm like blood, and he floated happily for an age, not remembering, mindless and content. So gradually that he could not determine when it began, something began to ache. He moved slowly in the warm, dark waters, trying to relieve the sensation, to move away, but the discomfort grew. It began to focus inside him, where he could not escape, and he wriggled and flopped and splashed, and finally he found himself on a hard surface, gasping for breath, and memory returned.

He had left his horse and armor with a trusted friend near the coast. He had proceeded to the castle on foot with only a knife to defend himself against thieves and cutthroats, and there were many stories he could have told, had he a mind to do so, of battles and narrow escapes from death along the roads and paths. But they were nothing compared with the ten years he had spent fighting the Lord's battles in the Holy Land.

No one knew him in the green countryside where he had ruled, nor in the forests where he had hunted boar and deer with his friends. Now many of the fields had been abandoned to weeds, and those that were tilled were worked by sullen peasants guarded by men-at-arms, and the forests had been stripped of game and left to silence.

He should have returned with squires and men-at-arms, bedecked in shining armor with banners floating above, but all the men he had taken with him were dead on the battlefields of the Holy Land or lost to plague along the way. There was no one to welcome him as he came across the lowered drawbridge into

the castle, admitted for the night like any wandering stranger who looked as if he would not kill them as they slept.

The old seneschal was dead. The new seneschal he had never seen. He recognized none of the servants and was recognized by none. He had changed. He knew that. He had left clean-shaven. He had left a young wife and two small sons. He had left to the cheers and blessings of the faithful. He returned with a beard streaked with gray, a scar across his face from eye to chin, and hair turned white and worn long around his shoulders. His eyes, too, were changed. They had looked on death too often, and they were cold, and, like his soul, reluctant to be warmed.

No one knew him as he was ushered into the great hall where the long table already was set for dining. The smell of the meat cooking before the great fire — a whole pig, a haunch of venison, chickens — and the fragrant rushes strewn upon the stone floor, all the odors of the room brought back memories; they flooded into his mind from happier times, of a wife's gentle hands and winding hair, of children's voices laughing at play, of nobles and ladies laughing and shouting in the hall, gathered to share the fellowship of the meal, and servants bringing to the table great carcasses of stags and beeves to be carved or torn apart, flagons of wine, great round slabs of bread.

There was no merriment in this great hall. The master of the castle sat at the head of the table: his brother Thomas, grown older and thinner and peevish. Thomas nodded curtly and motioned him to a place just above the salt. Beside Thomas sat the mistress of the castle — his wife, Eloise, whom he had left in charge of the castle and its lands when he departed for the Crusade. She, too, was older and haggard; her glossy dark hair had streaks of gray, and her face was the face of a hawk, with strange, watchful blue eyes.

He wondered that they did not recognize him in spite of the changes in him, this treacherous younger brother who had stolen his place not long after he left and this faithless wife who had aided the usurper — nay, who had instigated the betrayal, slipping between incestuous sheets, whispering words of passion and beguilement. He could see the terrible vision as if he had been there watching and unable to act: the loyal, old seneschal summoned to her chambers to be slaughtered by the unsuspected blade, and then a scream, a story of treacherous attack upon her frustrated only by the watchful brother. And then a careful scrutiny of the servants to see which ones doubted, which ones were willing to defend the master's place, so that they, too, could be disposed of.

Now this bloody pair still watched shadows, still studied strangers, still remained unable to enjoy their treachery. Had he changed so much, or had the Blessed Virgin veiled their eyes so that he could obtain his heaven-blessed revenge? The rushes crunched beneath his feet as he walked toward the table, and he looked at the two young men on either side of the master and the mistress; they had been his sons, his hopes, innocent children learning to be men when he left and now large and surly and dark, muttering to each other and cursing the servants.

Above all else he could not forgive his wife and his brother for this — for ruining his children, for destroying the future. The red tide of anger surged through his veins, warming him in the chill of the room, but his voice was steady as he answered the questions that Thomas had for him. Was he from the Holy Land? And had he fought many battles? And how went the Lord's Holy War against the infidel? Was the Saracen to be thrown out of Jerusalem? And had he known the master's brother, Eric, who had perished so tragically while in the service of the Lord?

But the shifty-eyed Thomas had no ear for the answers, even to the last question, and Eric, spurning the meat, ate only the cheese he took from his pouch, while he fingered the hilt of his knife and thought of blood.

When all had retired for the night, Eric rose from his bed of straw in the stable and went the old, hidden route into the keep, up through the trapdoor, and up the old stairway that twined around the interior of the tower. The narrow defensive slits let in only slivers of light from the partly clouded sky, but his bare feet knew these cold stone stairs — he had imagined climbing them many times in the past ten years — and his feet did not slip.

Finally he reached the room in which he had slept when he was master here. He did not try the door; it would be barred. Murderers fear the assassin. But the old way behind the hanging drapes had not been discovered, and he pushed open the hinged stones and in an instant was beside the bed, his knife to the throat of the traitorous brother who lay beside the woman who had been his wife.

The fire burning in the hearth across the room painted a devil's mask across his brother's face. "You know me now?" Eric asked.

"Eric?" his brother gasped, as stiff as death. "Eric? But word came of your death with all your men."

He felt the sleek, silk sheets beneath his hand and the trembling of the vein at the point of the knife. Bite deeply, knife! Taste blood, as you have tasted the blood of a dozen Saracens! "My men, yes, may their souls be with God. But I escaped, as you see. Escaped to return and confront you with your treachery."

"We thought you dead," Thomas said thickly, feeling his death on him. "We did only what was right, what was approved by the Crown and the Church."

"With what unseemly haste you did it, not after learning of my presumed death but within months — nay, weeks — of my leaving."

"Eric!" Eloise said then, throwing herself against his left arm. On her knees in the bed, she clutched his waist in arms strengthened by panic. "You have returned to save me from this beast whom you called brother! I couldn't help myself. He did it all. He threatened me with death if I refused him, not just my death but the death of my sons as well. I had to save them for you."

"Eloise —!" Thomas began.

And then her hand struck Eric's right hand, driving the blade deep into his brother's throat. Thomas's scream ended in bubbles as he strangled on his own blood, his body jerking in a simulation of life.

Eric pulled the knife free and wiped the hot blood from his hand on the sheet. "Good Eloise," he said. "Gentle Eloise. How good it is to know that you are still pure of heart, if not of body."

"Yes," she said. "I am pure. I am. I did only what I had to do to save the children." She caught up his right hand and kissed the blood, and ignored the body still dying beside her.

"You are a liar, Eloise," Eric said, "and you are an adulteress and a murderer and a cheat, and you must die along with your perfidious lover, or men will sleep uneasy in their graves and injustice will rule in this green land. You will die more slowly than he whose ending you mercifully hastened."

She retreated from his anger, crouching back into a corner of the room far from the fireplace, where the flickering flames reached for her like knives, turning her into a nightmare figure from some dream he had forgotten. He moved toward her, his knife ready to begin its work, but before he could reach her feral body, the air began to glow between him and his appointed victim.

He hesitated, puzzled, and saw a figure form in the glow. It was a woman clad in long, gleaming garments, her right hand outstretched toward him in a gesture of sympathy and concern, her face sweet beyond description but saddened now and wise. It was the Virgin. There was no doubt of that, and Eric

fell upon his knees.

“MY SON,” the Virgin said. He thought she spoke, but there was no sound, and perhaps the words only appeared, unspoken, inside his head. “YOU MUST NOT SEEK YOUR OWN VENGEANCE. ‘VENGEANCE IS MINE,’ SAYETH THE LORD. ”

“An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” he muttered.

“NO, MY SON,” the vision said. “YOU ENDANGER YOUR IMMORTAL SOUL. THIS WOMAN ISN'T WORTH IT. YOU WILL NOT KILL HER. YOU WILL SPARE HER LIFE. LEAVE HER TO A NUNNERY AND TO GOD. THERE ARE MEN —AND WOMEN, TOO —WHO STILL ARE HONORABLE AND WORTHY, AND THERE STILL IS TIME FOR YOU. ”

He struggled with the idea. Desire for vengeance still burned through his veins. Hunger for the sweet sounds of repentance still tormented his body. “No,” he said hoarsely. “This is not the way it was meant to be.”

“THIS IS THE WAY IT MUST BE,” the vision said.

Slowly, on his knees, his anger began to seep away, and in its place came a kind of peace.

THE CHANGELING

The eggs had hatched, and all the little finned creatures had wriggled away except one. He watched it now as it struggled perversely up from the water onto the beach and lay gasping upon the sand. The terror of it almost overcame him, and he saw that this unnatural offspring lived in the corrosive, weighty environment that had never been meant for life. He leaped out of the water into the air for one last look. The creature on the beach pulled itself up through the sand, away from the water. He fell back into the sea and dived deep, trying to forget.

He felt her come into the room from the kitchen. He felt the weight of her presence behind him, and he wondered if she had a knife in her hand and he should brace his shoulders for the blow that would send the blade through his back seeking his heart. But she went past him toward her chair. What she had in her hand was a drink — a Scotch and soda, he knew from long experience — and she sat in the striped, cut-velvet chair staring out the picture window into the garden.

The garden had bloomed splendidly this year. The right combination of rain and sun had brought forth more blossoms than ever before, and the colors were more brilliant — yellows and reds and blues. It was her garden, and it was like her: its heads lifted proudly into the crystal air and its roots drawing their sustenance out of decay.

He saw her face in profile, the delicate dark beauty of her hair like clouds framing her face, the straight forehead and the shapely nose and lips, perfect, as though sculpted by an artist, but most of all the eyes, blue and unfathomable, capable of freezing with anger or melting with laughter or love. He remembered the tender times, the first moments of awareness, the heightened sensitivity as they met more often, the casual touches that became purposeful, the kisses, the caresses, the passion that touched fire to cool flesh, the intimate, glorious things she had done for him, that she had wanted to do, that she had invented, and the final ecstasy of their total union....

That was all over. It had been over now for months, but a new development had been introduced into the relationship. He had introduced it, and she knew what he had done. She sat there, that perfect body, so well remembered and so distant, and he waited, filled with the knowledge that he had avenged himself, for the satisfaction of her reaction.

Waiting, he got up and went to the bar to fix himself a bourbon and soda, knowing she had shifted her head to watch him, knowing she could not resist much longer.

“Why did you do it?” she asked.

“Do what?” he asked, returning to the sofa, picking up the paper, prolonging the moment.

“You know what you did.”

“You mean, why did I tell the committee that your lover was a poor teacher and a man of low moral standards?” He took a sip of his drink; it was strong but not strong enough. Nothing was strong enough to erase the memories that would not let him sleep or rest.

“Yes. Why did you do it?”

“I plead truth.”

“He is a good teacher.”

“You don’t know him. He is a bad teacher, a poor scholar, and probably he would not have won tenure anyway. My voice was only one among many. In the end, he had no support from anyone.”

“Do you think this could possibly stop us from seeing each other?”

She still had not looked at him. He wondered if she would ever look at him again. “No,” he said, “but it will make the seeing more difficult. You and he are going to have to make some choices, both of you. Everything won’t be easy anymore.”

“Your vaunted civilization is slipping.”

“We can be just as civilized as ever,” he said evenly, “but we don’t have to make adultery easy. Why should adultery be easy? Nothing else is.”

“You can always leave,” she said. Now she looked at him; it was a look of hate — no, worse than hate, disgust. “Or you can divorce me.”

“You’re safe in saying that,” he said. “You know I won’t do either. You’ve ruined me; I’m a wreck, not a man. I can’t leave you. Even if I can’t have you, I want to see you whenever I can. ‘My face, my moon, my everybody’s moon, which everybody looks on and calls his.’ And I can’t divorce you. While we still are man and wife I can cling to the faint hope that you will love me again.”

“Don’t delude yourself.” The sneer marred that perfect face.

“But now, you see, he must choose,” he said. “He will not have a job as a teacher; if he wants to teach, he will have to go somewhere else after his terminal year.”

“You are willing to wait a whole year?”

“I am grown peaceful as old age tonight.”

“What are you quoting now?”

He went on, ignoring her, “If he wants to stay in this town, near you, he will have to take some other kind of job, as a salesman of automobiles, perhaps, or of real estate.”

“You think that would matter to me?”

“I’m sure it would,” he said. “You have this sense of propriety, which doesn’t keep you faithful but which keeps you from being unfaithful with someone inappropriate. Sin is irrelevant; good taste is everything. But maybe we will test his attachment, too. He will have to decide which is more important to him, you or his profession.”

“You think that will be a problem?” she said with great scorn. “For you, maybe, but not everybody is as cold-blooded as you are.”

“Cold-blooded,” he said, and almost choked on the lump of grief that rose in his throat.

“You make this big show of jealousy,” she said, “but really you’re as cold as a fish. It’s no wonder I turned to someone else for warmth.”

“Go on,” he said. “Turn the knife a little more. I thought I couldn’t feel anything, but I can still enjoy the pain.”

“You’ll see. He’ll find something here, some way we can be together. Some —”

The telephone rang as if on cue. Distantly the thought echoed, On cue, on cue, on cue. He didn’t move, and after a few rings she went to answer it.

“Hello,” she said, and then her voice softened into intimacy and he knew who it was, if he hadn’t known before. “Yes. No, I’m not alone, but it doesn’t matter....”

That cousin here again? He waits outside?

“Go ahead,” she said. “You can say anything....” Her hubris spoke. “What kind of bad news? ... When? ... Where are you going? ... Yes.... Of course I understand.... Your profession is important.... Yes.... As soon as you’re settled? No, I couldn’t do that.... Well, I don’t want to do it; put it that way.... No, I’m not angry. Disappointed, maybe. A bit sad. Not angry. Not with you.... Of course we’ll meet again before you go.... We’ll say good-bye then.”

She hung up the telephone and turned to him. He knew that without looking. “You knew he was going to call, didn’t you?” she said. “You knew he had a job on the Coast, and you worked it around so that I would consider it a test of what we had together. Congratulations. You won.”

“But do not let us quarrel any more. No, my Lucrezia ...” he began before her words and their terrible import made him turn in his chair. She was behind him with a knife; it was the premonition that had brushed him earlier. But the knife was not aimed at him. She held it in front of her chest with both hands, awkwardly but with deadly intensity.

He knew the wrongness of it as he came out of his chair. This wasn’t the way it was supposed to be. How he knew that he was not sure, but he knew it was wrong, and he reached her just as the knife plunged toward her breast, in time to touch her hands as they moved but not in time to stop the knife in its descent. It was almost as if he guided the knife toward its palpating destination.

As he caught her dying body, the blood spurted onto his hands and chest and neck, warm and thick and sickening.

THE RETURN TO THE WOMB

He lay basking in the sun on a rock near the sea. The sun was warm, and his imperfect lungs were

working easily, drawing in life-giving air, sending waves of contentment through his scaly body. Into his little Eden intruded a rustle of nearby weeds. He lifted his head, trying to perceive movement with his right eye. For a moment, nothing. Then something moved. It was scaly and moved clumsily on ill-adapted fins, but it approached rapidly, almost running. Just before it reached him, he flipped his body off the rock and into the comforting depths of the amniotic sea.

The pink room rose comfortingly around him like a promise of eternal love as he ascended the lift shaft. It was her color, not his — his was a rich brown — but he had grown to love pink because it was hers, because it was a constant reminder of her, because he was so much in love with her that being in this room was a constant reassurance that he was safe within her love. The room smelled of her, too — the fragrance of roses.

He had to battle the room and everything it meant to him when his duties called him away. If he had been like other men, he would never have had to leave; he could have spent his life in this rose-scented pink room, with its silky carpet, its all-purpose console, its total convenience, and its total love — his love, his wife, his beautiful, gentle, always exciting wife.

But he was a surgeon in a time when no one was a surgeon anymore, when no one studied the old skills and arts. In this capsule culture maintained by self-repairing machines directed by omniscient computers, everyone did just what he or she wanted to do; people pursued pleasures in their own peculiar ways, and if something had to be done that the computers and their tools could not do, a volunteer would inject a capsule and the synthesized proteins would provide instant memory of how that action could be accomplished and of how the muscles and the nerve endings felt when they were doing it. That was the miracle of chemical learning.

The only problem was that not many volunteers were left. Everyone had succumbed to the capsule-popping craze that made available every kind of sensation. Men and women with vivid imaginations were dreaming experiences, episodes, and even entire sequences of episodes; the machines would synthesize the proteins manufactured in the bloodstreams of the dreamers, and the computers offered memories to everybody who wanted to be somebody else. And that included everybody; everybody, it seemed, but him.

He had something else. He had his work, the surgery he had studied with only the most casual capsule assistance — *coronoid, condyloid, styloid, mastoid, zygomatic arch, coronal suture* — that brought him a steadily increasing number of patients as new ailments arose among the poppets, ailments whose diagnosis and treatment were not programmed into the computers. When he asked the console about the curious rise in such conditions, the computers were evasive.

“Perhaps,” the console said with an unusual lack of certainty, “these conditions may be due to the increase in the life-span of humanity.”

When he pressed it, the console said, “Perhaps the memory capsules contain cellular memories of once-prevalent but now forgotten conditions.”

When he asked again, the console said, “The conditions under which humanity is living are new and unpredictable. Something may be underway that we will not be able to define for another thousand years.”

And when he asked a final time, the computer said, “Perhaps the process of evolution has not been completed for the human species.”

He shrugged and forgot it. Even with the prospect of a life-span of a century and a half, he would never know the reason, and these days, with memories available at every console, there was so much to forget.

Forgetting was an art. Men can drown in memories, and reality can become as elusive as a dream.

But all of these thoughts, like the memory of his half day of surgery, dropped from him as he returned to the paradise he had left. He sealed the lift shaft behind him with a word and called, “Love!”

The room swallowed the word as though it had never been spoken. The pink seemed to darken.

“Lora,” he called.

No answer. The room turned to rose.

There was no place for her to hide. The single, all purpose room was empty. The circular bed was part of the floor again. The lavatory was empty; the kitchenette was bare.

Everything in the room spoke of her, but Lora was not there.

The chambers of his heart — *superior vena cava, right atrium, right ventricle, left ventricle, left atrium, pulmonary vein, pulmonary artery, aorta* — squeezed together. His heart pounded to drive his blood through his contracted arteries.

“Lora!” he said.

“Jeri,” the console said. It spoke in his wife’s voice. She had left a message. Of course, of course. He should have felt relief, but the word only increased his apprehension, even before he heard what followed. “I have gone. Do not try to follow me. There is no point in seeking me out. I have sought my final happiness. Everyone has a right to that. Don’t cry; don’t grieve; don’t be angry. Be glad for me. It is not that I love you less but that love — the limited kind that we can know in the real world — no longer is enough.”

“I don’t understand,” he said. Blood pounded in his head.

“Of course you don’t. You couldn’t be expected to understand.” She had recorded it all, and the console triggered the answers to his questions. “While you have been gone, every day — I loved you for it, Jeri, don’t blame yourself — I sampled capsules. Just a little at first and then a bit more. It was glorious, Jeri. Don’t be angry, but this was what I had always been looking for. Neither of us were poppets, so how could we know?”

Angry. How could he help but be angry? How could he not be angry when the love that had nourished him had been withdrawn — not because it had changed, not because of anything he had done or not done, but because it wasn’t enough.

The room was the color of blood; it was like being inside a throbbing heart. “You should have let me talk to you. I would have changed. I would have been more.”

“It’s not that, Jeri,” the console said. “Don’t think it was that. You were everything you could be, everything anyone could want. But don’t you see? What the capsules offer is beyond human capability. What the capsules offer is bliss, tailored to my needs, not adjusted to them.”

Hope stirred. If she were on capsules he could find her, he could bring her back to this room, from dreams to reality, he could keep her with him, and if he couldn’t make her happy alone . . .

“We could have shared you,” he said, trying to be reasonable. “I would have been hurt, yes, but I would have shared you. You could have had your capsules, and I could have had —”

“It wouldn’t have worked,” the console said, “because by now I’m not me anymore. The me you knew was unsatisfied, one person with one set of memories. It isn’t just capsules I want, not just temporary relief, but a complete hookup, total immersion.”

He had heard of that; the consoles were capable of complete physical maintenance while the poppets went deeper and deeper into their programmed worlds of preselected memories.

“I’ll find you,” he muttered. His voice felt harsh; his throat hurt. His surgeon’s hands were trembling. “Wherever you are, I’ll find you.”

“I’m sorry, Jeri. I’ve placed an absolute hold on my privacy. There’s no way to find me, and if you did, you’d never get me back. I’m as good as dead. But think of me as being in paradise.” The console clicked. The finality of the sound was terrible, but the silence that followed was even worse.

He went through the entire urban center looking, looking, looking, invading privacy, offending everyone he met, seeking everywhere, against all common decency. And all the while his anger grew, and the pain went deeper. But even anger and pain eventually must recognize defeat, and finally he surrendered. He returned to the pink room. No longer did it remind him of love; the color and the odor were the hue and smell of hate.

She was gone. Gone for good. Never to return. The love he had felt had turned to something else, something dark and unpleasant, something that sought a different kind of release. If she had been here now, he would have taken his surgeon’s tools, his saws and his scalpels, and dissected the creature that once had been Lora. Lora, who had been taken from him. But she was gone. He could not get satisfaction from her. But there was another way.

Coldly, containing his rage, focusing his bitterness, he programmed the console with the skill of long experience with the surgical computers and the equipment they controlled. Soon it was ready, and he lowered himself into the tepid fluid that filled the bath in the lavatory. Tubes that once had proffered sprays and brushes found his nostrils and his veins, his bowels and his bladder. A clear plastic lid lowered itself over him to fit snugly against the rim of the tub. Momentary discomfort ended as fluids began to seep into his system, anesthetizing, feeding, monitoring, protecting, taking command. His last conscious thoughts as he slipped completely into the dark dreams he had summoned were of revenge.

Or was there, just before he went under, a moment of sanity, a flicker of doubt?

The voices penetrated his uterine stronghold long before they reached his brain, murmurs and isolated words and incomprehensible sounds and silences.

“Is there a chance?”

“I’m just a volunteer.”

“But what do you think?”

“I’ve never seen anyone come back after being so far under.”

He kept slipping back into someone else’s memories or diving for protection from the intruding world into dark pools and deep shadows.

The Man Who Hunts Alone returned through the forest with the deer across his shoulders, its legs dangling against his chest on either side of his broad neck. He could feel the soft hide of the young animal against his shoulders....

“Somewhere there is a person who can help me.”

“Not this one.”

“You can’t be sure.”

“Let him be.”

“I can’t.”

He was being pulled into consciousness, into awareness. It wasn’t fair. He didn’t want it. He slipped away again, evading them, sliding between incidents in lives he never led.

The stone floor was cold and hard beneath his feet but not as cold nor as hard as the face of the man who sat upon the throne.... The smell of the burnt offerings was strong; the odor of fear was stronger....

“Can’t you get another volunteer?”

“This is the only one.”

“Then I think you have lost. Give up.”

“Never!”

The world constricted around him. He was being squeezed into existence. He fought against it, fought to get back into the safety and security of his rocking, floating dreams. His lives began to flash before his eyes with all their sensory data and emotional content.

He should have returned with squires and men-at-arms, bedecked in shining armor with banners floating above, but all the men he had taken with him were dead on the battlefields of the Holy Land or lost to plague along the way. There was no one to welcome him as he came across the lowered drawbridge into the castle, admitted for the night like any wandering stranger who looked as if he would not kill them as they slept....

He felt the weight of her presence behind him, and he wondered if she had a knife in her hand and he should brace his shoulders for the blow that would send the blade through his back seeking his heart....

The pink room rose comfortingly around him like a promise of eternal love as he ascended the lift shaft....

The Man Who Hunts Alone returned through the forest....

The smell of the burnt offerings was strong....

... kill them as they slept ...

... seeking his heart....

And he was born. He was expelled into the cold, bright world, and he returned to life croaking hoarsely through disused vocal cords, coughing, objecting. Something soft was under him, but not as soft as the sea, and he was pulled down into it with cruel hands. He raised an arm in front of his eyes. It was difficult to focus upon it, but when he did, it looked like the belly of a corpse, dead-white and wrinkled.

“You’re awake,” someone said.

He croaked something that meant “yes” or “maybe” or “what?” And he slept. It was not the sleep he had known for so long, but a troubled sleep, weighed down by human cares, a descent into aching darkness, an ascent close to the brutal reality, and a drop back into depths disturbed by fugitive dreams and a pervading feeling of grief and terror.

The bodies were small and fragile beside the old fire, smaller even than the deer he had carried back for their meal, and they were dead...

... she came struggling in the hands of priests, cursing them, unbelieving and blasphemous....

... they had been his sons, his hopes, innocent children learning to be men....

... and almost choked on the lump of grief that rose in his throat...

Everything in the room spoke of her, but Lora was not there....

He came awake to warm liquids struggling down a reluctant throat, arousing unused taste buds and old reflexes, to cloths washing a body he wasn’t sure was his, so distant did it feel, to hands kneading muscles that were wasted almost to nothing, to words issuing from some distant voice like that of God.

“Drink a little more....”

“You’re getting better....”

“We’ll get some flesh on that skeleton....”

“Soon you’ll be walking again....”

“You’re getting better....”

“You’ll walk again....”

“You will, you will....”

He began to wonder, vaguely, with a trace of irritation, who this person was who pestered him with demands and injunctions, who lifted this and touched that and made him drink. And with that infantile concern he crossed the border of the haunted nightland into the day. He slipped back frequently into the world of nightmares and confusion, for he was very weak, but increasingly he was awake and conscious and accumulating real-life experience. If this was real life and not another dream.

He was like an infant being educated once more, gradually learning to distinguish between himself and his environment, then to differentiate the sense impressions that came to him, to tell warm from cool, soft from hard, hand from foot or flank or forehead. For there were no words for these things, only vague concepts that were hard to focus upon. Loud noises startled him, and soft sounds soothed him. Odors pleased him, the odors of milk and broth and the more mysterious and delicate scents that came to his nose when God was with him.

And one day he opened his eyes and saw her.

At first the world was only a blur. After that first, freakish view of his arm, his vision had regressed to the infantile, and he had been unable to focus his eyes in the few moments when they were open. Gradually they remained open longer, always to approving sounds from the person who was constantly with him. Finally his vision sharpened, the world came into focus, and he saw a face above him, round and

ridiculous at this strange angle.

He laughed. It was the first happy sound he had made that he could recall, but then he could not remember much, and nothing with certainty. But the noise brought more approval from the person, and in that happiness he laughed again.

The second time, he saw her from farther away, and the realization came to him like revelation that she was beautiful. She was tall and slender and she moved gracefully as she crossed the carpeted floor toward him. Her hair was pale — he could not tell the exact color because the pink ceiling tinted it; later he would decide that it was a curious cross between gold and silver — and her eyes were dark.

They saw him studying her, and the lips smiled, transfiguring the face with an inner light. Her beauty had been passive; now it glowed. “You’re conscious,” she said. Her voice was gentle and low. He had known that all along, but he had not known he knew it. “You’re going to be all right.”

Was this a clever new dream? he wondered. Did it play upon the subconscious awareness of the dreamer that he was dreaming, to provide a greater feeling of reality? Was this sensation of waking, of coming back to life, only the start of another grim episode?

The others had seemed as real as real, too. They had supplied sensory stimulation, details, memories of a past, consciousness of a present, but this was different. He felt no sense of hatred for this woman; he had no premonition of betrayal; he planned no vengeance.

This memory of having lived a thousand lives was new as well. He did not know which of them was real. He did not know for sure if this was real — what if it was not? — but he would live it as if it were real.

“Yes,” he said, and then more clearly, “Yes. I’m back. Who are you? Why did you bring me back?”

He did not get an answer to his questions then, and the days that followed were filled with the slow business of recuperation, as if he were recovering from a long illness that had wasted his body and disarranged all his autonomic processes. They were filled with the small triumphs of recovery — the first time he was able to chew and swallow solid food or lift his head or sit up cushioned by the responsive pneumatic apparatus of the bed. And they were disturbed by the little defeats — the rebellion of his disused stomach that spewed stinking vomit across the bed and himself, the dizziness with which his head dropped back to the cushions, the weakness that followed every attempt at something new.

Through everything the woman was there with her comfort, her encouragement, her tireless patience, her smile, and slowly he improved. Setbacks were frequent. Sometimes memories would come flooding over him — a knife, blood spurting, screams of pain, the joy of vengeance — and he would stop in the midst of saying something to drift with them for minutes or hours or days. Sometimes, mostly when the room was darkened for sleep, he would run a fever and cry out in delirium; and sometimes he would wake in her arms, she beside him in the bed, although she did not sleep with him, he with his head upon her comfortable breast, crying weakly against her from the agony of the other lives he lived again. And once, when the lives seemed as if they would take him over once more, when fever turned to chills that shook him like a mechanical vibrator, he found himself warmed by her bare skin as she sat half-naked in the bed beside him, caressing him, soothing him with comforting sounds that had no meaning. He cried again because he was weak and not a man.

Finally he passed a crisis of sorts, and from this point he progressed steadily without setbacks. Soon he was sitting up regularly and talking. He had no more desire to return to his capsule experiences; indeed, he thought of them with a growing distaste, and except for brief flashes, like *déjà vu*, they bothered him very little, and they steadily receded beyond recall until all that was left was only a vague feeling that he had been singled out for some unusual form of punishment.

Within days he began to walk, first a few tottering steps on legs that felt as if they were made of wood and then as if they were made of jelly, then a child's staggering fall, which progressed into an old man's uncertain weave and finally, much later, into a young man's confident stride.

He began to eat. He exercised. He gained weight. His legs and arms filled out with flesh and then with muscle. He watched the woman a lot, and he talked. At first she put off his questions with friendly evasions that he lacked the strength to break through, and then she promised to tell him everything when he was stronger. She had told him nothing but her name. Her name was Sara, and he watched her as she moved easily around the room, memorizing her face from every angle, the body that moved so lithely beneath the disposable robe, the look in her eyes, the way her hand extended to him when she brought him food, the feel of her fingers upon his back and arms and legs as she rubbed strength back into them or relief when they were tired with exercise. Particularly she worked with his hands and his fingers as if she wanted them to be supple and strong. She would stare at them as if they held some extra meaning for her, and when she saw him watching her, she would smile and kiss the fingers one by one. He melted inside when she did that.

"What are you doing here?" he asked at last, too strong now to be denied the information he needed, sure enough of his strength and of her attraction to him that he could risk bluntness. "Why did you bring me back?"

She took a deep breath and let it out as if the final truth came with it. "I heard of you. Stories circulate through the center about those who have chosen total immersion. At first" — she looked away as if it hurt to remember a time of casual interest — "it was only curiosity. One should not be merely curious about another human being's predicament." He could hardly hear her voice. "But then I learned more about you from Central Information."

"About me?" he echoed. The possibility that he had a real past was both exciting and alarming.

"You are a famous person," she began.

"No, don't tell me," he interrupted. "I don't want to know. Not yet. Perhaps not ever."

She nodded. She was willing to do anything he asked, and he liked that.

"So I found you."

"How?"

"You had placed no privacy block on the information, nor on your door."

From one of his lives he remembered privacy blocks. "Why wouldn't I do that?"

She shrugged; he liked the way her shoulders moved and almost forgot what she was saying. "Perhaps you were in too much of a hurry for what you wanted to do. Perhaps you didn't care. I like to think you wanted to be found, to be brought back. Anyway, we found you, the volunteer and I, and he told me what the console was programmed to do."

He looked at the console sitting in powerful isolation at the side of the room, looking majestic even in pink. "Yes," he said.

"You remember?"

"I remember something," he said, "but it may not be real."

“I felt sorry for you,” she said, “and guilty, you know, because it was only curiosity, and there you were, floating in the tub, all your skills and promise as a person subverted by someone else’s memories, lost in a thousand other lives, caught in a cyclical vengeance for some blow that you had forgotten completely.”

He thought of himself floating there like a dreaming gnome, like some wrinkled grub. “Yes. Yes,” he said. “I have forgotten. I have forgotten.”

“Even then I could see what you could be, and I knew what you had been.”

Again the words asking about his past shaped themselves in his mind, and his tongue and lips practiced how they would sound, but he held back. “I am a man without a past,” he said, “and without a future. Or rather I have a thousand pasts, and none of them is real — not one.”

“You have a past,” she said. “A real one.”

“It must have been terrible,” he said, “to have driven me to program the console as I did, to kill, over and over, the woman I loved. Whatever it was that drove me to do that, I don’t want to know; I don’t want to feel that way again. Let me start fresh — a man with many memories and none of them more real than the others. Only then can I have a future.”

She looked away shyly. He found it oddly moving in a woman who in his need had held him to her naked breast. Now he was no longer an invalid; no longer was he incapable of the male response. “You have a future,” she said, “if you want it.”

No past but a future. It was, indeed, like being born again. He wanted to tell her that he loved her, for what she had done and most of all for what she was, beautiful inside and out, but he remembered that he had once trusted a woman (or trusted her many times over) and that she had hurt him as many times as he had trusted her. The words died in his throat, but he knew they were there, and he knew some day he would tell her if she stayed with him long enough, if she didn’t discover the blackness inside him and leave in disgust.

That she stayed, that she cared, that she did not turn away was what he still found difficult to believe.

He had much to relearn about his world, and Sara was a good teacher, full of information and eager to impart it. She talked to him for hours a day about life in what she called the twenty-second century. The four basic ingredients of their civilization, she said, were power, automation, computers, and capsules representing energy, work, control, and knowledge — a complete system, with humanity in the middle as the beneficiary.

Most of the world’s work went on without human intervention. Solar energy, collected from vast arrays of solar cells built in the sunny deserts of the world and from the even larger arrays floating in the shadowless space around the earth, provided all the clean power that anyone could need anywhere in the world. Power was free. Machines, under the direction of great, interconnected computers, built and maintained the great urban centers (though few of the giant complexes had been built since the dramatic decline in the birthrate); they tended crops in fields and hydroponic gardens, and they delivered all the necessary supplies and services to each apartment in the centers. The computers were the overseers, controlling the efforts of the machines, responding to the requests of the humans, guiding, informing, servicing, storing. And the capsules contained not only information, so that people could learn what the world was like and what it had been like and what other men and women had thought about it and how to do things, but experiences — memories so complete that they could be lived and relived with only an injection from a capsule programmed from a computer.

It would be pleasant to think, Sara said, that this good life had been created deliberately, but that wasn’t

true; it had grown, like any other society, out of possibilities and pressures and small choices. The computers and free, plentiful energy had made a planned society possible for the first time in man's history. Relieved of his age-long concern for food and power, he could have built himself a utopia; instead he moved along paths of least resistance. The self-contained urban centers had made sense: total efficiency in the delivery of services, the use and reuse of resources, and total privacy if desired. But nobody planned it. The urban centers grew, and the men and women who lived in them like cave dwellers independent of the need to leave began to shape their lives to fit their dwellings. They enjoyed a carefree period of growing up in a crèche, socializing with other children of their age, tended by a few loving volunteers and a great many efficient machines, learning the few things necessary for their life in the urban centers, taught by capsules or computers: the resources available to them and how to order them. Other kinds of information were available, and occasionally an odd child would pursue an unexpected interest through a console for hours or days or even many days. But mostly the children were happy with games and self-discovery, with music and dance and art and lovemaking.

When the children became young adults, they graduated from the crèche into their own apartments, each with its own console. For a while their social training brought them back together for mutual stimulation; they played the games of adolescence, the games of interplay and romance, and the even more exciting games of trying on personalities like false faces. Most of them never discovered who they were, if they were anybody. And they roamed the urban center, capsule-popping, apartment-hopping, gay and scintillating and pleasure bent; apparently happy, never unhappy, or if they were unhappy, it was somebody else's unhappiness.

Gradually the urban center's privacy potential began to work upon them. As the group games began to pale, they paired off or retired singly to their apartments to pursue their solitary pleasures. A few — usually those strange children who went scurrying through the computers after useless information — became specialists in areas where the computers were not effective. They became artists, composers, authors, historians, philosophers, synthesizers, dreamers... Out of the vast amount of source material available, out of the work of all the other specialists, the dreamers made the capsule life possible by imagining in sensory detail the new experiences that the poppets demanded. Some were noted for their incredible attention to detail; some for the consistency of their scenarios; some for their emotional content; and some for the wildness of their dreams, because novelty was always in demand. The computers would take blood samples and synthesize the capsules. Sometimes the dreamers would dream to order.

In the urban center humanity found everything it had ever sought from life and was given the opportunity to become whatever it had the potential to become. But it turned out that principally humanity had the potential to become a mature animal, which for most meant a creature isolated and content, its desires satisfied in being what it was. Nobody traveled anymore — not even as far as the neighboring urban center. Humanity, now freer than it had ever been, returned to the tribe and the cave. A few persons, it is true, still sought real-life experiences; they volunteered their services, when needed, and they came into contact with others, and out of these contacts grew something new, something unpredictable.

Later, the slowly recovering invalid used the console to pursue information further into areas that interested him. The use of the console and the other equipment in the apartment brought back old skills, and memories — were they his own or had he gotten them secondhand? — flooded back to aid him in his reeducation. By now he had accepted, almost without reservation, that this experience was real, that he had been a citizen of this world and that he had forsaken it for reasons he did not want to remember. The information and abilities that a child takes years to learn, even with the aid of capsules, came back to him in weeks, without the aid of capsules, for he knew that they would bring back other memories with them; but he had the advantage of a mature nervous system, ravaged though it had been, and the memories of a lifetime, complicated though they were by a thousand other lifetimes of memories. The

synapses were prepared, ready to be used.

When he had become comfortable enough in his new situation to ask questions and confident enough of his newly recovered physical strength to accept the answers, he said, “You’re very knowledgeable for a poppet.” He savored the word, feeling it strange on his lips, but proud of it as a mark of belonging.

“I was never a poppet,” Sara said, “and neither were you. We were the odd ones, the unusual children, the nonconforming adults. Perhaps that is why ... things hit you so hard.”

He put out a hand to stop her; perhaps he was not as strong as he thought. But he felt lean and tall and strong and young leaning against the pink console while she sat on the edge of the round bed. “The past is as dead as month-old gamma globulins,” he said. One of the interests he had pursued through the console was blood chemistry. “There is only the present — and the future. Why did you come here, Sara? What do you want from me?”

She looked helpless on the edge of the bed, and he almost took back his questions before she had to answer them. “I was — am a synthesist,” she said. “I don’t create anything, but I put things together in new combinations. What became apparent to me, and a few others, was that humanity was dying, succumbing to a life that satisfied desires before they became needs, almost before any desires were expressed. We wanted to gather together a nucleus of people who had learned that this world had a dark side, who had lived some of its horrors and were willing to work for something new. I thought you might be one of these.”

“Were you right?”

“You’re the only one who can answer that,” she said. But she looked hopeful. “You have to be willing to let go of the old and try the new. You’ll have to tell me when you’re willing to try something brave and different.”

He found himself standing in front of her, tears in his eyes, holding out his hands to her, taking hers, raising her to him. He kissed her closing eyes and felt her tremble as his lips moved down her soft cheek to her lips, and he knew, as they sank toward the pink bed, that he was ready for whatever life might bring or whatever courage might enable him to seek out.

“I love you,” he said, and it was as if he had never said those words before. And though he had felt ten thousand times before the emotions and physical sensations that surged through him now, it seemed as if everything that went before had happened to someone else, as if this were all happening to him for the first time, and he hoped desperately that this was real.

What was brave and different, he discovered, was venturing outside the apartment. He pulled himself away from this room, the color and the shape and the smell of love, and with Sara — he could not have done it without her constant encouragement, her urging, her rewarding — he went to other parts of the center. At first they went only down the drop shaft to the lobby below, where shafts circled the oval room, with its neutral yellow carpet, like fasces surrounding the ax handle of authority.

Connected by corridors with the lobby of their building were other lobbies, each with its oval of lift shafts and drop shafts. Together twenty-five of the lobbies and the oval buildings that ascended seventy-five stories above them made up an urban center. In the middle of the building complex were joint heating, cooling, and ventilation shafts, water and food distribution systems, and other service facilities, including automatic waste recycling. No windows faced the outside, even from the lobby, and the bronze door to the outside looked as if it had been welded shut by generations of disuse.

Much of this he did not know until later. The first time it was as much as he could do to visit the lobby, to

step out of the drop shaft and smell the neutral, unconditioned air and feel the terrifying vastness of its open, unused space, before he fled back to the apartment. Gradually, encouraged by Sara's love, he expanded his range as his courage grew. They visited other lobbies, all empty, all identical in their dimensions and their painted cement walls — these were public spaces, and they could not be attuned to individuals nor adjusted to individual color sensitivities — and their painted murals celebrating the victory of humanity over the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

They visited the commons, which joined the oval towers of the urban center at the thirty-fifth floor; a few brave or eccentric men and women gathered there daily to share a meal at one of the scattered tables. The odors were tempting, the lighting was carefully gauged to enhance the attractiveness of the food, and the pastel colors of the walls reinforced a mood of social ceremony. But the small group in the huge room seemed gloomy and the gaiety forced; the food was the same as that available in every apartment, but here it turned to dust and leather. Gradually, however, with Sara's help, he came to accept the company of others, even eating with them and almost enjoying it.

"After all," Sara reminded him, "you were once a volunteer yourself," but he told her that was all dead and gone, and he did not want to hear about it.

Slowly he found himself becoming acculturated to his own culture. He had been drawn by degrees out of the security of the pink room; he was beginning to rejoin the larger society of his fellow citizens.

Toward the end they visited a crèche of six-year-olds. He enjoyed the openness of the youngsters, the free and uncomplicated games they played, and their willingness to share not only their momentary belongings but themselves. They were marvelous and beautiful, and he wondered, for the first time without instant withdrawal, about his past. Had he fathered a child? He remembered being a father....

...a boy and a girl, lying stretched out beside the black remains of an old fire as if they were asleep....

But perhaps that was only a dream. It was associated with loss and grief and betrayal, as was everything in the past. He pulled himself back to the present.

Twice in the lobby they passed a group of young revelers, magnificent in their strength and grace and beauty, enraptured in some communal dream, moving as if they were part of some carefully choreographed ballet, speaking as if their words had been composed by some artist in counterpoint. He was fascinated by them, but Sara passed them by scornfully. "They're nothing but butterflies," she said.

"But beautiful."

"Beautiful and mindless and short-lived. Is this what it all comes to, the human race? All the struggle and the pain and the sorrow? Poppets dreaming somebody else's lies?"

He admired her fire, even though he himself had been a poppet dreaming more deeply than any of them and had been brought back to reality — tell me it is reality! — only by her determination and patience and, he dared to think it, love. It was a word she never used. He used it more freely now, with fewer qualms, as if by its incantation he could drive away its potential for evil, seldom thinking anymore that he had once loved someone else so much that he had chosen to spend eternity revenging himself on her.

But Sara had said he had not been a poppet, that he had been a volunteer. That was good, he thought. It was good to be a volunteer.

One day they visited the top of their tower. The lift shaft had climbed interminably, and finally they emerged into a room filled with light. He stopped, just inside the room, dazzled. Slowly his vision

returned, and he saw a room filled with tables and chairs waiting for people to be seated at them. The carpet was red and deep under their feet, and the walls around the entire perimeter of the room were set with shining panels. The room was empty except for them.

“No one has been here for ages,” Sara said.

She led him toward one of the shining panels. As he neared it, he realized that it was not a panel at all but a window, and the light was sunshine streaming through. He had never seen a window before, except perhaps in his other lives. He approached it with curiosity and then stopped, a half pace away, panic surging through his body as he looked out and out to the distant green semicircle of land against the blue sky. He felt himself toppling forward into nothingness, exploding into the infinite, and his hands reached out and found the air hard and slick and cold in front of him, and he could not breathe.

Sara pulled him back, and from the safe distance of some three meters he could breathe again, his pulse calmed, his eyes focused, and he could see the smudges on the window where his hands had pressed against the glass. Beyond, to the right and left, were the odd multiple towers of other urban centers, like castles on a chessboard; straight ahead and down and down was the chessboard of fields tilled by machines stretching out across the land until it stopped at the sky. Here and there fields were being watered by sprays; others were bare, as if their bounty had just been harvested. And everything was geometrically perfect, as if the land had been finally conquered by man and remade in his own image.

“A long time ago this was a restaurant and entertainment center,” Sara said. “Nobody has been here for a long time, but the room waits for people who are not afraid of heights, who are not terrified to look out upon the world. It may have to wait for a long time.”

What a magnificent place for a human sacrifice, the thought came unbidden, and his arm was heavy with the weight of the ceremonial knife and the lives it had taken and the hearts ripped from still-heaving maiden breasts and deposited reverently before the gods.

“Yes,” he said. “I know how they feel. I’m afraid, too.”

“Not the way they are,” she said. “You can stand here and look out.”

“Only because you are here,” he said.

“You’ll get over that, Jeri,” she said. “You’ll be strong again.”

“Is that my name?” he asked, forgetting the rest.

“Jeri? Yes,” she said, and she repeated it, “Jeri.”

He didn’t reject it. It sounded good on her lips. He savored it. Jeri. Jeri. That was all right. He had a name. He felt stronger already, and he went forward to the window and looked down seventy-five stories without terror.

Each time they left the pink room, Jeri felt that it was like a little death; each time they returned he felt himself reborn. As time passed, however, he found new strength and new courage in leaving and felt less sick relief on his return. Always there was Sara. He delighted in watching her face and the emotions that came and went upon it, like light and shadow upon the land. He memorized her breasts until he had only to close his eyes and cup his hands to recall their weight and texture, and the ways their nipples responded to his touch. He studied her body, admiring the supple slenderness of her waist, the neat round cup of her navel, the smooth spread of her hips, the firm, slim legs, and the eternally responsive mysteries that waited for him....

The time in the pink room with Sara restored him, not just the lovemaking but the everyday events of eating and talking and sleeping; as she guided him and encouraged him in the opening of his love to her in continually more outgoing and exciting ways, he opened to the world. At last the time came when he felt restored, confident, capable of anything, even of facing the past.

Sara seemed to sense his mood; she was as conscious of his progress as if she monitored his autonomic nervous system. "I'm going to take you one more place we haven't been before, at least not together."

"All right," he said with a spirit of bravado, although there was something disquieting in her manner. She seemed pleased; always before she had found it necessary to coax him from the room.

The end of their journey was one of the areas that served the twenty-five-tower center in common. The lift shaft opened into a small, stainless-steel room, frightening in its sterility. As Jeri entered, airjets of disinfectant searched his clothing; he felt as if invisible radiation were streaming through his body. Minutes later a door opened in front of them. He stepped out into a corridor paved with pale tile. He felt uneasy. Like a criminal, he thought, returning to the scene of the crime. If he could only remember what the crime was. His hands tightened into fists until he felt the nails biting into his palms.

He had never seen this sterile, endless corridor before, turning both ways toward some distant meeting place, and yet it seemed as familiar as a nightmare. The very air was different here, strange and astringent, and yet the thought occurred to him that he had smelled it before. He was afraid, and he looked toward Sara for help.

She motioned him toward the interior wall of the corridor. Windows were set with geometric regularity into the walls, and he went up to a window reluctantly, fearing that it would be another test, like the one at the top of the tower, and fearing even more that it would be something worse.

He looked in upon a scene done all in white and stainless steel. At first his eyes refused to sort out what was happening, and then it began to make sense. A woman was squatting over a machine which half-supported her and half-worked beneath her.

Even as he watched, a bloody mass was withdrawn from underneath the woman. Suction apparatus moved over the object, and unexpectedly it turned into a baby, squalling soundlessly within the plastic and metal grasp of the same machines that tended its mother. Soon the baby was clean and calmer, and it was placed in the arms of its mother, now horizontal and looking at her child with wondering eyes.

The next window revealed a room empty of everything except machines. Behind the next, an older man, surrounded by metallic arms and plastic feelers like an insect in the grasp of a praying mantis, was watching mechanical fingers manipulating his gaping chest while they did something inexplicable to the organs within.

Without knowing why, Jeri knew what they were doing: They were performing a bypass operation for a faulty pulmonary artery, plugged up or constricted by deposits of ... His fingers twitched. "I want to leave," he said.

"No!" Sara said. It was the first time she had refused a request since she had pulled him back to life. "This is the critical point. To go back now is to undo everything we have done."

"I'm not strong enough."

"If you love me," she said, "you must come with me now."

She led him down the corridor like a reluctant child. At another window they saw a tumor the size of an

apple being removed from a man's abdomen. Jeri knew what it was; he did not know how he knew, and he was too stunned to wonder. He was grasped by memories that would not set him free.

They saw an elderly man's veins resectioned, a woman's face restructured, a man's appendix removed, kidneys transplanted, a boy's legs straightened, teeth replanted, inner ears replaced, more babies born, a mechanical heart implanted. And many rooms were empty.

More might have been in use, Jeri knew, if the consoles in each apartment had not practiced preventive medicine at every meal, with every drink, with each injection. Here in this facility were only the major problems: the maternities, the constitutional inadequacies, the emergencies, the aged. The cave dwellers lived for a long time; they lived well and they lived without sickness, most of the time, but even their bodies wore out and needed care, and most of them got it very quickly and effectively.

Things he once had known were flooding back to him, and he fought to keep his innocence.

The last window was filled with sea-green water like a giant aquarium. In the water floated bodies of men and women like dead fish caught in the arms of an octopus. The bodies were naked, men and women, young and old, and they drifted and turned in some unseen current so that sometimes one and then another would come to the window as if peering out at the real world with blind, closed eyes. Jeri could not count how many there were behind the window — a hundred, two hundred, a thousand, how could he count them all? — and his mind closed against the implications of what they were and why they were there.

"Put your hand against the window," Sara said.

"No," he said hoarsely. "Let me leave. I want to go back."

She picked up the wrist of his right hand and placed the palm of the hand against the window. "Feel it!"

The window was as cold as death.

"Those are the undead," she said, "the sick people the machines can't help. Their temperatures have been lowered almost to the freezing point of water in order to slow the biological processes and the progress of their conditions."

Yes. He knew that.

"Some have new conditions for which the computers aren't programmed," she said. "Some have conditions whose repair requires a degree of judgment or of discrimination the machines cannot exercise. And some have conditions for which there is at this time no cure."

"There is no hope for them," he said mechanically. "The computer does no research."

"There still are men and women!" Sara said fiercely, as if her world depended upon convincing him.

"They can be physicians, surgeons, researchers. They can solve these problems. They can redeem these poor lost souls. They can bring them back to life the way I brought you back."

"There are no physicians, no surgeons, no researchers anymore," Jeri said, pulling himself back from the window, back from the blind eyes that stared at him through water and glass.

"But there could be! There could be!"

Jeri turned to look at Sara, drawn by the intensity of her voice and the play of emotions upon her face. Her eyes burned into him. "Why do you say that?" he asked. "Why do you keep saying that?"

“Jeri,” she said. “You are a surgeon!”

“No!” he said, shrinking back from the window, shrinking back from her.

“Yes, you are! You are a very good surgeon with a remarkable record of successes. It’s all there in the computer. You can find it out for yourself. You can help these people, some of them.”

“No!” he said again, raising his hands in front of her eyes. “Look at these hands. Are they the hands of a surgeon?” The hands were shaking.

“They can be again,” she said. In a whisper, she added, “They must be.”

“Why must they be!” Jeri demanded. “Why do you keep after me? What is so important to you about my being a surgeon?” And then, with a flash of intuition, he turned to the window. “Which of these undead do you want restored to life?”

Sara was silent. She stared into the window of the undead as if searching for a particular face, and when she turned back to Jeri, he saw tears in her eyes. They glittered in her dark eyes like black jewels. In spite of his anger, Jeri felt himself moved.

“You are right,” she said. “There is one. A young man. We were going to be married. He became ill. After many tests, a small tumor was discovered in his brain. It was in the forebrain. It was too close to the seat of memory, and even personality, for the surgical machines to remove it. Toni wanted them to go ahead, but I wouldn’t let them. Not while there was a chance.”

“Toni?” he said. “Which one is he?” His voice was normal, but his heartbeat was shaking his body. This is the way he once had been: emotional but able to control his feelings, able to pour his emotional energy into purpose and action.

With the skill of long practice, Sara punched out a code on a panel of buttons beside the window. The undead milled around until the body of a naked young man came to the window as if trying to drift through and out into the world of the living. He was a pleasant-looking young man with dark hair and a trim body that did not look as bleached and dead as the others. He seemed quite ordinary, unexceptional really. Jeri caught a glimpse of his own face dimly reflected in the glass, as if he were floating among the undead, and he thought, without pride, that he was more attractive, more interesting. And weaker, he added, and more vicious. Besides, he thought sadly, who knows what fascination lies within that ailing brain, what tenderness, what charm, what capacity for love the living man possessed? It was enough to make of Sara a woman willing to raise another man from the dead and then destroy him in an effort to save her beloved. That was love. That was love. He would be destroyed by it again.

He turned and walked away from the window, down the long, curving corridor back toward the door that led into the tower in which he lived. He remembered it now. He remembered walking this corridor many times before as he went to his humanitarian work in the surgery and he remembered returning, either victorious or defeated, to the apartment where someone waited. Someone whose face was unformed, someone who looked a bit like Sara, who shared his victories and eased his defeats.

Sara trotted behind him. Her voice pleaded with him; he did not look at her face. “You will do it, won’t you, Jeri? If I have done anything to help you, to nurse you, to make you strong again —”

“If you did,” he said, “you did it for your own purposes.”

“I had no choice,” she said. “And it wasn’t as if you were doing anybody any good, including yourself. You were as good as dead, farther gone even than Toni. I brought you back; I gave you life again. Can’t

you do as much for Toni? It's only fair."

"I was better dead," he said. "You used me. Like a machine with no feelings. Like a thing."

"It wasn't just for me," Sara said as they ascended in the lift shaft toward the apartment. "Nor for Toni. We do want to change the direction of humanity's slow drift toward the dream world. I can't do it alone."

"You're very strong," he said.

"Together," she went on, not heeding the interruption, "Toni and I can recruit others. People like you — I wasn't lying about that — who have talent and are willing to learn skills and want to do something new. We can set things right again."

"By doing evil?" he asked. He would have shut and sealed the lift shaft behind him, but she was in the apartment already. Pink, he thought, is the color of betrayal; pink, he thought, is the color of hate. He could not eject her. He did not want to touch her, not in anger and not coldly; she had meant too much to him once.

"You're bitter," she said. "I can understand that. But — don't you see? You needed hope. You needed love. I only gave you what you needed."

He sank down in the chair behind the console, suddenly very weary. "You gave me what you thought I needed so that I could serve your purpose. How did you ever hope to persuade me to do it after you had led me to believe that you had done everything for love of me."

"I never said anything about love," she said. "I never used the word."

"You didn't have to," he said. His hand flickered across the console, and the sickening odor of roses was replaced by the smell of an open fire.

"It wasn't all put on," Sara said. "I did like you. I wanted to be with you."

She retreated from his anger, crouching back into a corner of the room far from the fireplace, where the flickering flames reached for her like knives, turning her into a nightmare figure from some dream he had forgotten....

"How did you hope to get away with this impossible scheme?"

She looked away from his eyes as if she saw his dreams reflected in them. "I thought I could slip him past you once you were recovered, once you were operating again. And then — well, at least he would have a chance."

"If it depends upon me," Jeri said, "he has none."

The smell of the gods was powerful in the king's house. The courtiers gasped. The king fell back in his throne. Even the daughter of the king paled and trembled and was silent. Now she knew her life was in his hands....

"All right," Sara said. "If you operate on him, I'll stay with you. Just make him well again, and I will stay with you as long as you want me." Her eyes pleaded with him. The body that he remembered was tense with hope.

"You place a high valuation on yourself," he said. "Do you think it would be enjoyable to live with a

woman who was thinking every moment how much she wanted to be somewhere else?"

My face, my moon, my everybody's moon, which everybody looks on and calls his...

"I'd do it," she said. "You'd never know."

"I'd always know," he said. "My problem is I can't forget. And what if he died during the operation?"

Her face tightened against the underlying bones. "The bargain still would hold."

"You realize what a temptation that would be? To win by killing your lover and call it accident?"

"You wouldn't do that," she said. But her voice lacked conviction.

"You don't believe that. You know my dreams. You know the kind of person I am. I have killed a thousand times because a woman deserted me."

"I'll take the chance," she said. "It's the only chance I have."

"And what if he should die by accident? Would you ever think it was anything but intentional? No. It wouldn't work. I can't do it."

"But why? Tell me why? What can I do to persuade you? What can I offer?"

"Nothing," he said. "You brought me back, you see. I can't go through that experience of betrayal and revenge again. Even more important than that, I don't want to remember why I chose that fate. And that's why I can't operate, even if I believed everything would work out as you say, even if I wanted to."

She looked bewildered. "I don't understand."

"I don't remember enough of what it's like to be a surgeon," he said. "Oh, I remember being a surgeon. You've convinced me of that, and since then I remembered a great deal. But I don't remember the techniques, I don't even remember some of the names much less what they stand for, and my fingers have forgotten the skills. Before I could operate, I would have to take a capsule. And once I took a capsule, I would remember too much. I would be back where I was, back as deeply under the influence of other people's memories as I ever was. So — what you ask is impossible. Even if I was everything you wanted me to be, even if you lived up to every promise, I would never be able to collect. I'd be back where you found me."

Why this is hell, he thought, nor am I out of it.

"We'd bring you back, Toni and I," she said, panting as if she had run a long race. "We'd nurse you back to health and reality."

"To hold you to your bargain?" he asked. "Perhaps, out of kindness, you would say, 'He's better off as he is.' Or perhaps not. But how would you give me an incentive to live?"

Her body went slack, and she turned away toward the drop shaft. Suddenly her body straightened as if something within her, beyond her control, would not surrender. She turned back. "You think you've been betrayed by women."

He shrugged. "It seems to be my fate." And yet the reminder of his persistent reality touched him beyond any explanation.

"You are the betrayer," she said. "You."

He spread his hands helplessly. “What are you saying?”

“What happened to your wife? Why can’t you remember?”

He sealed the lift shaft behind him with a word and called, “Love!”

The room swallowed the word as though it had never been spoken. The pink seemed to darken.

“Lora. Your wife.” She seemed to be taunting him. “What happened to Lora?”

“Lora,” he called.

No answer. The room turned to rose.

There was no place for her to hide. The single, all-purpose room was empty. The circular bed was part of the floor again. The lavatory was empty; the kitchenette was bare.

Everything in the room spoke of her, but Lora was not there.

“Don’t do this to me,” he pleaded.

“What happened to Lora, Jeri?” she insisted.

The chambers of his heart — superior vena cava, right atrium, right ventricle, left ventricle, left atrium, pulmonary vein, pulmonary artery, aorta — squeezed together. His heart pounded to drive his blood through his contracted arteries.

“Lora!” he said.

“Jeri,” the console said. It spoke in his wife’s voice. She had left a message....

“She — she chose total immersion,” he said. The memories flooded into his mind. “She left a message on the console.”

“Recall it.”

He stared at the console for a moment and then automatically punched the right buttons. The console said, “No such message is recorded.”

“Has it ever been recorded?” he asked.

“A search discloses no evidence of any such message.”

He looked blankly at Sara. “I don’t understand.”

“You came back one day to find Lora totally immersed,” Sara said. “Not fled. Immersed. She hadn’t deserted you. But she was deeply under. And you killed her.”

“No!” he protested.

“You killed her. You cut her wrists and watched her bleed to death, and then you cut her up with your surgeon’s knives and saws and disposed of her body through the waste chute, and ever since then you have been trying to forget, trying to convince yourself that you were the one who had been betrayed, getting your revenge on a series of surrogates so that you need not face the truth.”

“No!” he said. “No!”

She hated him while he cut off her toes one by one, and then her fingers, her ears, her eyelids, her nose.... After the first hour she began to scream. Each scream sent a shudder of pleasure down his back. She was a strong woman and she lived for most of two days....

The power was upon him like a mantle, guiding his actions, controlling his arms as they raised above her and plunged the knife into the soft breast. The blood spurted like the blood of any peasant, and the heart lay in his hand like any heart, still throbbing with life for a moment. And he knew the great joy of serving as the instrument of divine forces to do that which his heart desired....

She retreated from his anger, crouching back into a corner of the room far from the fireplace, where the flickering flames reached for her like knives, turning her into a nightmare figure from some dream he had forgotten. He moved toward her, his knife ready to begin its work....

He knew the wrongness of it as he came out of his chair. This wasn't the way it was supposed to be. How he knew that he was not sure, but he knew it was wrong, and he reached her just as the knife plunged toward her breast, in time to touch her hands as they moved but not in time to stop the knife in its descent. It was almost as if he guided the knife toward its palpitating destination....

When he looked up, Sara was gone.

He sat for a long time behind the console staring at his hands. Lora was gone. Now Sara was gone. His hands had been covered with blood more than once: innocent blood, guilty blood. But which memory was his? Which was real? He remembered Lora now. At least he remembered a memory of Lora. He punched the appropriate buttons on the console, and a series of views of a young woman looked out at him. A beautiful woman with dark hair and blue eyes. Yes, he remembered Lora. She spoke, and he remembered her voice. He remembered his love for her, and he remembered his desolation when she left him, but he could not remember the terrible thing Sara said he had done to her.

Had he blocked that from his memory? Had he made up the story about her leaving him? Or had Sara made it up to destroy him or as one last desperate effort to change his mind?

He asked the console where Lora was, and the console replied, "There is a privacy block on that information." He could not work his way around it. At last he gave up. As he had given up before, he thought. He would never know the truth. But if the console had told him the real state of affairs, how had Sara known more?

He asked where Sara was, and the console said, "There is a privacy block on that information."

Both of them were gone, finally and forever. And the truth about them was gone. He felt alone and afraid. He sat quite still for hours trying to tell himself that he was capable of making a new life, that he was well and strong, that the past didn't matter. But each time two terrible truths intruded themselves into his small dream world: he had loved Lora, and she had driven him to eternal revenge; and he had loved Sara, and she, too, had betrayed him.

Could a man love two women? he asked himself. Perhaps — if he had forgotten one. He had loved a hundred women, all with dark hair and blue eyes, all but one. Did that mean that all this was real?

Was this experience with Sara only another variation upon an eternal theme? How could he tell the difference? What test could he use? Is memory our only reality?

He found himself within the medical complex with no memory of getting there. Now within his favorite operating room, the surgical console recognized his voice. The moment might have been a kind of

reunion, but he felt numb, like a fetus waiting to be shaped by DNA and experience, like a one-celled creature waiting to be sculpted by evolution. He looked down at the body named Toni. It was still dripping from its long immersion. He put his hand on it. The body was colder than a corpse.

The X rays and angiograms were displayed on the monitor. He studied the position of the pea-sized tumor. It had changed scarcely at all in the year since the young man had joined the undead.

He placed his fingers in the surgical gloves and moved them gently. On the monitor the tip of the microscopic scalpel — an invisible needle — moved in response. The prepping machines shaved the young man's head. Jeri moved the laser beam into position, and his finger traced a circle. The beam missed the young man's scalp by millimeters. The second time he managed to cut a hole in scalp and skull that only the safety mechanisms on the surgical machine kept from going too deep. As the circle of bone and flesh was lifted away, Jeri looked down at the dura mater. He tried to approach it with the scalpel. His fingers stopped. He could not move. He didn't know what lay beneath. He tried again and stopped, sweating.

He drew his hands out of the gloves and looked at them. Then he looked down at the young man. In his chilled condition his breathing was almost imperceptible. This was Sara's love, he thought. Her chance for happiness; his chance to prove that this was real and not another dream of vengeance.

Perhaps somewhere, sometime, there was a chance for him if he could love.

He turned to the surgical console and punched a series of buttons and accepted the injector offered by the console. Here it was, he thought. Memories. Life for Toni, if all went well. Hell for him. Perhaps love can redeem, he thought, and placed the nozzle against the inside of his elbow and pressed the release. It hissed briefly, and the injector dropped from his hand.

He felt the memories beginning to stir. Yes, there was the telencephalon and there the diencephalon, with the thalamus and epithalamus and metathalamus. He put his hands back into the surgical gloves, and they fit as if they had been molded onto his hands. His fingers felt alive and purposeful, as if they had memories of their own, and he allowed them to move about their work without conscious interference.

They cut through the tough dura mater and exposed the tumor embedded in one of the fissures of the cortex. Delicately they cut around the tumor while he studied the scalpel's movements on the monitor. A slip here, and Toni would soon be dead. Perhaps Sara would return to him, he thought. But his fingers moved on. A little more of the cortex there, and Toni would never recognize her, never speak again, never walk, perhaps would remain forever without awareness, a collection of cells without consciousness or memory. But his fingers moved on, unaware of his indecision.

At last they finished their delicate task of decision and action, pulling the pea of abnormal tissue from the brain, dropping it into the analysis tray. Jeri pulled his hands from the gloves, leaving the surgical machine to tidy up. His fingers already were beginning to forget. If all went well, the young man would recover. Sara would have her love.

And he — he had his memories. They were flooding back into his brain, all the demons he had exorcised, all the terrors he had driven from his world. They took him over. They ate him up. He remembered. He remembered.

He went to the vat in which drifted the uncounted numbers of the undead and laid himself on the table beside the vat. He felt the many arms of the vat machine begin their work upon him, touching him here and there with a kind of lethal affection. A slow chill ran through his body, like the memory of winter, and he shivered, and shivered, and then his consciousness began to slip away like a man freezing, and he felt warm and pleasant, and the bath into which he slipped was like the mother sea in which all men were

born.

But the dreams did not stop. He drifted and drifted, and one day he came face to face with Lora and did not know it...

THE COMING OF WINTER

The cold winds blew always from the north, and all water froze over. First the puddles and then the ponds and the lakes and finally the seas and the oceans. Life that had developed in warm, tropic seas died quickly, and only those creatures lived who could hibernate at the bottoms of lakes and seas in holes or shells or spores.

The Man Who Hunts Alone returned through the forest with the deer across his shoulders, its legs dangling against his chest on either side of his broad neck. He could feel the soft hide of the young animal against his shoulders and the head bouncing against his back as he jogged through the snow. The snow was general now, all over the forest, and he had been lucky to find the animal by the stream. He could smell the nostril-flaring odor of new blood not yet congealed in the knife wound across the deer's throat.

He could smell the snow drifting down in heavy flakes. He wondered if it would ever stop snowing, or if the ice would keep coming south from the mountains until it covered the entire world.

He reached the clearing. He stopped just inside the edge of the forest with the caution that came from long experience with perils that lurked everywhere. On the far side of the clearing, like a shadow on the face of the wooded bluff, was the mouth of the cave. The clearing looked just as he had left it the day before, but it was silent — no voices, no movement, and the snow lay undisturbed everywhere, even in front of the cave. He circled the entire clearing, staying just out of sight among the trees, and found nothing — no trail, no intruders. From the nearest point he could see a few paces into the dark opening of the cave; nothing moved.

Soundlessly he put down the carcass of the deer in the snow and eased into the clearing and across it to the bluff. He glanced around one last time and then moved quickly and quietly through the opening and stopped just beyond the wintry light that spilled into the cave. The cave was dark and quiet, and it had the good familiar odors of smoke and meat and urine. In a moment his vision grew sharper and he saw the forms of his two children, a boy and a girl, lying stretched out beside the black remains of an old fire as if they were asleep. But they were lying too still.

Their throats had been cut like little pigs. The smell of blood was thick in the cave. The bodies were small and fragile beside the old fire, smaller even than the deer he had carried back for their meal, and they were dead. Sorrow was a cold fist in his throat, and he sat there beside the old fire while the snow fell eternally outside the cave...

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The Mnemonist III

O, I have passed a miserable night,

So full of ugly sights, of ghastly dreams,

That, as I am a Christian faithful man,

I would not spend another such a night,

Though 'twere to buy a world of happy days.

—WILLIAMSHAKESPEARE

The Mnemonist felt chilled. He shivered on his supportive pallet as he considered the fate of the surgeon. “Will legends arise, in times to come,” he asked, “of a hero asleep in a distant land who will return when his people need him, to heal the fatal illness that threatens them?” Or was it too late? Was the fatal illness already working its way through the urban center? Whatever the answer to those questions, the answer to the question of his successor did not lie among the volunteers. They were not fundamentally different from the poppets; their threshold might be higher, but under sufficient stress they would snap, suddenly, like weary metal.

we	each neuron in the brain	faulty
are	has its own unique	molecules
such	chemical label	are
stuff	when two neurons	being
as dreams	form a synapse	produced
are	joining nearby pathways	by
made on	the label from one neuron	memory
and our	enters the other	synthesizer
little	as a result the other	14
life	neuron synthesizes	pull
is	a memory molecule	off
rounded	this consists	line
with	of the labels	and
a sleep	from both neurons	repair

As he searched the experiences of other volunteers, the Mnemonist asked, “Are there two kinds of volunteers — one who has not yet broken and one so enamored of life and personal contact that he or she will not settle for the secondhand experience of dreams?” Some, it seemed to him, might never break, but they were all young and were fewer all the time. “Why,” he asked, “are there no old volunteers still resisting the lure of fulfillment?” And even if there were, the Mnemonist knew that they would be useless for his purpose, for they would be too much in love with living to settle for secondhand and thirdhand experience on his pallet.

our birth is but	for every separate	waste pipe
------------------	--------------------	------------

a sleep and	memory in the mind	378
a forgetting	said david krech	is clogged
the soul that rises	there is a	with what
with us our lifes star	differentiated chemical	may be
has had elsewhere	in the brain	a human body
its setting	chemical memory pellets	identify
and cometh from afar	as it were	and remove

He himself, the Mnemonist knew, had never been a volunteer; he had been in love not with living but with knowing. He remembered how it had been, the eagerness with which the child had selected pellets of knowledge while the other children had chosen experience. He grew lean with his unsatisfied hunger for data and correlation while they lolled, in fleshy contentment, with their capsuled happenings. "Come with me to the library," he had asked one of them or another. "Let us discover wonderful things." And not one of them had come with him. Why should he care for them or do for them what they wouldn't do for themselves? They were not like him. And yet, the Mnemonist reflected, he had spent a lifetime caring for them, doing for them.

not in entire	metrazol	water
forgetfulness	which is a stimulant	reservoir
and not in utter	to the nervous system	7
nakedness	has been used	has
but trailing clouds	to improve	a
of glory do we come	the learning ability	high
from god	of mice	coliform
who is our home	and a strain	count
heaven lies about us	of stupid mice	sterilize
in our infancy	outperformed	and
shades of the	untreated mice	then
prison house	with superior heredity	check
begin to close upon	by 40 percent	the
the growing boy	in learning mazes	recycler

“Was it caring?” the Mnemonist asked. “Was it doing for others?” If he were to be honest with himself, he would have to admit that what he cared about was the information that flowed through his body, and that what he did was only a natural consequence of that process. He served himself, and if, in doing that, he served the urban center and its population, he did not mind, but it was a by-product of his need to keep the center going so that he could keep doing what he enjoyed, what he needed, what kept him alive. Besides, what was the alternative?

true	puromycin	fabric
i talk of dreams	an antibiotic	machine 5
which are	that blocks	is producing
the children	protein formation	defective gowns
of an idle brain	has been used	check
begot of nothing	to inhibit	the quality
but vain fantasy	the memory of goldfish	of the fiber

He searched the memories that were uniquely, and obscurely, his own. “Did my experience with chemical memory recapitulate the early experiences of humanity?” he asked. He could imagine — there were no racial memories to draw upon — the first fascination of people with the shortcuts made possible by chemical learning: the knowledge they could ingest, the skills they could acquire, the abilities they could assume. No more puzzling over meaning; no more stretching the mind to encompass the unpredictable, the uncommunicable, the unthinkable. And then the slow realization that chemical memory was not just a shortcut but the royal road to perfection: total memory, absolute communication, and knowledge, skills, and abilities sharpened to the cutting edge of possibility.

i broider	if the memory molecules	spray
the world	can be identified	fields
upon a loom	and synthesized	27
i broider	mcconnell said	and
with dreams	scientists might even	28
my tapestry	be able to implant	for
here	artificial memories	mosaic
in a	in human beings	and
little	obviously education	check
lonely room	would be quite	the

i am master	a different matter	other
of earth	if students could be	fields
and sea	injected with	for
and the planets	algebra memories	possible
come to me	or spanish memories	spread

After the first rush of enthusiasm for learning had faded into commonplace acceptance — or perhaps while new developments in education were still being introduced — people would have begun to adapt synthetic memories to other uses. First, thrill seekers would have explored alien memory for its own sake, just as the general availability of automobiles introduced indiscriminate automobile riding, or the introduction of television was greeted by the watching of test patterns. Then, as tastes became more sophisticated, simple stories would have been developed out of patterned memories, and then would have come the avalanche of capsuled other lives.

dreamer	through a combination	the
of dreams	of psychology and chemistry	party
born out of	krech said	in the
my due time	we may be able	commons
why	to raise verbal abilities	is getting
should	in some	frenetic
i strive	arithmetical abilities	spray
to set	in others	depressant
the crooked	artistic ability	into
straight	in still others	the air ducts

The Mnemonist considered the opinions of historians and philosophers and asked, “Was the evolution of this world of dreamers inevitable once chemical memory was perfected and made generally available, or were there points at which events could have been diverted into other channels?” No one had recorded any such decision points, he knew. The first crude synthetic experiences had flowed imperceptibly into more expert storytelling and then into various pathways of specialization. First came artistry, then decadence, and finally perversion — until popping capsules became a way of life and then a culture, while earlier uses of chemical memory remained embedded in society like scarred boulders dropped from retreating glaciers.

o sleep	the day is very near	blood
---------	----------------------	-------

o gentle sleep	krech believes	analyzer
natures soft nurse	when the	24
how have	intellectual capacities	is
i frightened thee	of human beings	cycling
that thou	will be subject	off
no more	to the products	and
wilt weight	of the chemical	on
my eyelids down	as well as the teaching	shut it down
and steep my senses	laboratory	and
in forgetfulness	psychoneurobiochemistry	check it out

“Could I be looking in the wrong place for someone who might find this pallet a place of pleasure and not a bed of pain?” the Mnemonist asked. He had been searching for a person who dealt in data, whose love for information matched his own, or for a volunteer whose concern for the welfare of others led him to sacrifice easy satisfactions for the general good. What he should have been looking for all this time, he thought, was someone already accustomed to the pallet and the flow of information, who used it without being used, who could dream without becoming a poppet.

he never saw	if he	in the flow
never before today	and other workers	of
what was able to take	succeed	chemical
his breath away	krech says	memories
a face	with mock exuberance	are those
to lose youth for	the world	who change them
to occupy age	of the	but
with the dream of	mind	are not changed
meet death with	is ours	by them

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The Dreamer

Hecabe dreamed that she gave birth to a bundle of sticks that turned into countless fiery serpents. She awoke screaming that Ilium was in flames.

Helen comes to me as she came that first night at Cranaë, the most beautiful woman in the world, her face like alabaster lit from within, her eyes dark with mystery, her body smooth and youthful, and her passions and skills in lovemaking as great as those of Aphrodite herself.

I do not believe in this barbarous world whose petty gods walk among their believers in disguise or shrouded in mist, guiding weapons, preserving favorites, instilling fear or courage, determining destinies, controlling fates, lying, cheating, seducing, raping. And the people — I am another kind of man than these credulous savages. I shrink from their shouting and wailing, the stench of their unwashed bodies, their angers, their pride, their cruelty.

Yet Helen makes a believer.

She is my shrine, and I almost believe that, as rumor has it, she has found on the walls of Troy a stone that drips blood when rubbed against another, and she uses it to keep my love alive. But I am not such a fool, and I remember that I am a dreamer.

At the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, Eris, the god of strife, rolled a golden apple to the feet of Hera, Athene, and Aphrodite. The apple was inscribed, "For the Fairest."

I remember also — for my memory is divided in half, like my brain — my first sight of Helen. It was in Sparta at the palace of Menelaus. Helen was twenty-five, no longer a girl, and the mother of four children by Menelaus. I was the guest of a great and proud king of the Achaeans. None of this mattered. Helen bedazzled my eyes. I could not stop watching her.

If you award me the prize, I will make you king of all Asia and the richest man alive.

I knew that I was making myself ridiculous — I was not such a simple cattle herdsman as not to realize how a Trojan behaves at court — but I could not stop the glances, the sighs, the signals of my love. Once I picked up the goblet from which she had sipped and placed my lips on the very spot where hers had rested, and once, in a moment of exquisite rashness, I wrote in wine on the tabletop, "I love you, Helen."

If you choose me, I will make you victorious in all your battles, and the handsomest and wisest man in the world.

The king noticed nothing. He was too proud, too powerful, to suspect that anyone would dare to approach his wife, and he sailed off to Crete for the funeral of his grandfather. That night Helen and I eloped. She was as much in love with me as I with her; she abandoned two sons and a nine-year-old daughter, taking along only little Pleisthenes. We also took as much treasure from the palace as my fleet could carry. It was the custom — not theft, as later generations might consider it, but a way of redistributing wealth, just as the traditional exchange of gifts was a method of trading when money had not yet been invented. At least that is what my dreaming self remembered, although my consciousness continually reminded me of other customs, other systems.

If you award me the golden apple, Helen of Sparta, the most beautiful woman in the world, will be yours.

Some say that Helen's love was the gratitude of Aphrodite, but I don't believe in gods or prophecies. All I know is Helen's beauty and the passion of her love. Women are cheap in this world. They are taken and enslaved, made concubines or servants; they are objects to be traded, used, and bred; and if one is abducted or caught in adultery, it is not the loss of the woman that is resented but the injury to the man's pride.

Not Helen. All this world is only a frame to enhance her loveliness; the Achaeans encamped outside these embattled walls for nine long years and the destruction they bring are only the spice to make our love more savory.

Men die every day because of me, because of Helen. The generations to come will never stop singing about her beauty, about our love. All Troy fell in love with her, and Priam swore that he would never let her go. They die unlovely deaths outside the walls, and worse things are to come, I fear. Beautiful Cassandra, Priam's daughter and my sister, has been imprisoned in a pyramidal building on top of the citadel for fear her dire prophecies, including the fall of Troy, will dishearten the Trojans. But she is not believed.

The people say that Cassandra is a false prophet; how they decide this I have not been able to determine. Cassandra says that Apollo offered to teach her the art of prophecy if she would lie with him, but after he taught her, she refused to carry out her end of the bargain. He begged her for a kiss at least, and when she agreed, he spit in her mouth, thus ensuring that her prophecies would never be believed.

I think that Cassandra is mentally ill, but every time I come within range of her voice, she screams that I will bring the destruction of Troy. I don't believe her, but I'd rather she stopped.

But all of this is only the accompaniment to our love, the shouts of warriors and the wailing of widows the music that makes our lovemaking more sweet, the blows of battle on the plains leading to the black Achaean ships only the clash of cymbals that celebrate our orgasms.

Helen comes to my bed by day and by night. Although she is a matron now of more than forty years and she has born me three sons — all killed, alas, when a roof collapsed — and a daughter, she is as beautiful, as breath-stopping, as when we first met, and every time we touch, my senses reel with a sickness that only her passion can cure.

Helen, Helen, Helen... It is the litany by which I chant myself to paradise. The most beautiful woman in the world. If I can celebrate that beauty in my own special way, if I can make it live again, like Faust, it will be worth my soul.

And yet there is something about this strange, barbaric world that worries me. It is like no other world I have ever dreamed. It throbs to the rhythm of our lovemaking, and yet it seems strangely resistant to my will. Am I in control or not?

Samuel awoke to the lassitude that always followed a dream. It was a good feeling generally — like relaxation after passion, like the quiet of isolation after the demands of other people. Occasionally, after one of his darker dreams, he would feel a carryover of guilt or depravity flowing like ichor through dull veins, but even that would soon be gone. That was one of his great assets as a dreamer: There was little carry-over from one dream to another. Each seemed freshly drawn from the well of his unconscious.

For him dreaming had always been like therapy.

This dream, though, was different. It clung to him like sleep itself with gritty hands, unwilling to let him go. He felt tired, burned-out. "Refresher!" he said to the console, and then, "Stimulant!"

He felt the injections like a lover's touch upon his arms and legs. With a last, soothing burst of healant, the console's tiny needles withdrew. He slowly revived. Finally he sat up on the round bed, eased himself to his feet, and walked unsteadily to the lavatory. He relieved himself and showered.

He emerged from the shower feeling a little better and took a robe from the dispenser in the lavatory wall. He caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror. His eyes wore dark circles like mascara. They looked

sunken as if they had seen too many things and remembered too much.

He was not good-looking, he knew. His dark hair was wispy, his nose was sharp, his lips were thin and a bit bloodless, and his body was weak. He looked nothing at all like the Paris of his dream, whose sturdy body and handsome appearance drew the envy of all men and the admiration of all women, many of whom begged for his touch. Even Helen. And yet in this, the real world, good looks did not matter so much. The fact that he dreamed so well made him a man of importance. He was famous throughout this urban center, and perhaps through others as well, and popular, too, though such things went in cycles. He had been wanted by many and loved by some.

He turned away from the mirror, nevertheless, with a strange mixture of satisfaction and discontent and was surprised to see a woman standing beside the lift shaft beyond the bed. For a moment he didn't recognize her.

Joy? No, "Zoe!" he said. "What are you doing here?"

She smiled apologetically, ingratiatingly. "I came to see if you were all right."

"Why shouldn't I be all right?" he asked. He was annoyed by this intrusion upon his privacy, and he didn't care if she knew it. He had not posted, it is true, nor forbidden entry, and in the urban center people came and went freely, as mood moved them, but his dream was so recent, so vivid still in his mind, that he felt interrupted, invaded.

"I came several times while you were dreaming," she said. At his look, she added quickly, "You told me I might."

He remembered now. He had told her something like that when they had met — how long ago? yesterday? the day before? as recently as that? — at the party in the commons for — for that composer who was so popular now. Bach? Bacharach? Bachman. And he had been attracted to this blonde girl with the blue eyes who had stood apart from the allegro movements of the others, and they had talked a bit of dreams and dreaming, and he had said to her, idly as it seemed to him, "Come see me if you wish, and I will tell you what it is like to be a dreamer."

"I came several times, and you were still stretched out there upon the bed," she said, and he would have been moved by her concern had not the vision of Helen risen before his eyes.

Helen, thy beauty is to me

Like those Nicean barks of yore ...

"The bed," Zoe went on, "I've never seen one that color before — it looks like blood. The whole room is red like that. And — the tubes to the console made it seem as if you were a prisoner and some vampire had you, and you never woke up —" She sensed that she was babbling and stopped.

His annoyance dwindled as her pretty confusion grew. "Perhaps it was a bit longer than usual," he admitted. He held out his hand to her, and she put her hand in it. It was soft and ordinary and a bit sweaty. "Sit down." He ordered the soft chairs out of the wall and the bed lowered into the floor. "It's not that frightening, being a dreamer. Those tubes to the console are a two-way system. They provide me with sustenance and occasionally inspiration and a soporific to keep me asleep until the dream is done or the time is up — I can't stay under too long or I lose control as the dream takes over — and at the same time they sample my blood proteins and analyze them for memories. All of it is recorded, of course, for later editing."

“I know you’re a famous dreamer,” she said. She sat on the edge of her chair, leaning toward him. “But I’ve never understood how it works.”

“What you want to know is what happens when I dream.”

“I’ve taken a cap or two of yours,” she said, blushing a little as if in recollection. “Actually I’ve taken lots. I shouldn’t tell you that, I guess. But yours are so — so vivid, so lifelike.”

“I dream in color,” he said, scoffing at it a little as if it were something he had not earned. “Not everybody does, you know. And I have trained myself to control my dreams, by thinking about them, by talking about them, by replaying them. It’s an art form, you see. When there isn’t anybody else about or anybody I want to talk to, I tell them to the console.”

“You can tell them to me,” Zoe said shyly.

“Of course,” Samuel said, brushing her offer away casually. “I’m both a free lance and a commission dreamer. I dream what I like — or sometimes, if the commission appeals to me, I will dream to order. Now, for instance —” He stopped. Suddenly he didn’t want to talk about it — to her or anybody.

“You’re dreaming something on commission?” she prompted, looking up at him expectantly, her eyes wide with appreciation, her face transparent.

“A dream,” he said, “about the most beautiful woman in the world.”

Thy Naiad airs have brought me home

To the glory that was Greece

And the grandeur that was Rome.

“Is she?” Zoe asked, and then added quickly, “The most beautiful woman in the world?”

“Yes.”

“Would you let me share the dream?” she asked hesitantly. “Would that be illegal or unethical?”

“Yes,” he said quickly. And then, “No, not unethical. After all, what can the commissioner pay? But the dream isn’t ready. I’m not ready to release it. And — and there’s a matter of art to be considered.”

She frowned. He noticed the way she caught her lower lip between her teeth. Her teeth were white, and her lips were red and kissable. She was a remarkably pretty girl with a good body, and she was clearly anxious to please. She was no Helen, but no one was.

He got up from his chair and held out his hand to her. “I haven’t been very hospitable,” he said gently. “Come. I’ll tell you about my dream.” At his command the round bed rose from the floor, and he led her to it, and he cooled his feverish dreams between her silken thighs.

The child who will be born today will bring ruin to Ilium.

He and his mother must be destroyed.

I stand upon the broad stone tower by the south gate that some call the Scaean Gate. Ilium is built upon the end of a long ridge that rises as it extends to the east. The ridge has been carved out of the rock by the flow of rivers, the Simois to the north and the Scamander to the west. Pious fools believe the Scamander an ancestor of mine. Its sources are in the hills and foothills of Mount Ida, far to the

southeast; it runs directly below the low hill of Ilium until it is joined by the Simois after it emerges from a swamp to the north, and they flow together into the Hellespont. Beyond the Scamander is a broad plain extending from the southeast, where the Scamander emerges through a rocky gorge, to the north and the Hellespont. To the west the plain ends in hills higher than Ilium; between them I can see the blue glint of the Aegean Sea. To the northwest, beyond the Hellespont, I can see the twin peaks of Samothrace, and if the weather were clearer to the west, I could see the summit of Mount Athos.

But I do not look at these things. I look to the north at the three lines of black ships drawn up on the banks of the Hellespont. Except for occasional departures as messengers or to carry the raiding parties that have ravaged our coast and nearby islands, the ships have squatted there, like eternally patient vultures, for nine long years. By now the sails and cordage, even the wooden hulls, must be rotting, and the Achaeans, if they wished to return home, would risk their lives in leaky ships.

But they do not wish to return. They think only of killing and burning and looting, and they will keep making war until they destroy Troy or they are dead.

I can see them now, black dots moving between the ships and the rough huts thrown up in front of them. They live like pigs, these Achaeans and their allies, and we — because we are besieged and crowded within these walls — live little better. It is my fault, all of this, and I feel a persistent sense of guilt. All this bloodshed, all this agony and deprivation and destruction, all this rage and terror because of the love of one man and one woman. There is a disproportion here that I must think about.

But not now. I reach out and put my arm around the still-slender waist of Helen, who stands beside me on the tower, and I look at her lovely face and I know that it is worth it. If this were nearly twenty years ago and I had known then how it would all come out, I would do it all again. All the butchering and misery that our illicit love has brought upon our worlds only makes the loving more intense. Like a frame for a picture, the warfare encloses it, makes it a world apart, brightens the colors, darkens the shadows, focuses the attention.

The first Achaean to set his foot on Troy will be the first to die.

Perhaps this is how these credulous savages feel about the prophecies that surround their lives, as if they see the future by flashes of lightning. They often know what will happen, like Protesilaus leaping ashore at Troy, but they go forward, moved by some blind acceptance of a destiny woven for them at their birth or by a courage or an arrogance stronger than their fear of death.

Helen stirs within my arm and looks up at me, and I feel her love as strong as mine. I do not care where it comes from, whether it was fated by the gods from the beginning or whether I will it so and Helen is the reflection of my own desire. She is mine, by our passion as well as by what we have sacrificed, and we make the nights brilliant with our love.

“The Achaeans are restless this morning,” she says. “I think they are preparing another attack.”

“We have beaten them back each time from the walls of Ilium,” I tell her. The only fear I wish her to feel is the fear that gives an edge to appetite.

“Yet Troy is destined to fall,” she says with a shiver I feel against my arm and the side her shoulder and hip touch. “Cassandra prophesies it, and her twin, Helenus, confirms her vision. Even Calchas, the Trojan renegade, has told the Achaeans that they will be victorious.”

I hold her tight to ease her apprehensions. “Prophecies are often wrong.”

“This is a luckless site,” she says, refusing to be comforted. “So your founder, Dardanus, was told, and

Ilus, builder of Troy, believed. You know how many times it has been destroyed. Within the memory of your father's generation it was sacked by Heracles after Laomedon refused to pay Poseidon and Apollo for building the wall. Laomedon and all his sons perished, save your father Podarces, renamed Priam, who was awarded the throne by Heracles."

"More likely it was an earthquake," I say.

"What is a shaking of the earth but the wrath of Zeus?" she asks, wide-eyed. "Besides, it was prophesied by Aesacus, your half brother, that you would be the ruin of your country. And when you awarded Aphrodite the golden apple, you earned the hatred of Hera and Athene."

She is a creature of her times, with all its customs, beliefs, and superstitions. Our love would not be the same if it were otherwise. And yet today I would not have her reinforce my concerns. I stop her mouth with a kiss, and as I draw back, feeling the familiar stirrings, I say, "I have heard that Achilles has quarreled with Agamemnon over some woman; Achilles has retired from the battle and has sworn to fight no more."

Her face, which was gloomy with foreboding, brightens with hope. These primitives can believe in the Fates and in their capricious gods and yet hope for something unexpected to happen. Is it because their gods are capricious, because there is so much divining, reading of signs, and prophesying that much of it must be contradictory or ambiguous, even if all is false? And how much that comes true is simple self-fulfillment?

"That's good news," she says. "Achilles is a savage. He's as big as a bull and as swift as a deer, and he lives only to fight and kill. Besides, they say that Thetis, his divine mother, made him invulnerable when he was a baby."

"Lots of Trojans believe that," I say, "and the news that he will not be in the battle is bound to encourage them."

"But how did you learn about Achilles?" she asks.

I smile. "I, too, have my powers."

"I know of those," she whispers, and leans against me, her eyes half-closed.

I kiss her again. My heartbeat quickens, and I calculate. "I must put on my armor for the battle," I tell her, "but if we return now to the house I built for you, there might be time ... before I must leave."

She walks, as eager as I, back to the house-of-many-rooms, with its spacious halls and its intimate chambers where ecstasy awaits us.

Samuel swam up from blackness through successive layers of gray into the light. A pink oval loomed over him. After a moment it resolved itself into the face of Zoe.

"Are you all right?" she asked.

"Why shouldn't I be all right?" he answered angrily. His head was still filled with Helen; his body was still warm from touching hers. And he had had this conversation before.

"You were groaning and twisting," she said. "I couldn't stand thinking that you were suffering."

"What business is it of yours?" He sat up, realizing for the first time that the slender needles had already been withdrawn. Not only had she awakened him, she had instructed his console, and that was bad

manners even from the most intimate of friends. Now he was really angry. “What are you doing here?”

“I thought —” she began. “After yesterday. You said ...” She got up from her knees beside the round bed, her face flushed with embarrassment. “But if you don’t want me here ...” She turned toward the drop shaft.

Samuel felt guilty as he watched her walk away from him. She was very young, very naive. Because he had tried to forget Helen in her anonymous arms, she had presumed that he was interested in her. It had been nothing to him but momentary forgetfulness, and little of that. Perhaps it had been more to her. Now she felt rejected and ashamed. “Wait,” he said.

She turned back, her face illuminated by joy, and Samuel realized, abstractly, that she was almost — yes, truly — beautiful. She was beautiful and sweetly formed and a gentle person whom he thought was loving and kind, and it was not her fault that she had come to him at the wrong time, that she was not Helen. He owed her something, an explanation, a little courtesy.

“I’m grumpy when I’m awakened,” he said, and then, because it sounded as if he were diminishing his work, he added, “Besides — I’m an artist, and no less an artist because I work in dreams.”

“I know you are,” she said. “I understand how you feel.”

He doubted that. At her age everything was personal. But she appreciated that he wanted to excuse his behavior. “Well, happy dreams,” he said, and went into the lavatory. When he returned to the room, he was surprised to find her sitting on the bed.

“You said you liked to talk about your dreams,” she said, as if explaining her presence.

“Not this one.”

“What is so special about this one?”

His quick response had told him something about his dream that he had not yet really faced, that it was special, that he didn’t want to share it with anyone. At least not yet. “Nothing,” he lied. “It’s just that the world I’m dreaming is strange. I haven’t figured it out yet. It’s a world I’m still exploring. I haven’t got it under control.”

“I thought you made it up,” she said, smiling at him, giving him all her attention as if he were the only person in her world.

He summoned a chair from the wall, not wanting to sit on the bed with her as she apparently intended, not wanting to get further involved. “I have to start somewhere. My subconscious needs something to work on — data, details, structure. A dream without data seems thin and unreal. Usually I pop a piece of fiction or a history, just to get started — not too much, or it gets turgid and unmanageable.”

“Where did you start on this one?”

“This one was unusual. It was both fiction and history. I popped a bit of history by a historian named Laurence, but mostly I used an epic by an ancient poet. Not much of either, you understand, or my imagination would be limited. Just background, hints, suggestions.”

“Who was Helen?” She said the name as if Helen were a rival.

Samuel almost laughed. She was no rival to Helen. “When I was asked to dream the most beautiful woman, he said, hiding his reaction in talk, “I asked the console for references. That was the name it

provided most frequently. Helen. Legend, myth, maybe reality as well. In mythology, she was the daughter of Leda by Zeus, who lay with her in the form of a swan.”

The words came to him unbidden: *unable to “push the feathered glory from her loosening thighs.”*

“The gods were always doing that in Greek myths,” he continued, “impregnating women in the form of swans or bulls or rivers. Maybe it was a good way for the women to explain embarrassing pregnancies.”

“But what about Helen?” Zoe asked impatiently.

“She grew up to be so beautiful that all the Greek princes came to the palace of her foster father, Tyndareus of Sparta, as suitors. Tyndareus was afraid to choose any of them for fear the rest would fall upon him. Finally Odysseus, always described as shrewd or wily, suggested that Tyndareus make the suitors swear on the bloody pieces of a sacrificed horse that they would defend Helen’s husband, whoever was chosen. She married the richest of them, Menelaus, who eventually succeeded Tyndareus as king of Sparta.”

Zoe shrugged. “That doesn’t seem so wonderful.”

“That’s only where it started,” Samuel said. “Paris, the son of Priam, king of Troy, came to visit Menelaus — there are many complications, but this is a simplified version — fell in love with Helen, eloped with her, and ten years later the Greeks and their allies arrived on the shores of Troy. They had sworn to destroy the city of Ilium, to slaughter its men, to carry off its women into concubinage and slavery, to loot its treasures. My dream begins where the epic starts, after nine years of battle and siege. Conditions are getting desperate; I think some climax is coming.”

“Don’t you know?” Zoe asked, surprised.

“I have intimations, but I avoid too much foreknowledge. I shape it as it happens.”

“Who are you in the dream?”

“Whom do you think? I’m Paris, of course.”

Zoe shivered. “It sounds like a savage kind of life.”

“It is. It’s nothing at all like this life we live within our towers, the towers no one attacks. Their world is open to the sky. The rain beats in upon them; the summer heat bakes them. Their food spoils if they don’t eat it quickly. They live close to nature. Their life is real. And the importance of all the fighting and the brutality — artistically, anyway — is that it’s about a woman. Thousands of warriors fighting one of the world’s great wars — all for a single woman!”

“And Helen,” Zoe asked, touching her own blonde hair with an unconscious appeal, “is she real, too?”

Samuel’s eyes grew distant. “As real as you,” he said. He could have said, as truthfully, “more real,” but it wouldn’t have mattered. When he looked at the bed again, she was gone, and he did not know when she had left, and he had only the faint recollection that she was crying.

Paris must be put to death at once, or Troy will perish!

Better that Troy shall fall than that my wonderful son should die.

The lines of battle are drawn up on the plain of Troy. The Achaeans have marched swiftly from the ships. Their feet and the hooves of their horses and the wheels of their chariots have raised a cloud of dust as

dense as mist, and we have gone forth to meet them through all the gates of Ilium. I counseled the wisdom of defending our walls from within, but Hector, as always, considered that the advice of a coward. Moreover, he said, Iris, the messenger of Zeus, had appeared to him in the guise of Priam's son, Polites, and told him to lead our forces into battle.

Maybe Polites is a little off in the head, too, I grumbled to myself.

Hector is an honest man, a lion in combat, and a man of honor in peace, but I don't think he is too bright. A man cannot fight the gods, he says. "Fate is a thing that no man born of woman, whether coward or hero, can escape. No man is going to send me down to Hades before my time." And all that sort of thing.

He says he would be ashamed to appear before the Trojan men and the Trojan ladies in their trailing gowns if he shrinks from the battle like a coward. Sure, he believes that Ilium is doomed, but he fights on with a kind of blind courage that I honor, though I do not understand it.

Still my sympathies go out to these men on either side who are ready to stab and hack each other into bloody meat for honor's sake, while I am ready to fly back to Ilium and Helen's arms, as little afraid of being thought a coward as they are of pain and death.

In spite of all this I relish the murmur of the Trojans behind me and the voices that call me "godlike" as I step from the forefront of the Trojan ranks. A panther's skin is on my back, a curved bow and a bronze sword are slung from my shoulders, and I brandish two bronze-headed spears in my hand. Godlike indeed I look and feel as I challenge to single duel any one of the Achaeans.

I do not understand what has provoked me to such rashness.

When I see Menelaus step down from his chariot, eager to get at the man who has wronged him, all my courage leaks away. I know that this is a dream and all these savages are only the dream-flesh my sleeping mind has given to the bare bones of myth and history.

What do I have to fear? But against my will and better judgment I slip back into the Trojan lines, trying to pretend that no one has accepted my challenge, until Hector confronts me.

"You sick fool," he said. "Are you nothing but a pretty face? Why were you ever born? Why didn't our mother, Hecabe, kill you that day? Why didn't we kill you before your wedding day? Far better to die than to disgrace us all and make yourself an object of contempt. You're nothing but a girl-crazy seducer. I can't believe that you're the man who sailed off with a crew of friends, abducted a beautiful woman from a far-off land and warlike family, and brought a curse to your father, to the city, to the whole people. And now you're too cowardly to stand up to the man you wronged."

I looked at his square-jawed face and his shining helmet — no one could have counted the hours Andromache spent polishing it — and I recall that he was always bigger and better than me at sports and battle. Except for that one time when I came to the games at Ilium, an unknown herdsman, and beat them all. Priam's sons, Hector and Deiphobus included, would have killed me in their shame and envy, but Agelaus, the king's herdsman, who had raised me as his own son, rushed forward, shouting, "Your majesty, this is your long-lost son." That's the way it happens in myths. Because of the prophecy, the priests still wanted to kill me, but Priam wouldn't hear of it.

I could tell Hector that he's had it easy, being raised at court, trained in combat and the ways of warriors. He wasn't cursed before he was born, taken to a hilltop to die, suckled by a she-bear, and raised among cattle. I could tell him that I knew more about dung than honor, but he wouldn't understand. Instead I say, "You're right. You're always right when it comes to matters of war and spirit. But you mustn't reproach me for the things Aphrodite gave me. The gifts of the gods should never be despised, even if

they aren't what we might ask for. I'll tell you what — if I'm going to fight Menelaus, let's arrange it so that we fight for Helen and her wealth. Winner take all.”

Hector likes the idea. He steps forward to arrange it with the Achaeans, while I tell myself that this is the way to end it. I will kill off Menelaus. If the Achaeans are honorable men — and honor means more to them than life — they will sail away, and I can enjoy Helen in peace.

While sacrificing to the gods, Tyndareus overlooked Aphrodite, who took her revenge by making his three daughters — Clytemnestra, Timandra, and Helen — notorious for their adulteries.

Before I am quite ready, I am standing in my armor between the two battle ranks, and Menelaus is not far away. Too close, in fact. He is an older man, but his hair is still red; he is tall and broad, and his arms look as if they were molded in bronze.

Hector and Odysseus have drawn lots from a helmet, and I won. I raise my spear, shake it in the air, and cast it with all my dreamlike strength, guiding it toward Menelaus as it falls. It strikes his round shield and pierces the layers of oxhide that cover it. The point almost reaches him — but is stopped by the bronze shield itself. I am shaken. I cannot believe that my will is so ineffectual.

Then Menelaus casts. The spear hurtles through the air, and I will it away, but it strikes my shield anyway, pierces the oxhide, goes through the bronze, penetrates my breastplate. I can feel it tear the tunic beside my flank as I turn my body. As I am avoiding the spear, Menelaus is upon me with his sword. He strikes my helmet. I shatter his sword into four pieces. He grabs the horsehair crest of my helmet and drags me toward the Achaean lines. I am strangled by the embroidered strap that holds my helmet in place. I make it part.

Menelaus hurls the helmet toward the Achaeans and turns to kill me with his spear, but I have had enough of this. I will myself back to Helen. She looks at me, unsurprised, and tells me she wishes I had died there on the battlefield, killed by the great warrior who had been her husband. She reminds me of my boast that I am a better man than Menelaus and asks me to challenge him again. Or maybe I shouldn't, she says, lest I fall to his spear.

“That's enough,” I tell her. “Menelaus won; I don't know why.” Perhaps, I thought, I didn't want this dream to end so soon. An artist has to trust his subconscious. “You're always blaming the gods for this and that, your mother's pregnancy, your own adulteries — blame Athene for Menelaus's victory. Maybe next time Apollo or Aphrodite will help me, and I'll win. But let us leave war to the fools. Love is the only game we know. Being in battle like this, being so close to death, I've never wanted you as much as I do now, not even the first time when I carried you off from Sparta and we spent the night on the island of Cranaë, drunk with love in each other's arms. I've never been so much in love with you or wanted you so much.”

Even as I speak, I lead Helen toward the wooden bed and the moments that are as close to paradise as either of us will ever know.

“How long was I asleep?” Samuel asked the console, his voice ragged with weariness.

“Eleven hours and thirty-three minutes,” the console said. It spoke in a woman's voice, husky and soft. He would have to have it changed, Samuel thought. Every woman's voice reminded him that it was not Helen's. But he wouldn't do it now. He was too tired.

He sagged in his chair, feeling as if he had been sick for a long time. “Am I ill?” he asked.

“Generally you are in good physical condition,” the console said, “but your metabolism has been speeded

up lately, and you may be feeling the aftereffects of too much adrenaline and too much soporific.”

The console was programmed to keep him asleep during the progress of an episode but to wake him periodically for conscious contemplation; if he stayed under too long, he might become no better than a poppet. It was good that he had been awakened: eleven and a half hours! That was three times as long as he had ever dreamed before.

Eleven and a half hours, and he felt too tired to move, as if he really had been battling Menelaus and consoling himself in Helen’s passionate arms. Dreams didn’t usually affect him like this. Besides, dream time was much faster than real time. A few minutes was long enough to dream an episode that seemed to last for hours. In half a day he could dream a lifetime.

No wonder he was tired. What he needed was sleep without dreams — or at least with only the rapid-eye-movement dreams that people seem to find necessary to work out their waking conflicts. What he needed was to sleep without dreaming of Helen.

His muscles tightened at the thought of Helen. He had dreamed of her and the world of the Trojans three times now; it was more than he had ever dreamed of anything, and he was not a casual dreamer. He was thorough, a craftsman, working out a dream until it was right. But it did not do to rework dreams too often; they lost sparkle, spontaneity, became artificial, brittle, refined beyond experience into art for art’s sake. Leave that for the aesthetes.

He was not one of those. He dreamed too vividly for that — in color and with a full range of sounds, from the twittering of birds and the hum of insects to the rush of wind and the distant rumble of thunder. When he was at his best, he even dreamed tactilely — the thought brought to his fingertips the incomparable feel of Helen’s skin — and with a wide gamut of odors and tastes that he continually worked to expand.

He was like Homer himself, he thought, recording a complete imaginative human experience out of myth. Did Homer fall in love with Helen?

It was too much. He was not shaping the dream but living it. Each time, he relived the experience from its beginning, like an apprentice dreamer unable to control his sleeping mind.

Helen comes to me as she came that first night at Cranaë....

Each time the experience was the same, unchanged by repetition, except that he progressed a little further into it, as if it were already complete and he was just unveiling it scene by scene.

He felt almost like those savages — trapped in a pattern of actions woven by the Fates, tormented at the whim of the too-human gods, and yet, like Achilles, slashing his predestined way through the resistant world to his own ... death.

Brightness falls from the air,

Queens have died young and fair;

Dust hath closed Helen’s eyes.

Death? Did that await him?

He rejected the notion. It was the product of his weariness. He was tired and depressed, but he was, after all, a dreamer. He shaped dreams for others, and none of them ended in the dreamer’s death. He was not that kind of dreamer. There were some, he knew, who dreamed that sort of thing, and there

were some death-wish poppets who went in for it. But he dreamed too vividly for that; death might not be just a dream. Danger and the threat of destruction might add savor. But not death.

He looked around the empty room. He lacked the strength even to order the bed lowered into the floor and sanitized. The room was sanitary, sterile, barren. The furniture that appeared and disappeared, cleaned in their niches for their next use. The lift shaft and the drop shaft, sealed now against intrusion.

There was the lavatory, spotless, empty; this time he had been too tired even to refresh himself. He felt grimy and sticky, but it was mostly imagination. And the little kitchenette. How long had it been since he had eaten? All he remembered now was half-cooked mutton and ox thigh wrapped in fat; in his dream he had eaten ravenously, but now the thought of food made him feel a bit sick. He didn't want to eat.

This room was his home. This was reality. Comfortable, convenient, safe. He came to it with a sense of relief. And yet, he could not help comparing it with Helen's world, with all its crowded humanity, its crude vitality, its wind and rain, its cold and heat, its passions and fears, its dirt, disease, and never-ending stench. Unendurable — and unforgettable.

But he could not return to that. Not soon. He could not let himself be drawn so completely into that world.

... the most beautiful woman in the world ...

He looked at the console, smooth, blood-red plastic over mysterious and complicated apparatus, and he wondered why he had overlooked it in his inventory. This was the central fact of his existence and his art.

He roused himself to ask, "Have there been any messages while I was dreaming?" Somehow he would drag himself back to the real world.

"A woman called. She identified herself as Zoe. She called several times."

Samuel sighed. "Let me hear them."

The first message said that she never wanted to see or speak to Samuel again. The second one said to disregard the first message and ended, "Samuel, I've got to talk to you." The third one became hysterical and demanded that the console wake Samuel. "Samuel, Samuel," Zoe shouted, "you've got to talk to me." And then, in a pleading voice, she said, "Call me. Please call me."

The console waited a decent interval for some response from Samuel. When there was none, it went on, "There is also a message from a man named Regi."

... her face like alabaster lit from within ...

"Let me hear it," Samuel said, as if his palms were pressed to his ears.

"Samuel, old man, isn't it about time for that commission of mine to be completed? You said you'd get right on it, and it's been several days now. Never been this slow before."

... her eyes dark with mystery, her body smooth and youthful ...

"Is there an answer?" the console asked.

"No," Samuel said. "But if Regi calls again, tell him that it isn't ready yet. The dream isn't finished."

... her passion and skills in lovemaking as great as those of Aphrodite herself ...

Samuel pulled himself to his feet as if drawn by an attraction stronger than his will, dragged his feet toward the round bed, and arranged his body on it, arms and legs outstretched for the needles, in the position for dreaming.

If Paris takes this voyage to Sparta, Troy will burn.

The battle is not going the way it should.

Crazy Pandarus broke the truce. He shot an arrow at Menelaus. If he had been successful, perhaps the war would have ended there, but the arrow hit Menelaus's belt buckle and only grazed the skin. Pious fools will spread stories that Athene saved the king's life, perhaps even that she persuaded Pandarus to break the truce, but Pandarus was dumb enough to do it without prompting.

Later, as the battle wages back and forth across the plain, Pandarus redeems his folly by wounding Diomedes in the right shoulder — and by his own death. His death is unpleasant. Diomedes' spear strikes him on the nose beside the eye and passes through his teeth, cuts off his tongue at the roots, and comes out the base of his chin before he crashes from Aeneas's chariot into the dust.

All death is unpleasant here; nothing is bloodless and romantic. Diomedes rages through the Trojan ranks in his chariot, slaughtering our best warriors in spite of everything I can do. At times like these I almost believe in the gods myself. But what gods would glory in the deeds of these savages?

The battle madness grips them, and they kill each other in bestial ways, with spear and sword and rock, through eyes and cheeks and throat, through breast and flank and thigh. Blood runs across the land in red rivulets, severed heads tumble through the battle lines, limbs lie in the mud still clutching for life, entrails strew the field like blind bloody worms.

They kill the injured and those who plead for life, their arms wrapped around the knees of men panting with the blood lust. And yet, crazed with killing, the victors never forget spoils. They pause to steal horses and chariots; they strip corpses of their armor as they lie in blood-thickened mud, even while spears fall around them and armed men charge to prevent the dishonoring of the dead.

The vultures cannot wait for the battle to stop before they land to thrust their naked necks into the carrion, and the dogs on either side dash in to snatch at bloody scraps as soon as the fray sways in another direction. The stench is almost unendurable even within the walls of Ilium, where I lie with Helen, conscious of the battle, aware of everything that goes on as if with another part of me. Am I not the dreamer? I am unwilling to risk myself again so soon, and Helen is more desirable than ever, but I see men die and I sense their pain as if it were mine. Surely that is enough. What more can they ask of me?

I see Aeneas — son, they say, of Anchises and Aphrodite — defend the corpse of Pandarus from the giant Diomedes. I see Diomedes raise overhead a rock I think no man can lift, and I feel it shatter the hip joint of Aeneas. But he does not fall. He must not die. He must live, I sense, for another purpose, perhaps to save Ilium and me.

Aeneas is destined to survive and to save the House of Dardanus from extinction. The great Aeneas shall be king of Troy and shall be followed by his children's children in the time to come.

I remove him from the battle as I had removed myself, leaving Diomedes to wonder what god has intervened. I will the hip healed and send a phantom Aeneas to fight upon the plain lest the Trojans be discouraged.

Sarpedon, king of Lycia and son, the pious say, of Zeus and Laodamia, kills Tlepolemus. I see Sarpedon's spear pass through his neck, but I feel the spear of Tlepolemus pass through Sarpedon's left

thigh.

Hector finally comes for me, all dirt and bloodstains, with the stink of battle on him. I am sitting in my bedroom looking at my armor, trying to make up my mind to return to the field. He restrains himself from hitting me. I am responsible for the battle, he tells me. Why am I sitting here dallying with Helen?

He is right, I say. Helen has been urging me to return, I tell him, and if he will only give me a moment, I will arm myself — or he can go on, and I will join him soon.

Helen also scorns me. She knows my weaknesses, but she cannot stop loving me anyway. “I’m sorry I wasn’t killed the day I was born,” she says. “Then none of this would have happened. But if it had to happen, I wish I’d found a better husband than this poor excuse for a man. But here we are, because of my shame and his wickedness. Things can only get worse. People not yet born will sing about how the gods tormented us.”

So we go out to fight again, Hector and I, to kill and feel the nearness of death, and it is almost as sweet as making love. But our brother Helenus says that Apollo and Athene have decided to stop the battle for now and let Hector fight a duel with an Achaean champion. Hector is delighted. He steps between the two armies and shouts out his challenge.

At first no one accepts the challenge. Then Menelaus begins to put on his armor. Agamemnon stops him. Finally nine Achaeans volunteer, and they draw lots. Big Ajax wins. I think even Hector’s savage heart pauses. They battle across the space between the armies, first with spears, then rocks, and finally swords until the sun casts long shadows across the plain from the hills bordering the Aegean. They agree to call it a standoff and exchange gifts, as if this were some game they were playing.

As the Achaeans return to their reed-thatched huts beside the hollow ships and we return inside the unbreached walls of Ilium, there is feasting and sacrifices to the gods.

In the meeting at the doors of my father’s palace in the acropolis, Antenor voices the thought that coils in the hearts of all Trojans. “Let’s give Helen back to the sons of Atreus along with all her property. What we are doing isn’t right, and if we persist, we will all be destroyed.”

At the thought of losing Helen my body turns cold. I leap to my feet. “I resent anybody giving my wife away. I’m not going to give her up. That’s final. But I will return all the treasure I brought home from Argos. I’ll even toss in something of my own.

Old Priam, too, won’t give Helen up. “In the morning,” he says, “we will send Idaeus to present Paris’s offer to Agamemnon and Menelaus. He will also suggest a truce so that both sides can burn their dead.”

They make a great deal of death here for all the care they show for the dying. I think sometimes that they value the dead more than the living.

Nobody asks Helenus or sends to learn from Cassandra how the sons of Atreus will respond. Maybe they don’t need prophecies to tell them what is in the hearts of the Achaeans. They will agree to a truce to burn the dead, but they will not call off their siege for half the gold in Ilium, no, not for Helen either. They are confident now that they will storm the walls of the citadel, that all the gold and all the women will be theirs, including Helen, and before that they will have all the lovely killing.

They do not reckon with my power over these events, nor with what unslakable desire I return to Helen.

Samuel stood in the lobby of his building and looked at the murals on the walls depicting the victory of humanity over the symbolic representations of war, famine, disease, and death. He had been unable any

longer to endure the womblike solitude of his room. That only reinforced his surrender to a persistent dream. He needed to breathe unconditioned air, to see unadjusted colors, to feel the neutrality of unattuned spaces.

Others found these areas cold or terrifying, but he was neither a poppet nor a hermit. He was an artist. He had created more than a hundred dreams. Everything was material for his art, and spaciousness, coldness, neutrality, hostility, danger were as good as enclosure, warmth, personalization, friendliness, safety.

No one else was in the uncluttered sweep of space encircling the central shafts. He had not expected anyone. He stood in the middle of the yellow carpet, tired and alone but pleased that he had fought his obsession and won. He turned slowly, thinking that he could succeed now. He could do anything. He could go through corridors to twenty-four other lobbies just like this one; he could even go through the bronze door, unused now for at least a generation, to judge by its appearance, to the world outside the urban center. But he didn't. That was material for another dream perhaps. Instead he went up the lift shaft to the seventy-fifth floor.

The room seemed almost twice as large as the lobby below, lacking, as it did, a central column. Here the carpeting was red instead of yellow. The floor was set with tables and chairs, but the room was as empty as the lobby. The fading light of sunset streamed through the windows on his left, while to his right the darkening sky was lined with red as if the claws of some celestial cat had raked across it, leaving it to bleed.

He knew what windows were, even though these were the only ones in the entire building, and he knew about the sky and the land. He had been here before, and he had dreamed them, too, as vividly as if they were real, and he walked toward the sunset and looked out upon the land, unafraid, and saw the fields below, carved out with machinelike precision from the soil; and fading into the distance, set here and there, other urban centers silhouetted against the western sky.

We have tamed the savage land, he thought, and the savages within us. We have humanized the earth, but everywhere we have cut ourselves off from those direct experiences with life that made us human: hunger, disease, pain, loss, and even death itself, which seldom comes unbidden. We know them now only through artists of experience like me, who imagine how these things must be and shape them into meanings that the computers code into subtle proteins and are finally consumed by adult fetuses in their mechanical wombs, sharing someone else's dream of distant passions they can never know.

And he stayed against the high window until the sky turned black and the stars came out. We might have had the stars, he thought. That was man's oldest dream. Instead we opted for the dream itself. How long can we subsist on dreams? Perhaps only until the dreamers are all gone — or consumed by their own dreams.

Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam.

He left the top of the tower, consoled somehow by his knowledge that the world still existed outside these impenetrable walls, that his weariness with his world had not yet destroyed it all. He felt a kind of peace he had not known for what seemed like many cycles, and on an impulse he stopped at the commons on the thirty-fifth floor, not averse to the sight of his fellowman.

He almost turned back when he saw a kind of party in progress among the scattered tables, and then he decided that perhaps it was the company of his fellow human beings that he needed. They were all young. It was the young who wanted to dream together. Not yet removed from their adolescent identity problems, they seemed to need the reassurance of other identities around them. Later, like aging bears,

they became content with their solitary dreams.

He didn't scoff. He had enjoyed their company until recently, and not just because, as he told himself, he wanted to stay close to his audience. He liked them. They were beautiful as only the innocent can be beautiful.

To his experienced eye the dream they shared seemed to be a fantasy. They floated, men and women, as if they were weightless, ethereal, bent on some otherworldly missions but tracing, as they went, some secret interrelationships between themselves. A midsummer night's dream, perhaps, with music by Mendelssohn, heard only by themselves. Here and there some of the group had separated from the rest to conduct some more intimate rites among themselves.

And there Samuel was surprised to discover a young woman seated apart from the others. Even before he had recognized her, she had seen him and started toward him. It was Zoe. He turned to leave and then turned back.

"Samuel," she said fondly. "I'm glad you came." Her eyes searched his face with concern and compassion. "You don't look well." She took his right hand in both of hers and held it to her breast.

He didn't try to retrieve his hand. "You haven't popped with the others."

"If you had noticed me more, you'd have seen that I seldom pop," she said, pulling his hand closer. "Besides ... I'm still in love with you."

"Not that," he said. He took his hand back. "You don't know what you're saying. I'm nobody to love. My life is my work. I can't love anybody."

She seemed not to hear his words. "What you need is something to take your mind off what's been bothering you lately. Diversion. People. A party. That's it. Let me have some people in to your place for a party. People like these. We'll work up something pleasant, something you'll like, I promise." She gestured at the young people scattered around the room, oblivious of anyone else's presence.

"All right," he said, anxious to get away now, filled with a sudden desire to return to Helen. "But say it — say you don't love me.

"I don't love you," she said, but she smiled to show him she was lying.

The Achaean fleet will be unable to sail from its windbound port at Aulis unless Agamemnon sacrifices his most beautiful daughter to Artemis.

The Achaeans have buried the bones of their dead in a single barrow in front of their black ships. On the barrow they have built a wall; in front of the wall they have dug a deep trench and planted the far side with stakes, as if they expect attack.

I suggest treachery. "Beware the Achaeans," I say, and hear resonances I do not understand. But Hector is not devious, and he doesn't understand it in others. "We will attack," he says, "for Zeus has determined that we will win today."

Why he is certain I don't know and am afraid to ask. I am beginning to fear that matters will not turn out the way I wish. But I push back the fear. I can control the events in my world, but why should I interfere now? Let my subconscious and the historic and poetic facts intertwine to shape a new masterpiece.

Apparently Hector is right. We cut our way through the Achaean troops. They flee before us. When they attempt to turn and fight, thunder rolls from the dark clouds hanging over Mount Ida, and as if at a signal

from the gods they flee again.

I discover a joy to savagery that I have not appreciated until now. Victory surges through my veins as my arrows sink into the backs of terrified warriors or my spear bites deep into yielding flesh or my sword slices through skin, flesh, and bone and I feel hot blood spurt upon my hand.

We, too, suffer losses. Men fall on either side of me, men I have known, brothers. Hector loses two charioteers.

We fight until dark, until our arms grow weary with killing and our legs tremble from holding us up, but we reach the Achaean wall. The enemy is pinned inside. Hector calls a halt to the battle. We make camp to wait for dawn.

In spite of sentries, we sleep uneasily. The Achaeans are sly, and now they are desperate from their defeat. They would like to draw Achilles back into the battle. Agamemnon, at the urging of his leaders, is likely to promise him anything, gold, horses, women — even the one he took away — if Achilles will only save them from the Trojans.

In the morning I discover that I am right about the Achaeans. A couple of them sneaked out in the night and cut the throats of more than a dozen men, including Rhesus, the newly arrived king of the Thracians, and they stole his horses.

Troy will become invulnerable once the horses of Rhesus have eaten Trojan fodder and drunk the waters of the Scamander.

We renew the attack upon the enemy, who are penned inside their own stockade, their backs against the Hellespont. Dismounted from our chariots, we rush the gates, but the Achaeans are rested too and encouraged by the possibility that this may be their day for victory.

We are equally matched. Men fall on either side like tall trees toppling in the forest. But that sounds too clean and neat. Blood splatters, heads roll in the dirt, brains spatter the insides of helmets, and only a haze of dust raised in the air by scuffling feet keeps the sane from vomiting where they stand.

Today Agamemnon rages, forcing us back nearly to the Scaean Gate. He kills Trojan after Trojan, pausing each time to strip their armor as if he hadn't wealth enough in his hut and on his ships as well as in far-off Mycenae. The Achaeans are looters. They look on it as a way of keeping score, but it is mostly greed. They live on a basic level that admits no subtleties of behavior; for them life is fighting, looting, eating, drinking, and fornicating, in that order. Any alteration in that hierarchy of behavior is intolerable.

The Achaeans kill many Trojans today — even Hector barely escapes death when a spear glances off his helmet — but the battle swings to us once Coön wounds Agamemnon in the middle of his forearm with a spear. Hector slashes his way through the Achaeans as Agamemnon withdraws. They retreat once more toward their ships.

This is Hector's day. He storms his way across the battlefield, but I, too, do damage with my arrows. I tell myself that we may drive the Achaeans from the Troad today and, despite all the prophecies of doom, send them scattered to their kingdoms or to Hades. I realize that I may miss their presence nearby, the constant menace they provide, the darkness that defines the light, the siege that gives Troy meaning; but today I will kill them all if I can and regret it tomorrow if I must.

When we reach the trench in front of the Achaean wall, Hector ranges back and forth, exhorting us to cross the trench and scale the wall, but we see an eagle fly in front of us, from the left. He carries a blood-red snake in his talons. The snake writhes and bites the eagle on the breast. The eagle cries out in

pain, drops the snake among the troops, and flies off downwind.

“Zeus speaks to us,” Polydamas says. He is a notorious barracks lawyer and a superstitious fool as well. “This is a portent that even if we breach the Achaean wall, we will have to retreat. They will kill many of us, and we will have to leave the bodies behind.”

For once Hector resists his pious credulity, or maybe my skepticism touches him. “The gods have confused your brain,” he says. “Zeus already has told me we are going to win today, and all the portents in the world won’t change that. The flight of birds — to the right toward the morning sun or to the left into the sunset — all these are nonsense compared to the word of Zeus. Let’s fight for Troy. That’s the only omen worth anything. You always hang back from the battle, Polydamas, but I warn you now: If you don’t fight this time, I’ll put this spear through you myself.”

With a great roar, as if from the throat of Ares himself, Hector’s company attacks the wall. I do not will it — or even think of it — but at that moment a gusty wind raises the dust and blows it straight into the eyes of the Achaeans.

Let them think it the work of Zeus.

The guiltless boys and girls floated around Samuel’s room like flower petals sailing on a gentle breeze. They wore no clothing, and their nakedness was without shame. They were innocent and beautiful; Samuel couldn’t deny that. Their beauty almost hurt his eyes as he watched them dance and make love wherever the notion found two of them within reach. There were many of them in the room, more than Samuel could count, but they were not so much a crowd of individuals as a repetition of pairs.

He seldom had trouble identifying dreams; they were his business, after all. But he couldn’t identify this one. All he was certain of was that he hated it. It was time wasted from the world of Ilium, time when he might have been with Helen; he was sorry he had agreed to let Zoe invite her friends to his room, and when they arrived he had not been courageous enough to send them away.

They were too young. He had not thought so once, he knew. He had admired their smooth, young bodies, their simple joy in dreams, their innocence and the way it had sometimes lightened his darkness. He had used them — to obtain temporary absolution for his guilt, to forget for the moment his pursuit of the unattainable — and they didn’t know it. Or if they knew, they didn’t care.

Or they were not as innocent as they seemed. He did not think he was ever that young; he couldn’t remember ever being guilt-free. Even in the crèche where they all grew up, nurtured by machines and volunteers who held them when they wanted love and reassurance, he had wondered why he was far from the father and mother who had brought him casually into this tidy world. The others never wondered, or if they did they would not admit it when he asked. Finally the volunteers made him stop because he was disturbing the others. Only he, it seemed, felt that he deserved the exclusive love of two adults and that there was something wrong with him because it had been denied him.

Perhaps that was what had made him a dreamer, that feeling of guilt, of worthlessness. Or maybe it all came later — in this world of dreams, all memories are suspect — when he had begun to dream himself and he had realized that other social arrangements were possible, even, with all their problems, desirable. But they were incompatible with life inside the urban centers.

For a time he had been satisfied that his darker self had made his position possible. His guilt had made him a dreamer, one of the central figures in his world, admired beyond others, privileged, welcome in any society. His suffering had made him famous, and he believed that it was worth it. But lately he had become bored with all of it, as if there were something more real, more vivid, more intensely satisfying than this. Perhaps that is what had pushed him into the world of Ilium, with barbaric warriors outside the

walls lusting for his blood and Helen's guilty arms waiting for his lust.

"Do you recognize it?" Zoe asked.

She was standing beside him. Samuel had not noticed her approach. Like the rest she was naked, but she wore her nakedness with a consciousness of its effect on him that made it seem provocative, sinful. He was determined to have nothing more to do with Zoe, but he couldn't help being moved by her beauty. She was youthful and smooth, an exciting contrast of pink and cream and shadow, a face that was good to look at, with blue eyes that looked adoration at him, and his hands and lips remembered the touch of her cool flesh. Any other time he would have fallen in love with her for a period or a cycle, but he was already in love, in love beyond redemption.

"What?" he asked.

"The dream?" Zoe repeated. "Don't you recognize it?"

He looked puzzled.

"It's your Paradise. We all voted on our favorite Samuel dream, and the Paradise won. It's all in your honor, you know. You're the best dreamer in the center, maybe in the whole world."

It was, of course, his Paradise, complete with Adam and Eve but without the serpent. Satan had not yet appeared. And, of course, without God. Unless he were God, the dreamer of the dream.

As if to verify Zoe's estimation of his status, the other young people began to drift past him, pausing in their effortless enjoyment to tell him of their admiration.

"You're the greatest dreamer of them all, Samuel."

"I always try yours first."

"Sometimes I pop the others, but I always come back to yours."

"Your dreams have color and taste."

"The others just don't satisfy."

"Vivid. Sensational!"

"Never stop dreaming! Promise you won't!"

"Magnificent. It's the only word."

"Are you working on something now? You must, you must."

"A new Samuel? I can hardly wait!"

He had no more than a word or a smile for any of them, beautiful, empty vessels of other people's dreams. It was not their fault that they were butterflies dreaming that they were people. It was not their fault that this dream of his was shallow and forgettable, that it lacked structure and contrast, that it was an early folly he would like to forget. It was only their fault that their taste in dreams was inadequate. What would they say if they knew that he was dreaming a world so savage, so violent, that their sheltered spirits would never be able to contain it.

He knew what they would say: They would beg for it, beg for experience, beg for raw emotions, for

blood-red savagery, and for guilty love. If he weren't kind, he would give it to them and let them shudder in a world they could never understand. But he knew he wouldn't, not yet anyway, for the world of Ilium and Helen was a world he didn't wish to — couldn't — share.

All he could do, like God, was drive them out. "Get out!" he shouted at last, tormented beyond endurance by their lack of understanding. "I can't stand you anymore. Get out!"

They fled before his wrath, uncomprehending, unsinning. If he had held a sword in his hand, like Hector or Achilles, he would have slain them as they ran. At last only Zoe was left, standing wide-eyed and afraid beside the drop shaft.

"You too, Zoe," he said. "You most of all."

"You're not well, Samuel," she said, with a courage he hadn't expected of her and in other circumstances might have admired. "You're thin. You're sick. I'll bet you haven't eaten. It's Helen, isn't it? She's doing this to you."

"That's nothing to you."

"But I love you," she said. "That gives me a right. You're all I want. You're all I think about. I'll do anything."

Perhaps she felt about him the way he felt about Helen, Samuel thought. For a moment he felt sorry for her. Then he pushed pity away. "You don't love me. You don't know what love is. It's — it's —" It's what I feel for Helen. No one has ever felt that way before.

Heavenborn Helen, Sparta's queen,

(O Troy Town!)

Had two breasts of heavenly sheen,

The sun and moon of the heart's desire.

Suddenly she was at his feet, her arms around his knees, like Adrestus in front of Menelaus, and said, "Give me a capsule! Let me be Helen! You will love me then the way you love her."

Samuel pushed her away, though she tried to cling to him. "Don't be stupid!"

He watched her creep away, his heart turned to ice at the thought that someone might share his dream.

While Agamemnon was sacrificing to Zeus and Apollo at Aulis, a blue serpent with blood-red markings on its back darted from beneath the altar and made straight for a plane tree nearby. It climbed the tree to a sparrow's nest and devoured eight nestlings and their mother. Nine years would pass before Troy could be taken, but it would be taken. Lightning flashed on the right as the fleet set sail.

To be taken from the guilty joys of Helen's arms to the violence of battle is anguish, and I never become accustomed to it, no matter how often repeated. Absence from Helen's bed grows until I must be with her, but something continually returns me to the fighting. Hector would call it honor, but I have none.

The Achaean wall is coming down. Sarpedon, Glaucus, and their Lycians attack a section of the wall defended by Ajax and Teucer. Boulders torn from the wall hurtle through the air, smashing helmets and skulls. Teucer wounds Glaucus in the arm with an arrow, but part of the battlement comes away in

Sarpedon's hands before he is staggered by Teucer's arrow and Ajax's spear.

In the confusion of the battle Hector rallies his company. "Come on, you Trojans! Pull down the wall! Burn the ships!"

He picks up a gigantic rock lying beside the gate and hurls it against the high double doors. They break at the hinges and burst inward. Hector leaps through, two spears in his hand, and we follow close behind, either through the gate or over the wall from which the defenders flee. The Achaeans panic as our fury is loosed among the hollow ships.

They scatter before us. We will win, we will win, I think. My will is triumphant. We will destroy the barbarians and burn their ships, and the land of Troy will know peace again.

Hector like a bronze spearpoint in front of us, we hack and cut our way through the Achaean troops. But somewhere another will, resistant to my desires, seems to be at work. The Achaeans turn and face us with a wall of shields, an impenetrable hedge of spears. Our avalanche loses momentum, slows, and stops.

But the slaughter never relents. Arrows and spears flying through the air drop men on either side of me. Even Hector, struggling to strip the armor of Amphinachus, falls back before Ajax's spear. When he has regained the Trojan lines, he sees the head of our brother-in-law Imbrius drop like a ball at his feet.

On our right flank and on our left our kinsmen and allies fall, but we fight bravely, and I kill many of the Achaeans with my arrows, including Euchenor.

Euchenor was destined to die in bed of a painful disease or to sail with the Achaeans and be killed at Troy.

I look up and see Hector standing in front of me; he is breathing hard, and his hands are on his hips. "Paris, you pretty-boy, you woman-crazy seducer," he begins, as always. "Where are Deiphobus, Helenus, Adamas, and Asius? And what have you done with Othryoneus?"

"Maybe I've deserved your abuse in the past," I say, "but not today. We've held our ground here, and I've fought as bravely as anyone. But all the friends you ask for are dead except Deiphobus and Helenus, and our brothers were wounded and have withdrawn. So lead us on. We'll follow with as much courage as we have. Nobody can ask for more than that."

We follow him to the center of the battle in front of the Achaean ships. He charges into the enemy lines, where Ajax is leading the defense, and we come after him, deafening the heavens with the clash of our weapons. Hector hurls a spear at Ajax, and it strikes squarely — but somehow the Achaean's life is spared by two baldrics that cross his chest.

As Hector retreats, Ajax throws a boulder that has been used to prop up a ship. It strikes Hector on the chest just over the rim of his shield; his second spear drops from his hand, and he falls in the dust, crumpled under his shield and helmet.

The Achaeans rush forward, eager to drag Hector away, but we surround him quickly. Polydamas, Aeneas, Agenor, Sarpedon, and Glaucus lift up his huge body and carry him out of the fight. Anger and terror battle inside me. I have not considered the possibility that Hector might die, and I wonder what will happen to us — to Helen and me and all the Trojans. For all his bluster, Hector has kept Achaeans from the gates of Ilium. I know this now, and I know that I cannot take his place.

He must not die, or if he is already dead, I must restore him to life if I can. As his horses drive away, I

hear him groan, and relief sweeps through my body. At the ford of the Scamander Hector's men lay him down and pour water over him. After a moment he opens his eyes, sits up, and vomits dark blood, but then he falls back, still near death.

While he is gone, the fight turns against us. Little Ajax and then Big Ajax cut their way into our ranks, followed by Peneleos, Antilochus, Meriones, Teucer, and Agamemnon himself. The fall of Hector has filled us with terror; our retreat turns into a rout as we fall back across the palisade and trench to reach our chariots, leaving the field strewn with our dead.

Hector must be restored, I think, and at that moment Hector is there, once more at the head of the troops, urging us, leading us into battle again. I almost believe that a god himself precedes Hector into battle, waving panic in the Achaean faces, for they resist only briefly, then break. We slaughter them singly and together. Again we reach the ships, but here they turn to fight, until a clap of thunder heartens us, and we are among them with our horses and chariots, and the Achaeans climb to the black sterns of their ships.

The battle rages on the beach. "Zeus has given us the victory today!" Hector shouts. Ajax, defending a ship from the deck with a long, pointed pole, calls out to the Achaeans, "Remember your duty! We must either die here or fight now, save the ships, and live!"

But this day belongs to us. The Achaeans are driven back from the first line of ships, and Hector shouts, "Bring fire! The ships are ours!"

Trojans run from the rear, flaming torches held high. Some are killed, but at least one gets through, and a ship begins to burn. The victory overwhelms me, and as I will myself to Helen's side, I think that the end is near.

This waking period was different. Others had been like furloughs from a war to which he must soon return, but this was the peace after victory.

For the first time in many periods Samuel had an appetite. He spent some moments selecting a dinner: shaped protein, vegetables, salad, all with appropriate sauces and dressings. It would be a kind of celebration. He tried to think of someone he might share it with. Not Zoe. He didn't want to get that started up again. He realized, with a bit of depression, that there wasn't a single poppet he would wish to spend a period with, and he had no friends he ever wanted to see again.

He was a man alone. He had always been alone. Even as a young man, before he had found his vocation, he had been alone even among a crowd of others. He had been, he thought, a little like Zoe; he gave her credit for that. He would celebrate alone.

He had something truly wonderful to celebrate. After some anxious moments the dream of Ilium was finally under control. It would be, he knew, his finest creation, and his longest. It had everything — love, war, death — and every emotion, every sensation. And it would be not simply a sensation cap but a true epic, proportioned, artistic, exquisite. It would make his fame in his world as lasting as that of the old blind poet in his.

Seven wealthy towns contend for Homer dead

Through which the living Homer begged his bread.

The urban center would echo with praise for Samuel the dreamer, the greatest dreamer of them all. It was all there in the console waiting to be edited, to be given final shape, and then it could be released to the world — maybe even to other urban centers. The poppets would pop it, and then ...

Well, he didn't want to think about that now. One last episode would wrap it up, and then he could begin to think about artistic form and release and the fame that this longest and greatest of dreams might bring.

His dinner was ready. He removed it from the autochef. It steamed attractively. The odors were good, the colors were right. He sat down appreciatively to the meal, but after a few bites his appetite left him, and he pushed the tray into the disposer. His dependence on intravenous feeding for so long had shrunk his stomach, he thought. Or perhaps it was only the comparison with his dream food — the watered wine; the great greasy, half-cooked haunches of beef and sheep; the tough, coarse bread. It all seemed better in his dream, even if he might gag if he had to face it now.

The trouble was — that world was more real than his life here in this crimson room. He would have to wean himself away from the dream. Dreams always had a great advantage over reality, especially for a disciplined dreamer like himself, who could shape it to his desires, and the possibility always existed that one dream might become so attractive that he would want to dream no other.

But that would make him no better than a poppet. They went that way, popping a variety of capsules when they were young but as they got older returning more and more often to one particular dream until that was all they popped, until, in some cases, they stayed under continually, dreaming their lives away.

Some philosophers said that there was no objective reality anyway. There was no world outside the self that any two persons could agree upon. So it made no difference whether one lived in the so-called real world or in some dream world. Everything, they said, was subjective.

But his pride, his sense of personal value, Samuel thought, insisted that he was the dreamer; as an artist he dreamed many things. He was in control, not someone else; he was not the slave of memory, he was its master.

He wished, for a moment, that he had his dinner still in front of him. He could have eaten it now. He would have showed his traitorous body who was master.

He was no Paris in love with Helen to the point of sacrificing for her his honor, his city, the lives of his friends and his children, his brothers, his parents. He was no Hector either, impelled to be a hero, to risk his life for the admiration of his comrades, to rage at the command of glands within his body. Nor was he an Agamemnon, to concern himself continually with the promises and whims of the gods, or to sacrifice Iphigenia so that his fleet might sail from Aulis.

He was the dreamer, not the dream.

And yet, he thought, he must return just one more time. To wind it up, he told himself.

“Samuel?” someone repeated.

He had heard it before, he realized, but deep in thought, he had not responded.

“Are you all right?” People kept asking that, he thought.

Samuel looked up and felt an unpleasant shock as he recognized his visitor. It was Regi, the owner — no, merely the commissioner — of his dream. “What is it, Regi?” he asked.

Regi took a step forward from the lift shaft. “I thought there was something wrong with you,” he said. He was older than the young people Samuel usually saw. He was dark-haired and a bit fleshy, a connoisseur rather than a poppet, a collector rather than a user. “The dream I commissioned. Your console keeps giving me excuses. Surely it's ready by now.”

“I’m sorry,” Samuel said.

“I have information to the contrary,” Regi said stubbornly, advancing another step into the room.

Was he threatening violence? Samuel wondered. No one was violent anymore. “Where would you get information like that?” he asked. And then he said, “Zoe!”

“It doesn’t matter where I got the information,” Regi said, “but the fact that you know where such information might have originated suggests to me that it is true.”

“Zoe has her own reasons for lying,” Samuel said. “But the truth is that your commission is not completed. In fact, I must tell you that it will never be completed. I can’t do it. If you want it done, you’ll have to take it to another dreamer.”

Regi stopped his menacing advance. His demands became an appeal. “But you accepted the commission. I was counting on it. Nobody else could handle it. It would be worthless.”

“It can’t be helped,” Samuel said. “I can’t guarantee success. Sometimes I fail.”

Only it was not failure but elation that filled his heart as Regi accepted his denial and turned toward the drop shaft. Now the dream was all his.

Troy will not be taken without the aid of Achilles.

I have anticipated too much.

Fresh Achaean troops have entered the battle for the hollow ships. Someone identifies them as the Myrmidons, swarming like ants toward the victorious Trojans. They are led by the fearsome Achilles himself.

It cannot be Achilles, I tell myself. I will that it not be Achilles. But he is dressed in Achilles’ armor, which the credulous say was forged by Hephaestus himself, he carries Achilles’ distinctive shield and his bronze sword with its silver-studded hilt, and he leads the Myrmidons.

Our lines waver when we see them come. Men of known courage look to right and left as if to find a place where they can hide from death. Suddenly the spears of the Myrmidons are falling among us; men crumple around me. The Trojan ranks break; our warriors fall back in total confusion. The Myrmidons extinguish the fire in the one half-burnt Achaean ship we had set alight, and then, roaring like a great animal with a single throat, the armed savages burst among us.

Now the other Achaeans, once apparently beaten, join in our pursuit. They strike down our leaders, Pyracchmes and Areilycus, Thoas and Amphiclus, Atymnius and Maris, Cleobulus and Lycon, Acamas and Erymas.

We flee across the Achaean wall and trench for a second time that day, the rattles and creaks of chariot wheels, the war shouts of the Achaeans, the thud of blows, the screams of wounded horses, the groans of dying men, all smothered in a haze of dust raised across the plain of Troy as we race for the walls of Ilium.

Hector leads us in that direction, too. But I do not blame him. His horses are fast, and it is Hector, even more than me, that the enemy most wishes to kill, for he is our champion, just as Achilles is theirs, and they have lost many comrades and kinsmen to his arm.

Achilles cuts up the nearest companies and places himself between their chariots and the walls of Ilium.

He charges in to kill, and each time at least one warrior drops.

If we don't stop fleeing, this madman will kill us all.

If, after living through this war, we could be sure of ageless immortality, I wouldn't take my place in the front line nor send you out to win honor on the battlefield. But life isn't like that. Death has a thousand pitfalls for our feet; and nobody can save himself and cheat Death. So in we go, either to yield the glory to other men or win it for ourselves.

Sarpedon, whom the credulous call the son of Zeus, is the first to stop. He leaps down from his chariot and rallies his Lycians as Achilles, in his turn, dismounts and advances. Bloody raindrops fall around us like the tears of Zeus at the imminent death of his son. For Sarpedon is doomed, as Achilles first kills his squire, Thrasymelus, and then, after Sarpedon misses twice with his spears, pierces Sarpedon's body at the diaphragm.

Glaucus calls out for help to save Sarpedon's body and armor, and Hector leads a group of Trojan heroes to battle with Achilles and the two Ajaxes. They fight back and forth across Sarpedon's bloody corpse, their scuffling feet kicking dust over the armor. Men die on either side, until Hector suddenly leaps into his chariot with a cry that Zeus has turned against them and they must retreat.

If I had done it, Hector would have called me a coward and worse. Well, if I am not the warrior Hector is, at least I don't pretend to virtues I don't have. The Achaeans strip Sarpedon of his armor, but I spirit the body from their midst.

Achilles follows Hector in his chariot and strikes down a dozen Trojan champions. In the grasp of his battle fury he attacks the walls of Ilium themselves. Three times he tries to scale the walls, and three times I hurl him back, and still he comes, but I shout at him and force him back once more.

The final time, Hector is there in his chariot. Achilles throws a giant rock and strikes Hector's driver, Cebriones, crushing his forehead. Hector and Achilles struggle for the body, while other Trojans and Achaeans join the fighting. At last the Achaeans pull the body away and strip it.

This terror has lasted too long, I tell myself. If I have artistic control at all, I must use it now. I resolve that Achilles must die as he charges again and again into the Trojan ranks, shouting his battle cry and killing seven, eight, nine at every charge. He must die! As I think it, Achilles staggers as if some giant hand has struck him between the shoulder blades. His crested helmet flies off, and his eyes start from his head.

At that moment Euphorbus strikes him in the back with a spear and Hector sticks him in the lower belly. He falls, and I am exultant. Without Achilles the Achaeans cannot last. Disheartened, they must board their black ships for their dismal retreat across the Aegean. Victory! Victory and control.

But as I am celebrating, Hector shouts, "This is not Achilles! It is Patroclus in Achilles' armor!"

The dying Patroclus says, "Enjoy your victory while you may, Hector, for you have not long to live. Soon Achilles himself will come to bring you death."

Patroclus. Not Achilles but his friend from childhood. His death will bring Achilles from his hut, and if Patroclus can almost destroy us what will Achilles do?

Why is this strange world so resistant to my desires?

Samuel opened his eyes and found himself looking up into the ambiguous eyes of Helen. His dejection at the path of events in the world of Ilium melted into bewilderment, and his bewilderment melted into passion as her kisses matched his own in hunger and urgency.

Helen comes to me as she came that first night at Cranaë ...

Her body was like a bowstring eager for his hands, and as they caressed her here and there, as they stroked and fondled, as they relearned all the familiar surprises and marveled once again at all the unique responses, his need grew along with hers, and the bowstring tightened for the fitting of the arrow into place.

... the most beautiful woman in the world ...

And she, with her blue eyes looking into his, was never passive. Her hands were as eager as his as they touched and held and encouraged, trembling as if with a passion too great to contain.

... her face like alabaster lit from within ...

Lips joined hands and fingers in turning flesh to flame, hers as well as his, and tongues shared the mingled honeys of their love

... her eyes dark with mystery, her body smooth and youthful ...

The urgency mounted into insistence, and they joined themselves, male to female, in a giving and a taking that became a joy that knew no end.

... her passion and skills in lovemaking as great as those of Aphrodite herself....

The small red room became a paradise, a place of ecstasy achieved, sustained, a place of possessing and possessing, a place of fulfillment earned, repletion found....

Afterward, as he lay stretched out upon the blood-red bed in the blood-red room, he felt a deep sadness within him, for her as well as for himself. He sighed and felt her stir against him.

“Are you all right?” she asked.

“Why did you do it?”

She lifted up her head to look at him. Her blonde hair was streaked with perspiration.

The ravish'd Helen, Menelaus' queen,

With wanton Paris sleeps.

“You know why,” she said. “My reason is the same as the one that drives you back again and again to a dream that’s killing you.

“Nonsense,” he said.

“If I couldn’t have you as Zoe,” she said, “I’d have you as Helen.”

He turned his head now to look at her, to look into her blue eyes, the eyes that were not at all like Helen’s. He should never have been deceived, and yet there was about her still the aura that Helen had, the assuredness of beauty beyond compare, the secret knowledge that all the world had gone to war because of her.

“Where did you get it?” he asked.

“There are things about computers that you’ll never know because you don’t care enough to learn,” Zoe

said. “You can’t lock me out. You can’t keep secrets from me. I care. I took computer caps until I knew more than anybody, and then I got a sample from your dream and had it refined by another dreamer — a woman — but you aren’t interested in the details.”

The thought of stuffing his head with data caps appalled him, but more than that, he could not accept the reality that his dream was no longer private. “My dream!”

She must have sensed his horror. “Your dream! Your dream! What’s so sacred about your dream? What about my dreams?”

“I can’t do anything about that. Understand? I can’t. If I’m essential to the fulfillment of your dreams, I’m sorry; it wasn’t my doing. You’re meddling in my life — like telling Regi his commission was completed — and all I ask is to be left alone.”

“Of course. You’ve got to let go of this thing that’s consuming you. It will destroy you if you don’t share it, if you don’t let it go. Remember what you told me! You’re a dreamer, not a poppet.”

“You don’t understand,” Samuel said patiently. “There’s a dream, one dream, that lies at the heart of each of us. When it comes to that one true dream, the dream that our life is all about, all of us are poppets.” He was surprised to realize that what he had intended as rationalization had the feel of truth.

“I’m not a poppet,” she said fiercely.

He almost loved her. Certainly he wished he loved her. She was strong, and he was weak; she would persevere, and he would surrender. In his weakness he couldn’t give her what he gave Helen; in her strength she wouldn’t accept anything else. “And yet you pop.”

“Just for you.”

He winced. “Maybe I am your one true love. I know I’m not worth it, but I suppose that doesn’t matter. If you can’t possess me — or what you think I am — you’ll pop. Believe me. You’ll pop and pop again.”

“But what we had was real,” she insisted. “It was wonderful. You can’t say it wasn’t wonderful.”

“What can I say?” he asked. “Obviously I was deceived. And yet I knew, I always knew, that you weren’t Helen. It wasn’t as wonderful as my dream.”

“That’s sickness. That’s just a dream,” she said. “This is reality.” She put his hand on her breast. “No, wait! If I should touch you once again, here and here, you would respond, I know. See? No, wait! I’ll pop again. I’ll do it better. I’ll be Helen to your Paris, and we will shatter that world and this with our lovemaking. I’ll do whatever you want; I’ll be whomever you want me to be. Even Helen. I hate her, but I’ll keep you as Helen.”

He recognized her tragedy, but he drew himself away from her and stood up, looking down at her naked body, and felt only sadness. “It’s not enough. Give it up. Give me up. Find someone else who has love to give you. I have none.”

She sat up, hugging her knees to her breasts. “I won’t. I won’t give you up.” Her voice broke. He almost reached for her, to comfort her and seek for himself, once more, the courage of her arms. But he had the strength to restrain himself. “I don’t know what I can do, but I won’t give you up,” she repeated.

“I’ll never make love to you again,” he said. It was like a prophecy. “As Zoe or Helen, it doesn’t matter. So nothing you can do can change anything. Give it up.”

Naked and cold, he watched her body shudder with unvoiced sobs.

Achilles was told by his mother, Thetis of the silver feet, that if he went to Troy he would win undying honor but would die young; if he stayed at home he would live a long but inglorious life.

From the top of the great tower of Ilium I see the battle spread before me with a clarity I could not believe when I was in the turmoil myself. Yesterday I had stood here. Yesterday the outcome of the war had seemed in doubt, as I was.

The Achaeans and the Trojans had battled back and forth across the body of Patroclus. Many men on either side died unlovely deaths in order to retrieve or desecrate one man's corpse. Hector stripped the body of Achilles's armor but was driven from the remains by Big Ajax. And so the battle went, favoring first one side and then the other. Hector and Aeneas killed many Achaeans; the two Ajaxes, Menelaus, and Automedon killed many Trojans. Finally Menelaus and Meriones carried the body of Patroclus back to the black ships, back to the grieving Achilles, while the two Ajaxes repelled the pursuit.

In the sunset as the Trojans paused upon the plain, Achilles, without his armor and clearly recognizable, appeared beside the trench in front of the Achaean wall. The Trojans fell back and held a conference on their feet.

"Retire within the walls," advised Polydamas, a comrade of Hector's who, the credulous believe, can read the future as if it were the past. "Achilles will not storm the citadel; he will never sack the town while we defend it."

"We have suffered losses," Hector admitted, "but we have been more successful than ever before. We have battled beside the Achaean ships and done more damage than in nine years of defending the walls of Ilium. Let's camp here and at dawn attack them again at their hollow ships. So we've seen Achilles. Let the great warrior join the fight. The man who thought he was going to do the killing sometimes gets killed himself."

The Trojans cheered that folly then. Next morning the groans and screams of dying men were louder as Achilles in new and shining armor cut his way through the Trojan lines, killing men as if they were foolish geese running in front of him.

From the right came the Achaeans, sparkling with the bronze of infantry and horse. From the left in front of the walls of Ilium came the Trojans in great waves across the plain. The dust roiled up as the two armies advanced; the earth shook beneath their feet. As they drew close, the armies paused. Aeneas, prompted by some foolhardy impulse, stepped forward to challenge Achilles.

Aeneas cast his spear. It was stopped by Achilles' great shield. Achilles' spear passed over Aeneas's back. Achilles charged, his sword raised high. Aeneas lifted a huge rock to hurl at him. With a terrible premonition, I knew his effort would fail. I swept him from the field.

Sometimes I had the clear knowledge that my will would control events; at other times, no matter what I tried to do, I could not make events respond. I would have called it simple artistic failure if I had not been successful so many times before.

Now Achilles was among the Trojans, killing a warrior at every cast of his spear, with every slash of his sword. Hector tried to stop him. He threw a spear, but some unruly wind blew it back at his feet. I knew that I must rescue him. If Hector were killed, all might be lost. I set him elsewhere upon the battlefield, far from Achilles.

The gigantic killer of men slew until his arm was weary and the blood splashed from his horse's hooves

and the wheels of his chariot. He caught many Trojans by a ford of the Scamander and slaughtered them until the river ran red and bodies floated from bank to bank.

When some Trojans tried to hide in the river along the bank, Achilles leaped in after them. In desperation I moved the waters of the river against him, throwing its waves against his great body, trying to knock him off his feet, to drown him, somehow to stop this carnage. Finally he ran from the fury of the river, but only far enough to avoid its reach before he turned once more to the slaying.

The gates of Ilium had been thrown open to save the fleeing troops, and Achilles made straight for them. Aenor, son of Antenor, moved into his path and challenged him. He launched a spear that hit Achilles' shin guard but failed to penetrate. Before Achilles could attack, I removed Aenor from the battlefield.

By now the gates had been closed. Old Priam had climbed beside me and gave me a scornful look. Below us in the streets were the bloody, dusty, beaten Trojans, panting and lamenting. All but Hector.

Now Achilles comes, and Hector remains outside to stand alone, on his back the armor of Achilles that he stripped from the dead Patroclus.

For the moment great power was yours. Now you must pay for it. There will be no homecoming for you from the battle, and Andromache will never take the glorious armor of Achilles from your hands.

We stand helpless upon the great tower and watch the duel develop. Helen's hand creeps into mine, and I look at her, my breath caught in my throat between concern and desire. Of late she has been cool, as if she knows something that I do not, but I will make her mine again.

When I look back I see that Hector is running, with Achilles, swiftest of the Achaeans in spite of his great bulk, close behind him. Under the walls of Ilium they run, past the lookout and the fig tree, along the cart path and past two springs, one hot and one cold, and close beside them the stone troughs where the women of Ilium washed their clothes before the Achaeans came. Time after time Hector dashes for the Dardanian Gates, hoping that the archers above can discourage Achilles' pursuit, but each time, Achilles heads him off toward open country. It is like a nightmare chase, where pursuer cannot catch up, but neither can the pursued escape.

Three times they race around the walls of Ilium. As the fourth circuit begins, Hector stops and stands panting, awaiting Achilles' approach. "Come, let us fight, man to man, until one of us is dead," he says.

Achilles answers, in a voice like an angry lion's, "You are as good as dead." He casts his spear, but Hector crouches under it. Hector throws his only spear at Achilles. I guide it in its flight. It strikes the center of Achilles' shield, and then rebounds, useless.

Suddenly Achilles' spear is back in his hand again, and Hector has none. Hector charges, sword in hand, and Achilles thrusts with his spear. It enters the gap above the bronze armor. It pierces Hector's throat.

Come alive! come alive! Hector! I implore, but he is dying, and I cannot save him.

"Let my body be ransomed," Hector asks, his voice faint.

"The dogs will eat you," Achilles says implacably.

Hector's throat fills up with blood. It is difficult to understand his reply, but I am sure — I am almost sure — I hear him say, "The gods will remember how you treated me when your turn comes, and you are brought down at the Scaean Gate in all your glory by Paris and Apollo."

Even if prophecies are an illusion, there is a certain sanctity that pervades the last words of dying men. Isn't there? Isn't there?

Terror still was coursing through Samuel's veins when he awoke, curled up on one side. He did not know why he was afraid until later. Too weak or too tired to cleanse himself, he slumped in a pneumatic chair trying to piece his recent experience into a pattern.

Hector was dead. Samuel didn't know whether he could revive him. So far, at least, he had not been successful with anyone who had really expired. Ordinarily that wouldn't matter. It was a dream, after all, and Hector was alive in some parts and dead in others, and if one wished to experience him alive, he had only to relive the dream.

Of course Samuel could bring Hector back to life by redreaming the episode, but artistically there would be a wrongness to it that he would know and others might sense. Besides, Hector's death had a kind of dramatic rightness that Samuel recognized beyond the implicit structure of the Homeric epic.

If he could convince himself that Hector's death was due to his subconscious recognition of the artistic appropriateness of the event, then he need not fear that the dream was being controlled by someone else. It would be like any other dream, and when it came to an end — as every dream must — he would go on to other dreams, or, if he wished, he could retire and dream no more.

Have I not made blind Homer sing to me?

But this was not any other dream. It had lasted far longer, and he had returned to it far oftener, returned with a compulsion he had never felt before. Perhaps he had been right when he told Zoe, "When it comes to our one true dream, the one dream that our life is all about, we all are puppets."

He knew, with a terrifying certainty, that no matter what the artistic necessity, he would have saved Hector if he could. That was the true measure of his compulsion. He wanted the dream to go on even if it meant that the war continued for another ten years, that men fell in his dream like slaughtered oxen, that blood ran instead of water between the banks of the Scamander — so long as he could return to Helen.

He would return, he knew. He would return to Helen's sensuous arms and the unaging splendor of her body. He would return to a world without Hector, to a world where he would have to face Achilles, yes, and kill him.

He sat upright as the thought came to him. Hector had said that Paris would bring down Achilles. If he could slay Achilles, no matter how fierce the struggle, then the war was not yet lost. Even more important, he would become a hero to the Trojans, a hero to Helen. What would that bring to their lovemaking?

More disturbing than that was the realization that he had accepted Hector's prophecy. He, the skeptic, the mover not the moved, had accepted the reality of a world in which people could see the future or could read the will of the gods in omens and auguries. He did not want to believe, he could not believe that he had dreamed a world like that, but everything had happened as Cassandra and Helenus had foreseen, as Aesacus had prophesied before the birth of Paris.

There had to be another explanation. Perhaps he had spent too long in that world, and the basic material was overwhelming his conscious desires. Was there another will than his to be reckoned with? Was there another dreamer shaping events to his desires? Who could it be? Old Homer? Was Samuel so weak and the material so powerful that he was moved around by it as if he were no less a puppet of the Olympians than the Trojans and the Achaeans who spilt their wine upon the ground and burnt their animal offerings to the quarrelsome gods?

It had to be something else. He was no apprentice dreamer, no cheap-jack exploiter of sensations.

“Have you had any other inputs to this dream, other than mine?” he asked.

“Yes,” the console said in its womanly voice. He would have to get it changed.

So much for gods and poets, he thought. “What kind of inputs?”

“That information is not available.”

Samuel tapped the arm of the chair. “You won’t tell me?”

“I do not know. I merely know that the information is not available.”

“To you or to me?” Samuel asked cannily.

“The answer to that is not available.”

Samuel had never run across this kind of unresponsiveness before. “What if I tell you to eliminate the foreign information or the instructions, whatever it is, from your operational system or your memory, will you be able to comply?”

“Since I cannot distinguish between inputs, the answer is no.”

“Whose input is involved — besides mine?”

“That information is not available.”

Samuel paused to consider the implications of what he had learned. Someone or something had complicated his dream and had done it so cleverly that he could not discover what had been done. The situation called for the services of a computer expert, who could talk the language better than he, but there were few experts available in anything. A search might take many periods and then be unsuccessful.

If he wanted to correct what had been done, he would have to become an expert himself. With a little practice and a few caps, he could become sufficiently informed to handle any kind of computer difficulty. It was, after all, only a problem of how to converse with the console, what questions to ask, what orders to give in what precise way. But that, too, would take time, and his memory would be clogged for many periods or even cycles with useless information. He might be ruined as a dreamer.

And how could he stay away that long from Helen and the world of Ilium? They were the siren songs that promised him, like Odysseus, knowledge of the many things that in broad Troy the Achaeans and the Trojans suffered at the will of the gods.

“Could we start all over,” Samuel asked, “eliminating everything, all the dream, and begin again? Fresh, with new data?”

“Yes.”

No equivocation here. He could wipe it out. He could start over. But he couldn’t. He could not bear to kill the woman he loved beyond honor, beyond reason, even if he could resurrect her the next moment. And if he did, she might be not quite the same. She might be subtly changed by the knowledge that he had killed her once, twice, a hundred times before; she might not love him but fear that he might kill her again.

Besides — the inexorable river of events was carrying him toward some unseen destination, and he could

not swim against it.

Regi or Zoe might have sought revenge or attempted to keep him from enjoying the dream each envied. But he wouldn't give it up. Whatever the outcome, he would take his chances.

He got to his feet, staggering a bit as he stood up, and made his way to the round bed and placed himself in the position for dreaming.

The city of Ilium was fated not to fall if Troilus, son of Priam, reached the age of twenty. But as he fought with Achilles, the peerless killer of men fell in love with him. When Troilus would not yield to his embraces, Achilles slew him.

I lie beside Helen, the sweat of our lovemaking drying upon our bodies. We lie in the bedroom of the palace I built for her upon the ruins of other buildings, sometimes using their stones as materials for construction.

The city beneath us is layered like memory. At least five civilizations built cities on this hill. Each in turn was destroyed and built again. No one knows where the Trojans came from, whether we have always been here, whether we were part of a great migration by sea from the southeast, or whether we were Greeks arriving from the north.

Eventually Ilium must fall, and other cities will be built on its ruins. In these savage times no city endures for long. But a few decades, a few years, are the difference between destruction and survival. It must not happen now. We will defend these walls. We will force the Achaean invaders from our shores. We will protect our right to levy tribute on the ships that traverse the Hellespont. And I will protect my right to Helen and our moments of ecstasy that we have bought so dearly.

Achilles remains our greatest danger. After the death of Hector he behaved like the barbarian he is. He slit Hector's heels behind the tendons and tied them to his chariot with leather straps, and he dragged Hector's body through the dust to the Achaean camp. The Achaeans burned Patroclus's body in a giant funeral pyre that we could see from the walls of Troy and built a great barrow for his bones. Then they had a feast in his honor and followed it with funeral games on the beach. We could hear the shouting and laughter in Ilium when our own lamentation eased off for a moment. We were praying to Aphrodite and Apollo to keep Hector's body from decay and not to let the dogs eat it.

The actions of Achilles cannot be condoned by the gods; he will be punished. Every day he harnessed his horses to his chariot, tied the body of Hector behind it, and hauled him three times in the dust around the barrow of Patroclus. Finally, on the twelfth day, Priam could endure no longer the indignities suffered by his son's body. He went unarmed and with only a herald to the Achaean camp. There, in the hut of Achilles, he offered a prince's ransom for Hector's body. Claspng Achilles' knees and kissing the hard hands that killed his son, he begged for the corpse. The killer of men, surprisingly, was moved and agreed to let the body go. Or perhaps he was moved only by the ransom.

Whatever the reason, Priam returned with the corpse, and we lamented for him. For nine days we gathered firewood and built a pyre fit for a king. We placed Hector's body upon it and set fire to the wood, and when the fire had completed its work, we collected his bones, wrapped them in soft purple cloth, placed them in a golden chest, and lowered it into a hollow grave. We covered the grave with large stones and built a barrow over it.

Such were the funeral rites of Hector, tamer of horses.

And then there came an Amazon, Penthesileia, who sought refuge in Ilium from the Erinyes of her sister, Hippolyte. She had shot her sister accidentally while hunting, but Priam purified her, and she fought for

Troy. She killed many Achaeans, including the surgeon Machaon, and several times she drove Achilles himself from the field. But at last Achilles ran her through with his spear. According to some who say they saw it happen, Achilles fell in love with her dead body and committed necrophilia upon it.

Priam persuaded his half brother, Tithonus of Assyria, to send two thousand troops under the command of his son Memnon the Ethiopian. Memnon was as black as ebony and the handsomest man alive — I say it myself — and a great warrior. He killed many Achaeans, including Antilochus, son of Nestor.

That day we nearly burned the Achaean ships, but some unseen hand dragged down the veil of night, and we had to retire. The Achaeans chose Big Ajax to challenge Memnon to single combat, but the next morning Achilles heard about the death of Antilochus and insisted on taking Ajax's place. Memnon, too, died on the point of Achilles' bright spear.

Achilles still rages upon the plains of Troy, but the walls of Ilium stand unscaled. I lift Helen's arm and admire the marvelous reticulation of the bones and the way the flesh surrounds them and how the skin, as smooth as silk, slides over the flesh as I place the arm upon the rounded hip upthrust beside me. With a finger I trace the feathery dark eyebrow above the closed eyes and the nose and the velvet lips. Helen is a miracle of design and construction, like any other woman and yet to me unique beyond credibility.

"Why?" I ask.

She senses my meaning and replies, "Because the gods willed it."

"The gods," I say, turning on my back and pillowing my head on my right arm. "They are merely our explanation for the inequalities of chance, for one man's luck and another man's misfortune."

Her dark eyes open wider. "Nothing happens by chance. There must be a cause for everything. You call it 'luck' and 'misfortune.' What is that but another name for the Fates? Do you think I loved you by choice? Oh, you're pretty enough, and we have brought each other much pleasure, though much torment, too. But why would I bring such tragedy on so many people if it were not the will of the gods? No, each man has his lot determined at birth: I am yours, and you are mine. And we are Troy's. If we did not believe this to be true, our suffering would drive us mad."

Zeus the Thunderer keeps two jars on the floor of his palace. They hold his gifts, the evils in one, the blessings in the other. People who receive a mixture have varying fortunes, sometimes good, sometimes bad. But when Zeus reaches into the jar of evil only, he makes that man an outcast, chased by the gadfly of despair over the face of the earth; he goes his way damned by gods and man alike.

"Besides," she says, "you must not blaspheme. It might bring evil upon us."

I roll to a sitting position and begin to put on my armor. "If it's all predetermined," I say, "then it doesn't matter what I say or do. It was prophesied that Achilles would not long survive the death of Hector and that I would kill him. We will see if this is the day."

But we flee once more before the Achaean slayer of men, as if some nightmare must be repeated time and again before it will release us from its terrors. Achilles harries us across the plain toward the city, killing the laggards, killing the cowards who are afraid to run and the brave warriors who turn to fight. Death plays no favorites today, and my will is submerged in the fear that grips Paris. I feel as if Zeus has stolen my courage and I must flee.

And yet at the Scaean Gate my resolution suddenly returns. Achilles approaches in his chariot, throwing his spears through the backs of Trojans flying before him, cutting through flesh and bone with his bronze

sword, like a monstrous machine for killing.

I remove the bow from my shoulder and carefully select an arrow. I fit it against the string and pull it back, accounting for distance, wind, and the speed and direction of Achilles' chariot. I release it. The arrow rises in the air and then dips. I feel as if an unseen hand is guiding it, mine or another's; it flies miraculously toward its target and then, as the chariot turns, the arrow drops from sight.

I think that I have failed again, and my shoulders sag. But suddenly Achilles droops against the chariot rail. The chariot slowly tips under the weight of his gigantic body. He falls to the ground, writhing in agony, my arrow buried in his heel.

When I look up to the walls of Ilium, the Trojan people are cheering my great victory. Even Priam smiles. Helen is there, too, her eyes aglow with another kind of joy. I see her turn and leave and I know where she is going to wait for me. I think of her naked there upon the bed, and my happiness is almost too great to contain.

Samuel opened his eyes. For a moment the red room blurred as if seen through tears. Each time he was awakened from his dream, he felt weaker, as if his strength and will were being drained into Paris. Unless this trend were reversed, some day he might not wake up at all, despite all the efforts of the console to invigorate his body. Strangely, the thought of retiring permanently into his dream, like some will-less poppet, didn't alarm him. Perhaps it was a measure of his weakness.

But why should he care if he existed permanently in this dream now that he had been victorious? Achilles was dead; Helen was his. And yet what of the prophecies? They had all been right: Calchas, Cassandra, Helenus, even Polydamas. They all foresaw the fall of Troy, the burning of Ilium, the massacre of the men, the enslavement and concubinage of the women.

Hector had been destined to die on Achilles' spear, and Achilles was destined to die soon after with Paris's arrow through his heel, and how would Paris escape the fall of Troy? And if he died ... That was impossible; the dreamer cannot die. But if he died, what would be the fate of Helen? In whose lustful arms would she lie, to whose pitiless fingers would she yield her body, to whose savage arrogance would she loosen her thighs? Whose ears would hear the melody of her hastened breath, the moans of her consummation?

Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,

And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?

Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss!

He could still make his will prevail, Samuel thought, and staggered to his feet. He could still shape this dream into his epic — his epic, not Homer's. He could — but he forgot what he could do, because he had to concentrate on getting to the lavatory without falling. He stood in the cubicle, leaning against one wall, his eyes closed, while the alternating hot and cold water beat down upon him.

“Samuel.”

“Yes, Helen.” No, he was getting confused. That could not be Helen. Helen would have called him Paris. There was nobody calling him. “Noman is my name,” he brought from some recess of memory.

“Samuel.”

He came weary and dripping from the shower to face an image of Zoe. It was projected from the console into the space between the bed and the drop shaft. She looked real enough, but Samuel knew

she was only an image because he could see the outline of the drop shaft through her legs.

“Let me alone,” he said.

“I can’t,” the image replied.

“Then dream of me, but don’t bother me,” Samuel said. “I’m tired to death of you.”

“You think I’m a foolish girl,” Zoe said, with a kind of tragic dignity Samuel once would have admired, “but I’m a real person, with ideas and imagination and feelings that go as deep as yours. If I’m foolish, it’s for loving you when you don’t deserve it and for not being able to help myself.”

“I don’t deserve it,” Samuel said, collapsing into a chair and resting his chin in his hands. “I’m old and ugly and selfish and unpleasant, and your vitality wears me out. I don’t have any love in me; I’ve never loved anybody. All I have now is my dream. Let me go back to it in peace.”

“You can’t go back,” Zoe said. “That’s what I came to tell you.”

“Why not?” Alarm made him lift his heavy head. What had this foolish girl done?

“I’ve added information to the console, and you can’t go back.”

“What did you add?”

“The information you left out. The rest of the story. *The Odyssey* and a few other things. It tells how the war comes out and what happens to Paris. You must have noticed!”

Of course he had noticed. That explained the resistance to his dreaming, the other will at work, the information that occurred to him when he should not have known. But his subconscious knew, and it controlled his dreams in ways he had not thought about until now.

“It turns out badly,” Zoe said. “It will be too much for you. You’re not strong, Samuel. Paris dies, and when he dies ...”

Now that he knew what the problem was, he could solve it. He felt confident of that. If only he didn’t feel so weak, so tired. Well, in the dream he wasn’t weak. He could be strong. He would be strong for Helen.

“I only did it so you wouldn’t go back,” Zoe said. “You understand that, don’t you? I don’t want you to die, and you’ll die — I know it — if you go back to that terrible place —”

“You will allow nobody to enter this room under any conditions,” Samuel told the console. “You will allow no one to alter the instructions I have given you or to add or subtract information. You will keep me alive as long as you can without waking me, and you will not wake me until the dream is over. You understand? Until the dream is over.”

“Don’t go back!” Zoe pleaded. “You musn’t go back. I won’t bother you anymore. I’ll change the instructions. I’ll remove the information. Don’t go back! Please, Samuel —”

He assumed the position for dreaming and allowed the little needles to begin their work.

“Troy will not be taken without the bow and arrows of Heracles that are now in the possession of Philoctetes.”

Now that Achilles is dead, the war has shifted in favor of the Trojans. Helen once more is mine, and

every night is like Cranaë all over again. But Cassandra continues to scream her prophecies from the pyramidal prison on the citadel, and in the palace of Priam Helenus echoes her forebodings.

Let Hades take them! I will not be depressed. I, too, have powers.

Yet word has come that Odysseus and Diomedes have sailed for Lemnos to fetch Philoctetes.

Philoctetes! The name fills me with obscure terror. I have a vision when I hear it of arrows flying at me through the sky, poisoned arrows that strike my wrist, my right eye, my ankle. And I have begun to dream of hollow horses.

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The Mnemonist IV

Now, Thetis had warned Achilles that if ever he killed a son of Apollo, he must himself die by Apollo's hand; and a servant named Mnemon accompanied him for the sole purpose of reminding him of that. But Achilles, when he saw Tenes hurling a huge rock from a cliff at the Greek ships, swam ashore, and thoughtlessly thrust him through the heart. The Greeks then landed and ravaged Tenedos; and realizing too late what he had done, Achilles put Mnemon to death because he had failed to remind him of Thetis's words.

—ROBERT GRAVES

The Mnemonist flinched as if he, too, sensed the imminence of poisoned arrows. “Are the dreamers, too, the victims of their dreams?” the Mnemonist asked. He stirred uneasily on his pallet, unclenching his hands and stretching his legs, as if the butterfly within his cocoon of withered flesh was anxious to emerge. His eyes inspected the room with more awareness than had come to them for many cycles. Questions still pounded against the inside of his skull, but now they were tinged with statement.

we	a new experience	check
are	is perceived	all
such	it initiates some kind	blood
stuff	of reverbatory	analyses
as dreams	electrical signal	for
are	among a set or web	inclinations
made on	of neurons	toward
and our	as the short term	information
little	memory signals	storage
life	leap across thousands	and
is	of synapses	curiosity

rounded	they begin to activate	about
with	chemical processes	the world
a sleep	at the synaptic junctions	of facts

Now he remembered where the door was. His gaze sought out the spot on the wall where cracks had been sealed by the dust of time. If he gave the command, it would open, to let him out or to let someone in. To let him out! He could not imagine leaving this place. Where would he go? What would he do? He had given too much of himself to his passion, and there was nothing left of him but a husk stuffed with memories. “Had there ever been another choice?” he asked. “Is there a choice now?”

footfalls echo	within a few seconds	close off
in the memory	or minutes	rooms 3412
down the passage	chemical changes begin	5367 2943
which we	perhaps the synthesis	and 4618
did not take	of rna	and install
towards the door	perhaps the construction	temporary bypasses
we never opened	of complex molecules	on the lift
into the rose garden	in the form of peptides	and drop shafts

The Mnemonist also could not imagine anyone coming through that disused door into this skull of a room where dreams and memories swam like misshapen fish and nibbled on the cellular fragments that were all that was left of his humanity. The door was useless, he thought. And his search for a successor — was that, too, useless? “Should I stop thinking about it?” he asked. “Can I stop?”

i am tired	the chemical material	check
of tears	forms a longer lasting	all
and laughter	but still temporary	other
of men	memory trace and	centers
that laugh and weep	perhaps in hours or days	for
for men	it induces profound	an increase
that sow to reap	anatomical changes	in the
i am weary	in the cortex	death rate
of days and hours	of the brain	and

blown buds	later these	a decrease
of barren flowers	physical chemical changes	in
and everything	become the soldered wiring	the
but sleep	of long term memory	birthrate

Historians, volunteers, dreamers — all had proved inadequate. Everyone was weak in his or her own way — an Achilles heel, a chink in the armor, all the old phrases came floating up to his consciousness out of the crowded cellar of his memories. Everyone was weak but the Mnemonist himself; there was not another like him. And yet, he thought, wasn't his own love of the knowledge that flowed ceaselessly through his head a weakness as great as theirs? Didn't it seduce him from life just as their dreams seduced them? And was his conviction that he dealt with reality indistinguishable from illusion? Was his sense of his indispensability only the lie to which he gave his personal faith, the essential lie that supported his dream?

and meet it is	the russian psychologist	check
that over these	alexander luria	other
sea pastures	described a man	urban
the waves should	whose memory seemed	centers
rise and fall	to have no limit	to
and ebb and flow	a mnemonist whose mind	determine
unceasingly	was so extraordinary	if
for here	that luria wrote of him	mnemonists
millions of	in terms usually reserved	are
mixed shades	for the mentally ill	still
and shadows	he could commit to memory	in
drowned dreams	in a couple of minutes	charge
somnambulisms	a table of fifty numbers	or
reveries	which he could recall	if
all that we call	in every minute detail	each
lives and souls	many years later	has
lie dreaming	his greatest difficulty	a

dreaming still	was in learning	possible
tossing like	how to forget	successor
slumberers	the endless trivia	in
in their beds	that cluttered his mind	training

A great weariness reminded the Mnemonist of his long-forgotten body. Somewhere within it was a heart that pumped something other than memories to his brain. He was more than an extension of the console, of the computers, of the urban center; somewhere inside this shell of flesh was a creature that was more than the sum of its memories, that had needs and desires. "What would it be like to forget?" he asked. No more the rush of memory, the flow of information, the remembering river that surged through his head leaving behind its detritus of data, its delta of detail. What would it be like to have a mind as bare as a bone? How would it feel to experience the darkness of unknowing? The thought was like a blasphemy, and yet it was only the opposite side of the coin of his life.

adieu	in 1968 krech testified	surely
adieu	before the senate	there
the	brain research	is
plaintive	is immeasurably	no
anthem	more significant	compulsion
fades	for the future of man	for
past	than anything else	one
the near	going on in science	man
meadows	within five to ten years	to
over	a regimen will be available	try
the still	which will permit us	to
stream	to exercise a significant	reverse
up the	degree of control	the
hill side	over the development	course
and	of man's intellectual	of
now	capacities	events
tis buried	this can mean a future	all

deep	of enormous promise	by
in the	chemical therapy for many	himself
next	of the mentally retarded	turn
valley	and senile	all
glades	chemical release for those	operations
was it	who suffer	to
a vision	from crippling memories	automatic
or	teamwork among chemists	and
a waking	psychologists and educators	let
dream	for the first business	loose
fled	of society	the
is that	the development	dark
music	of the mind of the child	flood
do i wake	the shaping of its	of
Or	strengths and	forget

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