

STORIES BY

Poul Anderson  
Stephen Vincent  
Benet  
Ray Bradbury  
Truman Capote  
A. E. Coppard  
E. M. Forster  
Graham Greene  
Aldous Huxley  
C. M. Kornbluth  
D. H. Lawrence  
Murray Leinster  
Katherine  
MacLean  
Richard  
Matheson  
Judith Merril  
Lewis Padgett  
Jane Rice  
"Saki"  
Alice-Mary  
Schnirring  
Wilmar H. Shiras  
Theodore  
Sturgeon  
William Tenn

Children  
of  
Wonder

edited by  
WILLIAM  
TENN

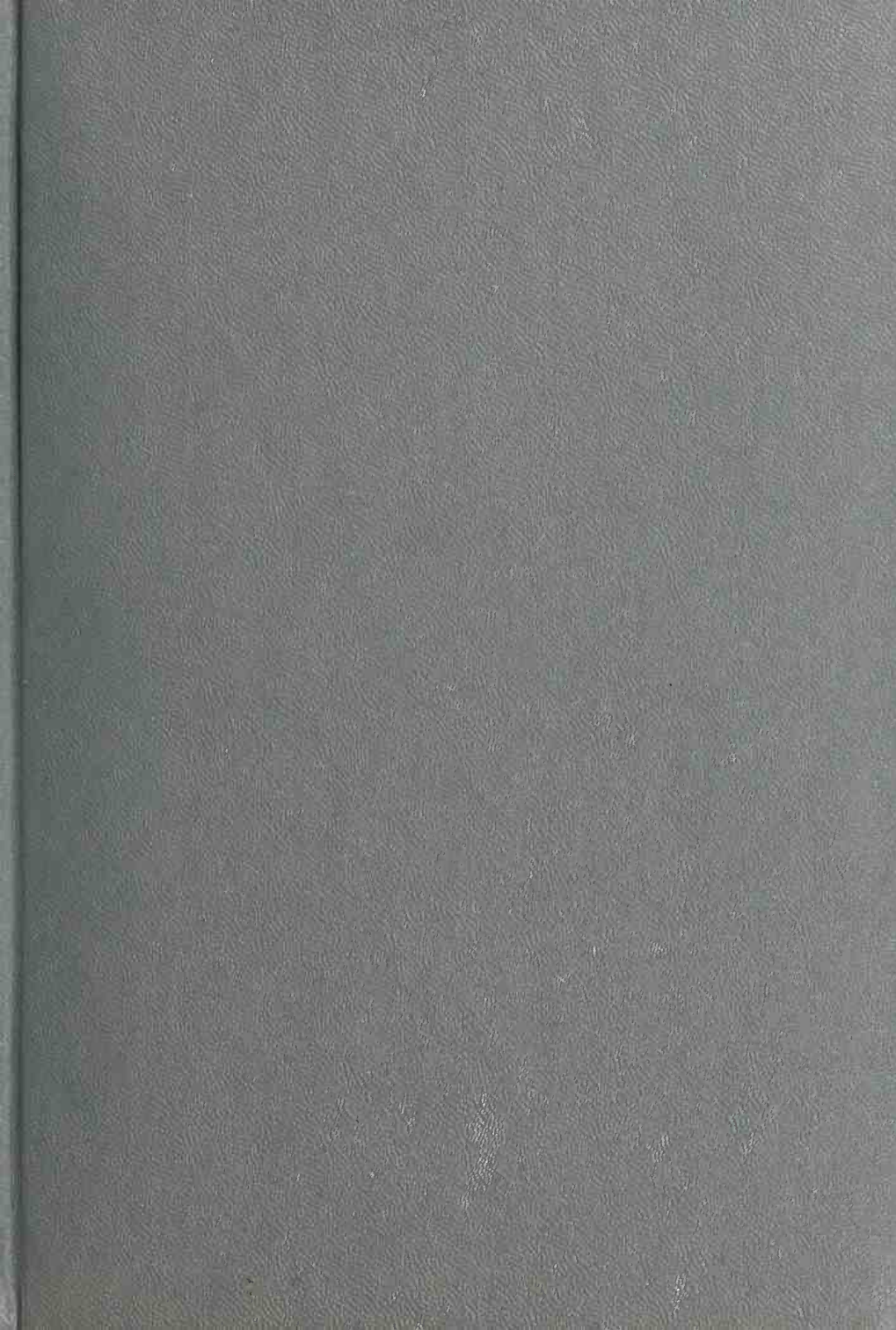
SIMON AND  
SCHUSTER

21 remarkable  
and fantastic  
tales about

# Children of Wonder

edited by

WILLIAM TENN





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# CHILDREN OF WONDER

21

REMARKABLE AND FANTASTIC TALES

EDITED AND WITH INTRODUCTION BY



WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY THOMAS HENRY  
RAY, BRADY, THOMAS HENRY, J. A. HAYMAN,  
L. M. FORTY, GEORGE CHASE, JAMES HULL,  
G. M. FORTMANN, R. J. LAWRENCE,  
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WILLIAM H. HILL, THOMAS HENRY,  
WILLIAM HILL

SIMON AND SCHUSTER - NEW YORK



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EDITED AND WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

WILLIAM TENN

WRITTEN BY

POUL ANDERSON, STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT,  
RAY BRADBURY, TRUMAN CAPOTE, A. E. COPPARD,  
E. M. FORSTER, GRAHAM GREENE, ALDOUS HUXLEY,  
C. M. KORNBLUTH, D. H. LAWRENCE,  
MURRAY LEINSTER, KATHERINE MACLEAN,  
RICHARD MATHESON, JUDITH MERRIL, LEWIS PADGETT,  
JANE RICE, SAKI, MARY-ALICE SCHNIRRING,  
WILMAR H. SHIRAS, THEODORE STURGEON,  
WILLIAM TENN

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To Gene Martinat  
—and to a child of wonder

---

At this moment the Unicorn sauntered by them with his hands in his pockets. His eye happened to fall upon Alice: he turned round instantly, and stood for some time looking at her with an air of the deepest disgust.

“What—is—this?” he said at last.

“This is a child!” Haigha replied eagerly. “We only found it today. It’s as large as life, and twice as natural!”

“I always thought they were fabulous monsters!” said the Unicorn. “Is it alive?”

“It can talk,” said Haigha solemnly.

The Unicorn looked dreamily at Alice, and said, “Talk, child.”

Alice could not help her lips curling up into a smile as she began: “Do you know, I always thought Unicorns were fabulous monsters, too? I never saw one alive before!”

“Well, now that we *have* seen each other,” said the Unicorn, “if you’ll believe in me, I’ll believe in you. Is that a bargain?”

“Yes, if you like,” said Alice.

—LEWIS CARROLL, *Through the Looking-Glass*

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## Introduction

ONCE UPON A TIME, when I was nine years old and reading happily in the lawn swing of a hotel where my parents usually spent their summers, a well-preserved old lady of sixteen or seventeen clambered in and took the seat opposite. We “pumped” back and forth for a while without a glance at each other. It was a hot, moist day.

Eventually, in a very bored, languid voice, she asked me what I was reading. It was Thackeray’s *The Rose and the Ring*—or some similar volume of never-never history. I told her the title most curtly. I was not interested in conversation just then: a minor villain was about to get a most satisfactory comeuppance by being changed into a door-knob and I intended to follow closely every step of the projected transformation.

“May I look at it?” I heard her ask. With great reluctance, I placed the book in her outstretched hand, keeping a finger on the page I’d been reading.

“Don’t lose my place,” I requested.

She nodded, withdrew the book from my grasp, and promptly closed it completely. She felt the texture of the title page, riffled through several illustrations and finally read a sentence or two. Satisfied, she flipped the volume to the seat beside me and delivered up her verdict:

“Trash. Pure trash.”

I was in a great hurry to get back to the to-be-doorknobbed villain, but I couldn’t leave this young woman subject to such misconceptions. “It isn’t,” I assured her. “It’s a fine book. It takes place, you see, in a strange land called—”

“A fairy tale. I should think you were too old to be reading fairy tales.”

That hurt. “Well, it isn’t an ordinary fairy tale.”

She shrugged scornfully, elaborately, right up to her ears, the slowest, most grown-up looking shrug of annoyance imaginable. “Would you answer one question?” she asked. “Just one question. Can you tell me a single fact you’ve learned from this book?”

I remember glaring at her forehead and nose and noticing that they were bright red with new sunburn. I remember hoping that they would hurt her very much and would peel slowly and itchingly for the rest of the summer.

*She hacked away at me as relentlessly as if she were a Crusader and I the entire Saracen host: "You can't, you see. There isn't one solitary piece of useful information that you've gained from reading this!"*

*I did the only thing I could do. I picked up the criminal, useless volume and, stepping out of the swing with a vicious jerk that changed its back-and-forth rhythm into a rattle and a wobble, walked back across the lawn with as much dignity and hauteur as it was possible for nine years to exude.*

*Unfortunately for my developing ego, it was not until a full week after she'd left the hotel that l'esprit d'escalier came upon me, sluggishly as is its wont. "When she asked me what I'd learned from the book," I was able to tell the mirror fiercely one day, "I should have said: 'Not to ask stupid questions!'"*

*In the years that have passed, I have found, alas, that those sunlit moments before she entered the swing can be recaptured but rarely: all too, too often must deeply imaginative fiction be read under the cloud that society has spread over it. The young lady who courageously set herself to protect an impressionable mind from its own tropisms was undoubtedly imitating elders whose intolerance of her excursions into literary dream worlds she had dutifully absorbed. And, today, the same intolerance is surely reflected in certain prosy contemporaries of mine, in whose homes offspring may be found hunched over reading matter with such singularly appetizing titles as *A First Book about Floors for Boys and Girls*, when they are not playing—with what seems to me a justifiably torpid enthusiasm—the guessing game newly learned in nursery school: "How Many Vitamins in a Forkful of Broccoli?"*

*A century or so ago, when educational theories originated in the heads of beery old philosophers and righteous young divines, instead of Professors Emeritus of Developmental Psychology, intellectual recreation among the younger elements of our population was in just as sad a state. In those days, the anxious parent who disapprovingly snatched a book containing such explosive stuff as myth and fantasy out of defenseless young hands would likely replace it with a homily setting forth in picturesque but simple language the agonies endured in Hell by little boys and girls who did not sufficiently love their parents, aunts, uncles and all other such duly constituted authorities.*

*We have progressed: modern tracts for juveniles pass along well-illustrated data from research bacteriology. But only persons suffering from acute cultural and temporal provincialism can fail to see the clear line of descent from one set of homilies to the other. "The*

eternal, sulphurous pit" once appeared as real a danger to well-meaning and intelligent parents as do pneumococci today. I have no doubt that future fathers and mothers will look back on present-day educational efforts with at least as much amusement and/or disgust as we do upon those of our own ancestors—the while, inevitably, they worriedly try to wheedle out of Junior's grasp a stereoscopic record of, say, T. H. White's *Sword in the Stone*, in order that it can be replaced with a child-slanted work dealing with whatever bogey or social attitude most preoccupies their culture.

Now I have nothing against education. I understand that it must always be bounded, north and south, by the limits of the knowledge of an era, and, east and west, by the prevailing mores of a people. What I object to are parents and teachers who concentrate on giving our heirs and heiresses a realistic education and fail to appreciate that the boundaries of "reality"—like all boundaries—are artificial, that it is the business of science constantly to draw new lines on the map and the business of art constantly to discover new areas of the real.

They see the child's mind, as adults have since the time of Ur and Akkad and Egypt, primarily as an arena of "improvement" rather than a live thing that requires stimulation above all else if it is to grow. They work expensive fertilizers and plant foods into the soil and then try to shut out the sunlight and roof off the rain!

The seeds of imagination, however, are among the hardiest in the human mind. In recent years, a more liberal attitude towards extrapolative thinking has opened a few chinks in the roof. The resultant proliferation of science-fantasy\* among mature writers and readers has, in one generation, threatened to crowd the rest of popular literature out of existence and is developing all sorts of strange, luxuriant growths in the corners devoted to "serious" writing.

It is now permissible to be caught reading a book about the social problems of 2415 A.D.; it is no longer necessary, for the sake of one's intellectual standing, to take the precaution of substituting for its dust jacket one from a realistic novel of bare-bosomed life in the fifteenth century. Truly, we live in brave times.

Of course, we professional imaginers must now suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortunetellers who, identifying themselves with science-fantasy, have taken a new lease on the Sunday supplements,

\* "Science-fantasy" is a catchall term that embraces science fiction *in toto*, but specifically and non-dogmatically leaves room for pure fantasy—at least, that is, for fantasy of the type that eschews creaky doors and Hungarian noblemen who needs must munch haemoglobin from the veins of sturdy, unsuspecting peasants.



into which they are once again pouring their ancient and unbelievable nonsense. This results in questions and quips from friendly faces kept straight with difficulty ("How come you lost money in the poker game? Thought all you fellows were telepathic!"): jokes by the feeblest of wits, as well as anxious inquiries by the most febrile of enthusiasts. It is with the foregoing very much in mind, as well as for reasons of fitness and taste, that I have chosen to include in this collection works that, in addition to qualifying perfectly under the stated theme of the book, also just-by-accident are the creations of outstanding men of modern letters. Let he who dares cast the first pitiful television gag at E. M. Forster or Aldous Huxley! (Furthermore, if the science-fantasy field is to develop a wider respect and more permanent audience, its practitioners must be able to compete successfully, not merely amongst themselves, but with the best of modern writers anywhere. In this anthology I have attempted to create the conditions for such a competition; the critical reader may judge for himself how well my colleagues and I have fared.)

Children of the future (to return to the subject at hand) may inherit the results of the present tendency to take a broader, more permissive view of imaginative fiction. Unfortunately, the opposite tendency, the desire to "improve" the minds of the young—i.e., to jam current beliefs and attitudes into them—is also on the increase. It is my own extremist theory that this may derive from a persistent fear of the child's potential, from a suspicion that, if let alone, children might eventually make this world a good and decent place in which to live—which would, of course, be one their parents would not recognize.

The child is traditionally regarded as something like a criminal undergoing rehabilitation: he questions and then does not accept the answers; he makes constant and vigorous attempts to alter that which strikes him as unfair and unjust; and he is regularly at odds with a world that he does not recall having made. Only after subjecting him for years to a barrage of what we adults know beyond dispute to be the true, the beautiful and the good, do we finally give him some measure of civil rights and allow him the first tentative steps outside the jailhouse of his minority.

Can it be that there is something about the life and times of childhood that seems to afflict even the most courageous and observant of writers with a case of jitters so acute that virtual blindness is the result? For example: for all of Dean Swift's wonderful attention to the most minor daily details of the races he depicts, it is only in Lemuel Gulliver's last voyage—to the land of the Houyhnhnm—that he

finally vouchsafes a very brief glimpse of youth and its pursuits. And take that first and in many respects finest of historians, Herodotus, who has given us almost all the picture we have of ancient Egyptian everyday life. He is inordinately comprehensive and lists detail far beyond the need of detail. Yet, reading him, one can easily come to believe that the Egyptians of his time were all sterile and imported their entire citizenry from abroad in adult sizes only!

It may be that this helps to explain one of the most noticeable features of the collection you are about to read. Without any predisposition on my part, it has come to pass that a heavy percentage of these stories deal with fright—sometimes the frightened child, more often the child whose powers frighten his elders, or at least make them fairly uncomfortable. Is this an overt expression of the guilty conscience which other writers have indicated by a too tightly-buttoned silence? Or is it simply that a badly frightened world inevitably produces many frightened stories?

By now, the reader is surely aware of the audience for which *Children of Wonder* is intended. It is obviously not an anthology of stories for children; stories for children are rarely about children. There are, for example, almost no children in any of the really fine fairy tales. Except for the all-too-realistic little minx who pointed out that the emperor's new clothes were somewhat lacking in substance (no child of wonder, she!), most fairy-tale figures come no younger than those youngest sons who are rewarded, after due adventuring, with half a kingdom and marriage to a princess, which is hardly enough to qualify them for this collection. And fantasies such as *Alice in Wonderland* have, justly or otherwise, invariably been appropriated by adults, who proclaim that so much charm and literary delicacy cannot properly be appreciated by the young.

On the other hand, understandably enough, modern science-fantasy abounds in stories about children—written for adults. It is logical that the people who have emerged from the schoolroom with the greatest part of their imaginations intact should frequently concern themselves with the unexpected viewpoint of the child and the incredible, untouched potential that it represents. Children themselves are living signs among us that the future already exists: for better or worse, they are the future as we have made it—and them. They, more than anything else that breathes, are the very stuff of dreams.

Even so, I was unprepared for the vast library of imaginative literature dealing with children that I discovered when I began preparing

this collection. Many very good stories had to be discarded simply because they developed a theme that could be found in others—and a choice had to be made. Then there were stories that were too long, stories that would not blend with others in the anthology, and there were also wonderful fantasy or science-fiction pieces that just did not fit the title of this volume—i.e., stories that concerned children not sufficiently, to my mind, of wonder. . . .

In this last category belong both Mowgli, of *The Jungle Book*, and the younger Tarzan, who after all are wonderful only in the comparatively lesser sense of being able to adjust, with assistance, to extremely primitive environments. I decided against including them, however, only after much internal debate, and was helped in my decision by coming across Katherine MacLean's previously unpublished *The Origin of the Species*, which touches (with both hands, one might say) the concept and the problems of the child raised by others than its own kind.

Finally, of course, there were those tales I should have liked very much to use, but that were not available for such reasons as prior commitment or inclusion in a projected collection of the author's own work.

By and large, I have disregarded the science-fantasy anthologist's greatest current bugaboo—the previously anthologized story. While it is true that many of these pieces have never before appeared in any anthology, I have preferred not to labor the point. Even a story that a reader has encountered before should, I feel, take on new meaning in the total context of this book and its special theme. I have, therefore, concentrated on bringing you the best and most interesting children of wonder available. This I conceive to be the sum total of the anthologist's duty.

I wish to give particular thanks to Morton Klass and Larry Shaw for their help in the preparation of this volume, and also to Martin Greenberg, Frances Klass, Katherine MacLean, Bill McKenzie, Judith Merrill, Theodore Sturgeon and Donald Wollheim for their contributions in the form of special favor or bright suggestion. And my especial gratitude to Orrin Keepnews, of Simon and Schuster, a veritable Job among editors, for his tremendous help and patience.

New York City  
January, 1953

—WILLIAM TENN

## PART

# I

---

## WILD TALENTS

THE FONDEST dream of a fond parent is to have a gifted child, with attributes that set him above and apart from the ordinary run of his contemporaries. But such gifts are not guaranteed to be wholly desirable for the child, the family, or the world.

Consider: the child of D. H. Lawrence's *The Rocking-Horse Winner* is given a specialized power of prescience which seems practical, infallible, and financial. But it initiates a tragedy as inevitable as, say, the *Medea* of Euripides. The apprentice sorcerer of C. M. Kornbluth's *The Words of Guru* is born with the basis for some very special abilities. However, the potential of "the words" is not as yet fully realized, for which we can all, temporarily, give thanks.

Theodore Sturgeon's *Baby Is Three* is surely unique, a truly wonderful imaginative concept. It does recall Goethe's maxim: "Talent is developed in retirement." But what will happen when the talent matures, and this "baby" emerges from its retirement? (Readers fascinated by the total hero of this story should note that it is the mid-section of a novel-in-progress, the whole to be entitled *The Fabulous Idiot*.)



## THE ROCKING-HORSE WINNER

by D. H. Lawrence

THERE WAS a woman who was beautiful, who started with all the advantages, yet she had no luck. She married for love, and the love turned to dust. She had bonny children, yet she felt they had been thrust upon her, and she could not love them. They looked at her coldly, as if they were finding fault with her. And hurriedly she felt she must cover up some fault in herself. Yet what it was that she must cover up she never knew. Nevertheless, when her children were present, she always felt the center of her heart go hard. This troubled her, and in her manner she was all the more gentle and anxious for her children, as if she loved them very much. Only she herself knew that at the center of her heart was a hard little place that could not feel love, no, not for anybody. Everybody else said of her: "She is such a good mother. She adores her children." Only she herself, and her children themselves, knew it was not so. They read it in each other's eyes.

There were a boy and two little girls. They lived in a pleasant house, with a garden, and they had discreet servants, and felt themselves superior to anyone in the neighborhood.

Although they lived in style, they felt always an anxiety in the house. There was never enough money. The mother had a small income, and the father had a small income, but not nearly enough for the social position which they had to keep up. The father went in to town to some office. But though he had good prospects, these prospects never materialized. There was always the grinding sense of the shortage of money, though the style was always kept up.

At last the mother said, "I will see if I can't make something." But she did not know where to begin. She racked her brains, and tried this thing and the other, but could not find anything successful. The failure made deep lines come into her face. Her children were growing up, they would have to go to school. There must be more money, there must be more money. The father, who was always very handsome and expensive in his tastes, seemed as if he never would be able to do anything worth doing. And the mother,

who had a great belief in herself, did not succeed any better, and her tastes were just as expensive.

And so the house came to be haunted by the unspoken phrase: There must be more money! There must be more money! The children could hear it all the time, though nobody said it aloud. They heard it at Christmas, when the expensive and splendid toys filled the nursery. Behind the shining modern rocking horse, behind the smart doll's house, a voice would start whispering: "There must be more money! There must be more money!" And the children would stop playing, to listen for a moment. They would look into each other's eyes, to see if they had all heard. And each one saw in the eyes of the other two that they too had heard. "There must be more money! There must be more money!"

It came whispering from the springs of the still-swaying rocking horse, and even the horse, bending his wooden, champion head, heard it. The big doll, sitting so pink and smirking in her new pram, could hear it quite plainly, and seemed to be smirking all the more self-consciously because of it. The foolish puppy, too, that took the place of the Teddy bear, he was looking so extraordinarily foolish for no other reason but that he heard the secret whisper all over the house: "There must be more money!"

Yet nobody ever said it aloud. The whisper was everywhere, and therefore no one spoke it. Just as no one ever says: "We are breathing!" in spite of the fact that breath is coming and going all the time.

"Mother," said the boy Paul one day, "why don't we keep a car of our own? Why do we always use Uncle's, or else a taxi?"

"Because we're the poor members of the family," said the mother.

"But why are we, Mother?"

"Well—I suppose," she said slowly and bitterly, "it's because your father has no luck."

The boy was silent for some time.

"Is luck money, Mother?" he asked, rather timidly.

"No, Paul. Not quite. It's what causes you to have money."

"Oh!" said Paul vaguely. "I thought when Uncle Oscar said filthy lucker, it meant money."

"Filthy lucre does mean money," said the mother. "But it's lucre, not luck."

"Oh!" said the boy. "Then what is luck, Mother?"

"It's what causes you to have money. If you're lucky you have money. That's why it's better to be born lucky than rich. If you're

rich, you may lose your money. But if you're lucky, you will always get more money."

"Oh! Will you? And is Father not lucky?"

"Very unlucky, I should say," she said bitterly.

The boy watched her with unsure eyes.

"Why?" he asked.

"I don't know. Nobody ever knows why one person is lucky and another unlucky."

"Don't they? Nobody at all? Does nobody know?"

"Perhaps God. But He never tells."

"He ought to, then. And aren't you lucky either, Mother?"

"I can't be, if I married an unlucky husband."

"But by yourself, aren't you?"

"I used to think I was, before I married. Now I think I am very unlucky indeed."

"Why?"

"Well—never mind! Perhaps I'm not really," she said.

The child looked at her, to see if she meant it. But he saw, by the lines of her mouth, that she was only trying to hide something from him.

"Well, anyhow," he said stoutly, "I'm a lucky person."

"Why?" said his mother, with a sudden laugh.

He stared at her. He didn't even know why he had said it.

"God told me," he asserted, brazening it out.

"I hope He did, dear!" she said, again with a laugh, but rather bitter.

"He did, Mother!"

"Excellent!" said the mother, using one of her husband's exclamations.

The boy saw she did not believe him; or rather, that she paid no attention to his assertions. This angered him somewhere, and made him want to compel her attention.

He went off by himself, vaguely, in a childish way, seeking for the clue to "luck." Absorbed, taking no heed of other people, he went about with a sort of stealth, seeking inwardly for luck. He wanted it. When the two girls were playing dolls in the nursery, he wanted luck, he wanted it, he would sit on his big rocking horse, charging madly into space, with a frenzy that made the little girls peer at him uneasily. Wildly the horse careered, the waving dark hair of the boy tossed, his eyes had a strange glare in them. The little girls dared not speak to him.



When he had ridden to the end of his mad little journey, he climbed down and stood in front of his rocking horse, staring fixedly into its lowered face. Its red mouth was slightly open, its big eye was wide and glassy-bright.

"Now!" he would silently command the snorting steed. "Now, take me to where there is luck! Now take me!"

And he would slash the horse on the neck with the little whip he had asked Uncle Oscar for. He knew the horse could take him to where there was luck, if only he forced it. So he would mount again, and start on his furious ride, hoping at last to get there. He knew he could get there.

"You'll break your horse, Paul!" said the nurse.

"He's always riding like that! I wish he'd leave off!" said his sister Joan.

But he only glared down on them in silence. Nurse gave him up. She could make nothing of him. Anyhow, he was growing beyond her.

One day his mother and his Uncle Oscar came in when he was on one of his furious rides. He did not speak to them.

"Hallo, you young jockey! Riding a winner?" said his uncle.

"Aren't you growing too big for a rocking horse? You're not a very little boy any longer, you know," said his mother.

But Paul only gave a blue glare from his big, rather close-set eyes. He would speak to nobody when he was in full tilt. His mother watched him with an anxious expression on her face.

At last he suddenly stopped forcing his horse into the mechanical gallop, and slid down.

"Well, I got there," he announced fiercely, his blue eyes still flaring, and his sturdy long legs straddling apart.

"Where did you get to?" asked his mother.

"Where I wanted to go," he flared back at her.

"That's right, son!" said Uncle Oscar. "Don't you stop till you get there. What's the horse's name?"

"He doesn't have a name," said the boy.

"Gets on without all right?" asked the uncle.

"Well, he has different names. He was called Sansovino last week."

"Sansovino, eh? Won the Ascot. How did you know his name?"

"He always talks about horse races with Bassett," said Joan.

The uncle was delighted to find that his small nephew was posted with all the racing news. Bassett, the young gardener, who had been

wounded in the left foot in the war and had got his present job through Oscar Cresswell, whose batman he had been, was a perfect blade of the "turf." He lived in the racing events, and the small boy lived with him.

Oscar Cresswell got it all from Bassett.

"Master Paul comes and asks me, so I can't do more than tell him, sir," said Bassett, his face terribly serious, as if he were speaking of religious matters.

"And does he ever put anything on a horse he fancies?"

"Well—I don't want to give him away—he's a young sport, a fine sport, sir. Would you mind asking him himself? He sort of takes a pleasure in it, and perhaps he'd feel I was giving him away, sir, if you don't mind."

Bassett was serious as a church.

The uncle went back to his nephew, and took him off for a ride in the car.

"Say, Paul, old man, do you ever put anything on a horse?" the uncle asked.

The boy watched the handsome man closely.

"Why, do you think I oughtn't to?" he parried.

"Not a bit of it! I thought perhaps you might give me a tip for the Lincoln."

The car sped on into the country, going down to Uncle Oscar's place in Hampshire.

"Honor bright?" said the nephew.

"Honor bright, son!" said the uncle.

"Well, then, Daffodil."

"Daffodil! I doubt it, sonny. What about Mirza?"

"I only know the winner," said the boy. "That's Daffodil."

"Daffodil, eh?"

There was a pause. Daffodil was an obscure horse comparatively.

"Uncle!"

"Yes, son?"

"You won't let it go any further, will you? I promised Bassett."

"Bassett be damned, old man! What's he got to do with it?"

"We're partners. We've been partners from the first. Uncle, he lent me my first five shillings, which I lost. I promised him, honor bright, it was only between me and him; only you gave me that ten-shilling note I started winning with, so I thought you were lucky. You won't let it go any further, will you?"

The boy gazed at his uncle from those big, hot, blue eyes, set

rather close together. The uncle stirred and laughed uneasily.

"Right you are, son! I'll keep your tip private. Daffodil, eh? How much are you putting on him?"

"All except twenty pounds," said the boy. "I keep that in reserve."

The uncle thought it a good joke.

"You keep twenty pounds in reserve, do you, you young romancer? What are you betting, then?"

"I'm betting three hundred," said the boy gravely.

"But it's between you and me, Uncle Oscar! Honor bright?"

The uncle burst into a roar of laughter.

"It's between you and me all right, you young Nat Gould," he said, laughing. "But where's your three hundred?"

"Bassett keeps it for me. We're partners."

"You are, are you! And what is Bassett putting on Daffodil?"

"He won't go quite as high as I do, I expect. Perhaps he'll go a hundred and fifty."

"What, pennies?" laughed the uncle.

"Pounds," said the child, with a surprised look at his uncle.

"Bassett keeps a bigger reserve than I do."

Between wonder and amusement Uncle Oscar was silent. He pursued the matter no further, but he determined to take his nephew with him to the Lincoln races.

"Now, son," he said, "I'm putting twenty on Mirza, and I'll put five for you on any horse you fancy. What's your pick?"

"Daffodil, Uncle."

"No, not the fiver on Daffodil!"

"I should if it was my own fiver," said the child.

"Good! Good! Right you are! A fiver for me and a fiver for you on Daffodil."

The child had never been to a race meeting before, and his eyes were blue fire. He pursed his mouth tight, and watched. A Frenchman just in front had put his money on Lancelot. Wild with excitement, he flayed his arms up and down, yelling, "Lancelot! Lancelot!" in his French accent.

Daffodil came in first, Lancelot second, Mirza third. The child, flushed with eyes blazing, was curiously serene. His uncle brought him four five-pound notes, four to one.

"What am I to do with these?" he cried, waving them before the boy's eyes.

"I suppose we'll talk to Bassett," said the boy. "I expect I have fifteen hundred now; and twenty in reserve; and this twenty."

His uncle studied him for some moments.

"Look here, son!" he said. "You're not serious about Bassett and that fifteen hundred, are you?"

"Yes, I am. But it's between you and me, Uncle. Honor bright!"

"Honor bright all right, son! But I must talk to Bassett."

"If you'd like to be a partner, Uncle, with Bassett and me, we could all be partners. Only, you'd have to promise, honor bright, Uncle, not to let it go beyond us three. Bassett and I are lucky, and you must be lucky, because it was your ten shillings I started winning with. . . ."

Uncle Oscar took both Bassett and Paul into Richmond Park for an afternoon, and there they talked.

"It's like this, you see, sir," Bassett said. "Master Paul would get me talking about racing events, spinning yarns, you know, sir. And he was always keen on knowing if I'd made or if I'd lost. It's about a year since, now, that I put five shillings on Blush of Dawn for him: and we lost. Then the luck turned, with that ten shillings he had from you: that we put on Singhalese. And since that time, it's been pretty steady, all things considering. What do you say, Master Paul?"

"We're all right when we're sure," said Paul. "It's when we're not quite sure that we go down."

"Oh, but we're careful then," said Bassett.

"But when are you sure?" smiled Uncle Oscar.

"It's Master Paul, sir," smiled Bassett, in a secret, religious voice. "It's as if he had it from heaven. Like Daffodil, now, for the Lincoln. That was as sure as eggs."

"Did you put anything on Daffodil?" asked Oscar Cresswell.

"Yes, sir. I made my bit."

"And my nephew?"

Bassett was obstinately silent, looking at Paul.

"I made twelve hundred, didn't I, Bassett? I told uncle I was putting three hundred on Daffodil."

"That's right," said Bassett, nodding.

"But where's the money?" asked the uncle.

"I keep it safe locked up, sir. Master Paul he can have it any minute he likes to ask for it."

"What, fifteen hundred pounds?"

"And twenty! And forty, that is, with the twenty he made on the course."

"It's amazing!" said the uncle.

"If Master Paul offers you to be partners, sir, I would, if I were you: if you'll excuse me," said Bassett.

Oscar Cresswell thought about it.

"I'll see the money," he said.

They drove home again, and, sure enough, Bassett came round to the gardenhouse with fifteen hundred pounds in notes. The twenty pounds' reserve was left with Joe Glee, in the Turf Commission deposit.

"You see, it's all right, Uncle, when I'm sure! Then we go strong, for all we're worth. Don't we, Bassett?"

"We do that, Master Paul."

"And when are you sure?" said the uncle, laughing.

"Oh, well, sometimes I'm absolutely sure, like about Daffodil," said the boy; "and sometimes I have an idea; and sometimes I haven't even an idea, have I, Bassett? Then we're careful, because we mostly go down."

"You do, do you! And when you're sure, like about Daffodil, what makes you sure, sonny?"

"Oh, well, I don't know," said the boy uneasily. "I'm sure, you know, Uncle, that's all."

"It's as if he had it from heaven, sir," Bassett reiterated.

"I should say so!" said the uncle.

But he became a partner. And when the Leger was coming on, Paul was "sure" about Lively Spark, which was a quite inconsiderable horse. The boy insisted on putting a thousand on the horse, Bassett went for five hundred, and Oscar Cresswell two hundred. Lively Spark came in first, and the betting had been ten to one against him. Paul had made ten thousand.

"You see," he said, "I was absolutely sure of him."

Even Oscar Cresswell had cleared two thousand.

"Look here, son," he said, "this sort of thing makes me nervous."

"It needn't, Uncle! Perhaps I shan't be sure again for a long time."

"But what are you going to do with your money?" asked the uncle.

"Of course," said the boy, "I started it for Mother. She said she had no luck, because Father is unlucky, so I thought if I was lucky, it might stop whispering."

"What might stop whispering?"

"Our house. I hate our house for whispering."

"What does it whisper?"

"Why—why"—the boy fidgeted—"why, I don't know. But it's always short of money, you know, Uncle."

"I know it, son, I know it."

"You know people send Mother writs, don't you, Uncle?"

"I'm afraid I do," said the uncle.

"And then the house whispers, like people laughing at you behind your back. It's awful, that is! I thought if I was lucky—"

"You might stop it," added the uncle.

The boy watched him with big blue eyes, that had an uncanny cold fire in them, and he said never a word.

"Well, then!" said the uncle. "What are we doing?"

"I shouldn't like Mother to know I was lucky," said the boy.

"Why not, son?"

"She'd stop me."

"I don't think she would."

"Oh!"—and the boy writhed in an odd way—"I don't want her to know, Uncle."

"All right, son! We'll manage it without her knowing."

They managed it very easily. Paul, at the other's suggestion, handed over five thousand pounds to his uncle, who deposited it with the family lawyer, who was then to inform Paul's mother that a relative had put five thousand pounds into his hands, which sum was to be paid out a thousand pounds at a time, on the mother's birthday, for the next five years.

"So she'll have a birthday present of a thousand pounds for five successive years," said Uncle Oscar. "I hope it won't make it all the harder for her later."

Paul's mother had her birthday in November. The house had been "whispering" worse than ever lately, and, even in spite of his luck, Paul could not bear up against it. He was very anxious to see the effect of the birthday letter, telling his mother about the thousand pounds.

When there were no visitors, Paul now took his meals with his parents, as he was beyond the nursery control. His mother went into town nearly every day. She had discovered that she had an odd knack of sketching furs and dress materials, so she worked secretly in the studio of a friend who was the chief "artist" for the leading drapers. She drew the figures of ladies in furs and ladies in silk and sequins for the newspaper advertisements. This young woman artist earned several thousand pounds a year, but Paul's mother only

made several hundreds, and she was again dissatisfied. She so wanted to be first in something, and she did not succeed, even in making sketches for drapery advertisements.

She was down to breakfast on the morning of her birthday. Paul watched her face as she read her letters. He knew the lawyer's letter. As his mother read it, her face hardened and became more expressionless. Then a cold, determined look came on her mouth. She hid the letter under the pile of others, and said not a word about it.

"Didn't you have anything nice in the post for your birthday, Mother?" asked Paul.

"Quite moderately nice," she said, her voice cold and absent.

She went away to town without saying more.

But in the afternoon Uncle Oscar appeared. He said Paul's mother had had a long interview with the lawyer, asking if the whole five thousand could not be advanced at once, as she was in debt.

"What do you think, Uncle?" said the boy.

"I leave it to you, son."

"Oh, let her have it, then! We can get some more with the other," said the boy.

"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, laddie!" said Uncle Oscar.

"But I'm sure to know for the Grand National; or the Lincolnshire; or else the Derby. I'm sure to know for one of them," said Paul.

So Uncle Oscar signed the agreement, and Paul's mother touched the whole five thousand. Then something very curious happened. The voices in the house suddenly went mad, like a chorus of frogs on a spring evening. There were certain new furnishings, and Paul had a tutor. He was really going to Eton, his father's school, in the following autumn. There were flowers in the winter, and blossoming of the luxury Paul's mother had been used to. And yet the voices in the house, behind the sprays of mimosa and almond blossom, and from under the piles of iridescent cushions, simply trilled and screamed in a sort of ecstasy: "There must be more money; O-h-h-h; there must be more money. Oh, now now-w! Now-w-w—there must be more money!—more than ever! More than ever!"

It frightened Paul terribly. He studied away at his Latin and Greek with his tutors, but his intense hours were spent with Bassett. The Grand National had gone by: he had not "known," and

had lost a hundred pounds. Summer was at hand. He was in agony for the Lincoln. But even for the Lincoln he didn't "know," and he lost fifty pounds. He became wild-eyed and strange, as if something were going to explode in him.

"Let it alone, son! Don't you bother about it!" urged Uncle Oscar. But it was as if the boy couldn't really hear what his uncle was saying.

"I've got to know for the Derby! I've got to know for the Derby," the child reiterated, his big blue eyes blazing with a sort of madness.

His mother noticed how over-wrought he was.

"You'd better go to the seaside. Wouldn't you like to go now to the seaside, instead of waiting? I think you'd better," she said, looking down at him anxiously, her heart curiously heavy because of him.

But the child lifted his uncanny blue eyes.

"I couldn't possibly go before the Derby, Mother!" he said. "I couldn't possibly go before the Derby, Mother!" he said. "I couldn't possibly!"

"Why not?" she said, her voice becoming heavy when she was opposed. "Why not? You can still go from the seaside to see the Derby with your Uncle Oscar, if that's what you wish. No need for you to wait here. Besides, I think you care too much about these races. It's a bad sign. My family has been a gambling family, and you won't know till you grow up how much damage it has done. But it has done damage. I shall have to send Bassett away, and ask Uncle Oscar not to talk racing to you, unless you promise to be reasonable about it: go away to the seaside and forget it. You're all nerves!"

"I'll do what you like, Mother, so long as you don't send me away till after the Derby," the boy said.

"Send you away from where? Just from this house?"

"Yes," he said, gazing at her.

"Why, you curious child, what makes you care about this house so much, suddenly? I never knew you loved it."

He gazed at her without speaking. He had a secret within a secret, something he had not divulged, even to Bassett or to his Uncle Oscar.

But his mother, after standing undecided and a little bit sullen for some moments, said:

"Very well, then! Don't go to the seaside till after the Derby, if



you don't wish it. But promise me you won't let your nerves go to pieces. Promise you won't think so much about horse racing and events, as you call them!"

"Oh, no," said the boy casually. "I won't think much about them, Mother. You needn't worry. I wouldn't worry, Mother, if I were you."

"If you were me and I were you," said his mother, "I wonder what we should do!"

"But you know you needn't worry, Mother, don't you?" the boy repeated.

"I should be awfully glad to know it," she said wearily.

"Oh, well, you can, you know. I mean, you ought to know you needn't worry," he insisted.

"Ought I? Then I'll see about it," she said.

Paul's secret of secrets was his wooden horse, that which had no name. Since he was emancipated from a nurse and a nursery governess, he had had his rocking horse removed to his own bedroom at the top of the house.

"Surely, you're too big for a rocking horse!" his mother had remonstrated.

"Well, you see, Mother, till I can have a real horse, I like to have some sort of animal about," had been his quaint answer.

"Do you feel he keeps you company?" she laughed.

"Oh, yes! He's very good, he always keeps me company, when I'm there," said Paul.

So the horse, rather shabby, stood in an arrested prance in the boy's bedroom.

The Derby was drawing near, and the boy grew more and more tense. He hardly heard what was spoken to him, he was very frail, and his eyes were really uncanny. His mother had sudden strange seizures of uneasiness about him. Sometimes, for half-an-hour, she would feel a sudden anxiety about him that was almost anguish. She wanted to rush to him at once, and know he was safe.

Two nights before the Derby, she was at a big party in town, when one of her rushes of anxiety about her boy, her firstborn, gripped her heart till she could hardly speak. She fought with the feeling, might and main, for she believed in common sense. But it was too strong. She had to leave the dance and go downstairs to telephone to the country. The children's nursery governess was terribly surprised and startled at being rung up in the night.

"Are the children all right, Miss Wilmot?"

"Oh, yes, they are quite all right."

"Master Paul? Is he all right?"

"He went to bed as right as a trivet. Shall I run up and look at him?"

"No," said Paul's mother reluctantly. "No! Don't trouble. It's all right. Don't sit up. We shall be home fairly soon." She did not want her son's privacy intruded upon.

"Very good," said the governess.

It was about one o'clock when Paul's mother and father drove up to their house. All was still. Paul's mother went to her room and slipped off her white fur cloak. She had told her maid not to wait up for her. She heard her husband downstairs, mixing a whisky and soda.

And then, because of the strange anxiety at her heart, she stole upstairs to her son's room. Noiselessly she went along the upper corridor. Was there a faint noise? What was it?

She stood, with arrested muscles, outside his door, listening. There was a strange, heavy, and yet not loud noise. Her heart stood still. It was a soundless noise, yet rushing and powerful. Something huge, in violent, hushed motion. What was it? What in God's name was it? She ought to know. She felt that she knew the noise. She knew what it was.

Yet she could not place it. She couldn't say what it was. And on and on it went, like a madness.

Softly, frozen with anxiety and fear, she turned the door handle.

The room was dark. Yet in the space near the window, she heard and saw something plunging to and fro. She gazed in fear and amazement.

Then suddenly she switched on the light, and saw her son, in his green pajamas, madly surging on the rocking horse. The blaze of light suddenly lit him up, as he urged the wooden horse, and lit her up, as she stood, blonde, in her dress of pale green and crystal, in the doorway.

"Paul!" she cried. "Whatever are you doing?"

"It's Malabar!" he screamed, in a powerful, strange voice. "It's Malabar!"

His eyes blazed at her for one strange and senseless second, as he ceased urging his wooden horse. Then he fell with a crash to the ground, and she, all her tormented motherhood flooding upon her, rushed to gather him up.

But he was unconscious, and unconscious he remained, with some

brain fever. He talked and tossed, and his mother sat stonily by his side.

"Malabar! It's Malabar! Bassett, Bassett, I know! It's Malabar!"

So the child cried, trying to get up and urge the rocking horse that gave him his inspiration.

"What does he mean by Malabar?" asked the heart-frozen mother.

"I don't know," said the father stonily.

"What does he mean by Malabar?" she asked her brother Oscar.

"It's one of the horses running for the Derby," was the answer.

And, in spite of himself, Oscar Cresswell spoke to Bassett, and himself put a thousand on Malabar; at fourteen to one.

The third day of the illness was critical; they were waiting for a change. The boy, with his rather long, curly hair, was tossing ceaselessly on the pillow. He neither slept nor regained consciousness, and his eyes were like blue stones. His mother sat, feeling her heart had gone, turned actually into a stone.

In the evening, Oscar Cresswell did not come, but Bassett sent a message saying could he come up for one moment, just one moment? Paul's mother was very angry at the intrusion, but on second thought she agreed. The boy was the same. Perhaps Bassett might bring him to consciousness.

The gardener, a shortish fellow with a little brown mustache, and sharp little brown eyes, tiptoed into the room, touched his imaginary cap to Paul's mother, and stole to the bedside, staring with glittering, smallish eyes at the tossing, dying child.

"Master Paul!" he whispered. "Master Paul! Malabar came in first all right, a clean win. I did as you told me. You've made over seventy thousand pounds, you have; you've got over eighty thousand. Malabar came in all right, Master Paul."

"Malabar! Malabar! Did I say Malabar, Mother? Did I say Malabar? Do you think I'm lucky, Mother? I knew Malabar, didn't I? Over eighty thousand pounds! I call that lucky, don't you Mother? Over eighty thousand pounds! I knew, didn't I know I knew? Malabar came in all right. If I ride my horse till I'm sure, then I tell you, Bassett, you can go as high as you like. Did you go for all you were worth, Bassett?"

"I went a thousand on it, Master Paul."

"I never told you, Mother, that if I can ride my horse, and get there, then I'm absolutely sure—oh, absolutely! Mother, did I ever tell you? I am lucky!"

"No, you never did," said the mother.

But the boy died in the night.

And even as he lay dead, his mother heard her brother's voice saying to her: "My God, Hester, you're eighty-odd thousand to the good, and a poor devil of a son to the bad. But, poor devil, poor devil, he's best gone out of a life where he rides his rocking horse to find a winner."

## **THE WORDS OF GURU**

**by C. M. Kornbluth**

**Y**ESTERDAY, when I was going to meet Guru in the woods a man stopped me and said: "Child, what are you doing out at one in the morning? Does your mother know where you are? How old are you, walking around this late?"

I looked at him, and saw that he was white-haired, so I laughed. Old men never see; in fact men hardly see at all. Sometimes young women see part, but men rarely ever see at all. "I'm twelve on my next birthday," I said. And then, because I would not let him live to tell people, I said, "And I'm out this late to see Guru."

"Guru?" he asked. "Who is Guru? Some foreigner, I suppose? Bad business mixing with foreigners, young fellow. Who is Guru?"

So I told him who Guru was, and just as he began talking about cheap magazines and fairy-tales I said one of the words that Guru taught me and he stopped talking. Because he was an old man and his joints were stiff he didn't crumple up but fell in one piece, hitting his head on the stone. Then I went on.

Even though I'm going to be only twelve on my next birthday I know many things that old people don't. And I remember things that other boys can't. I remember being born out of darkness, and I remember the noises that people made about me. Then when I was two months old I began to understand that the noises meant things like the things that were going on inside my head. I found out that I could make the noises too, and everybody was very much surprised. "Talking!" they said, again and again. "And so very young! Clara, what do you make of it?" Clara was my mother.

And Clara would say: "I'm sure I don't know. There never was

any genius in my family, and I'm sure there was none in Joe's." Joe was my father.

Once Clara showed me a man I had never seen before, and told me that he was a reporter—that he wrote things in newspapers. The reporter tried to talk to me as if I were an ordinary baby. I didn't even answer him, but just kept looking at him until his eyes fell and he went away. Later Clara scolded me and read me a little piece in the reporter's newspaper that was supposed to be funny—about the reporter asking me very complicated questions and me answering with baby-noises. It was not true, of course. I didn't say a word to the reporter, and he didn't ask me even one of the questions.

I heard her read the little piece, but while I listened I was watching the slug crawling on the wall. When Clara was finished I asked her: "What is that grey thing?"

She looked where I pointed, but couldn't see it. "What grey thing, Peter?" she asked. I had her call me by my whole name, Peter, instead of anything silly like Petey. "What grey thing?"

"It's as big as your hand, Clara, but soft. I don't think it has any bones at all. It's crawling up, but I don't see any face on the towards side. And there aren't any legs."

I think she was worried, but she tried to baby me by putting her hand on the wall and trying to find out where it was. I called out whether she was right or left of the thing. Finally she put her hand right through the slug. And then I realized that she really couldn't see it, and didn't believe it was there. I stopped talking about it then and only asked her a few days later: "Clara, what do you call a thing which one person can see and another person can't?"

"An illusion, Peter," she said. "If that's what you mean." I said nothing, but let her put me to bed as usual, but when she turned out the light and went away I waited a little while and then called out softly, "Illusion! Illusion!"

At once Guru came for the first time. He bowed, the way he always has since, and said: "I have been waiting."

"I didn't know that was the way to call you," I said.

"Whenever you want me I will be ready. I will teach you, Peter—if you want to learn. Do you know what I will teach you?"

"If you will teach me about the grey thing on the wall," I said, "I will listen. And if you will teach me about real things and unreal things I will listen."

"These things," he said thoughtfully, "very few wish to learn. And there are some things that nobody ever wished to learn. And there are some things that I will not teach."

Then I said: "The things nobody has ever wished to learn I will learn. And I will even learn the things you do not wish to teach."

He smiled mockingly. "A master has come," he said, half-laughing. "A master of Guru."

That was how I learned his name. And that night he taught me a word which would do little things, like spoiling food.

From that day, to the time I saw him last night he has not changed at all, though now I am as tall as he is. His skin is still as dry and shiny as ever it was, and his face is still bony, crowned by a head of very coarse, black hair.

When I was ten years old I went to bed one night only long enough to make Joe and Clara suppose I was fast asleep. I left in my place something which appears when you say one of the words of Guru and went down the drainpipe outside my window. It always was easy to climb down and up, ever since I was eight years old.

I met Guru in Inwood Hill Park. "You're late," he said.

"Not too late," I answered. "I know it's never too late for one of these things."

"How do you know?" he asked sharply. "This is your first."

"And maybe my last," I replied. "I don't like the idea of it. If I have nothing more to learn from my second than my first I shan't go to another."

"You don't know," he said. "You don't know what it's like—the voices, and the bodies slick with unguent, leaping flames, mind-filling ritual! You can have no idea at all until you've taken part."

"We'll see," I said. "Can we leave from here?"

"Yes," he said. Then he taught me the word I would need to know, and we both said it together.

The place we were in next was lit with red lights, and I think that the walls were of rock. Though of course there was no real seeing there, and so the lights only seemed to be red, and it was not real rock.

As we were going to the fire one of them stopped us. "Who's with you?" she asked, calling Guru by another name. I did not know that he was also the person bearing that name, for it was a very powerful one.

He cast a hasty, sidewise glance at me and then said: "This is Peter of whom I have often told you."

She looked at me then and smiled, stretching out her oily arms. "Ah," she said, softly, like the cats when they talk at night to me. "Ah, this is Peter. Will you come to me when I call you, Peter? And sometimes call for me—in the dark—when you are alone?"

"Don't do that!" said Guru, angrily pushing past her. "He's very young—you might spoil him for his work."

She screeched at our backs: "Guru and his pupil—fine pair! Boy, he's no more real than I am—you're the only real thing here!"

"Don't listen to her," said Guru. "She's wild and raving. They're always tight-strung when this time comes around."

We came near the fires then, and sat down on rocks. They were killing animals and birds and doing things with their bodies. The blood was being collected in a basin of stone, which passed through the crowd. The one to my left handed it to me. "Drink," she said, grinning to show me her fine, white teeth. I swallowed twice from it and passed it to Guru.

When the bowl had passed all around we took off our clothes. Some, like Guru, did not wear them, but many did. The one to my left sat closer to me, breathing heavily at my face. I moved away. "Tell her to stop, Guru," I said. "This isn't part of it, I know."

Guru spoke to her sharply in their own language, and she changed her seat, snarling.

Then we all began to chant, clapping our hands and beating our thighs. One of them rose slowly and circled about the fires in a slow pace, her eyes rolling wildly. She worked her jaws and flung her arms about so sharply that I could hear the elbows crack. Still shuffling her feet against the rock floor she bent her body backwards down to her feet. Her belly-muscles were bands standing out from her skin, nearly, and the oil rolled down her body and legs. As the palms of her hands touched the ground she collapsed in a twitching heap and began to set up a thin wailing noise against the steady chant and hand-beat that the rest of us were keeping up.

Another of them did the same as the first, and we chanted louder for her and still louder for the third. Then, while we still beat our hands and thighs, one of them took up the third, laid her across the altar and made her ready with a stone knife. The fire's light gleamed off the chipped edge of obsidian. As her blood drained down the groove cut as a gutter into the rock of the altar, we stopped our chant and the fires were snuffed out.

But still we could see what was going on, for these things were, of course, not happening at all—only seeming to happen, really, just as all the people and things there only seemed to be what they were. Only I was real. That must be why they desired me so.

As the last of the fires died Guru excitedly whispered: "The Presence!" He was very deeply moved.

From the pool of blood from the third dancer's body there issued the Presence. It was the tallest one there, and when it spoke its voice was deeper, and when it commanded its commands were obeyed.

"Let blood!" it commanded, and we gashed ourselves with flints. It smiled and showed teeth bigger and sharper and whiter than any of the others.

"Make water!" it commanded, and we all spat on each other. It flapped its wings and rolled its eyes, that were bigger and redder than any of the others.

"Pass flame!" it commanded, and we breathed smoke and fire on our limbs. It stamped its feet, let blue flames roar from its mouth, and they were bigger and wilder than any of the others.

Then it returned to the pool of blood and we lit the fires again. Guru was staring straight before him; I tugged his arm. He bowed as though we were meeting for the first time that night.

"What are you thinking of?" I asked. "We shall go now."

"Yes," he said heavily. "Now we shall go." Then we said the word that had brought us there.

The first man I killed was Brother Paul, at the school where I went to learn the things that Guru did not teach me.

It was less than a year ago, but it seems like a very long time. I have killed so many times since then.

"You're a very bright boy, Peter," said the brother.

"Thank you, brother."

"But there are things about you that I don't understand. Normally I'd ask your parents but—I feel that they don't understand either. You were an infant prodigy, weren't you?"

"Yes, brother."

"There's nothing very unusual about that—glands, I'm told. You know what glands are?"

Then I was alarmed. I had heard of them, but I was not certain whether they were the short, thick green men who wear only metal or the things with many legs with whom I talked in the woods.

"How did you find out?" I asked him.

"But Peter! You look positively frightened, lad! I don't know



a thing about them myself, but Father Frederick does. He has whole books about them, though I sometimes doubt whether he believes them himself."

"They aren't good books, brother," I said. "They ought to be burned."

"That's a savage thought, my son. But to return to your own problem—"

I could not let him go any further knowing what he did about me. I said one of the words Guru taught me and he looked at first very surprised and then seemed to be in great pain. He dropped across his desk and I felt his wrist to make sure, for I had not used that word before. But he was dead.

There was a heavy step outside and I made myself invisible. Stout Father Frederick entered, and I nearly killed him too with the word, but I knew that that would be very curious. I decided to wait, and went through the door as Father Frederick bent over the dead monk. He thought he was asleep.

I went down the corridor to the book-lined office of the stout priest and, working quickly, piled all his books in the center of the room and lit them with my breath. Then I went down to the schoolyard and made myself visible again when there was nobody looking. It was very easy. I killed a man I passed on the street the next day.

There was a girl named Mary who lived near us. She was fourteen then, and I desired her as those in the Cavern out of Time and Space had desired me.

So when I saw Guru and he had bowed, I told him of it, and he looked at me in great surprise. "You are growing older, Peter," he said.

"I am, Guru. And there will come a time when your words will not be strong enough for me."

He laughed. "Come, Peter," he said. "Follow me if you wish. There is something that is going to be done—" He licked his thin, purple lips and said: "I have told you what it will be like."

"I shall come," I said. "Teach me the word." So he taught me the word and we said it together.

The place we were in next was not like any of the other places I had been to before with Guru. It was No-place. Always before there had been the seeming passage of time and matter, but here there was not even that. Here Guru and the others cast off their

forms and were what they were, and No-place was the only place where they could do this.

It was not like the Cavern, for the Cavern had been out of time and space, and this place was not enough of a place even for that. It was No-place.

What happened there does not bear telling, but I was made known to certain ones who never departed from there. All came to them as they existed. They had not color or the seeming of color, or any seeming of shape.

There I learned that eventually I would join with them; that I had been selected as the one of my planet who was to dwell without being forever in that No-place.

Guru and I left, having said the word.

"Well?" demanded Guru, staring me in the eye.

"I am willing," I said. "But teach me one word now—"

"Ah," he said grinning. "The girl?"

"Yes," I said. "The word that will mean much to her."

Still grinning, he taught me the word.

Mary, who had been fourteen, is now fifteen and what they call incurably mad.

Last night I saw Guru again and for the last time. He bowed as I approached him. "Peter," he said warmly.

"Teach me the word," said I.

"It is not too late."

"Teach me the word."

"You can withdraw—with what you master you can master also this world. Gold without reckoning; sardonyx and gems, Peter! Rich crushed velvet—stiff, scraping, embroidered tapestries!"

"Teach me the word."

"Think, Peter, of the house you could build. It could be of white marble, and every slab centered by a winking ruby. Its gate could be of beaten gold within and without and it could be built about one slender tower of carven ivory, rising mile after mile into the turquoise sky. You could see the clouds float underneath your eyes."

"Teach me the word."

"Your tongue could crush the grapes that taste like melted silver. You could hear always the song of the bulbul and the lark that sounds like the dawnstar made musical. Spikenard that will bloom a

thousand thousand years could be ever in your nostrils. Your hands could feel the down of purple Himalayan swans that is softer than a sunset cloud."

"Teach me the word."

"You could have women whose skin would be from the black of ebony to the white of snow. You could have women who would be as hard as flints or as soft as a sunset cloud."

"Teach me the word."

Guru grinned and said the word.

Now, I do not know whether I will say that word, which was the last that Guru taught me, today or tomorrow or until a year has passed.

It is a word that will explode this planet like a stick of dynamite in a rotten apple.

## **BABY IS THREE**

*by Theodore Sturgeon*

**I** FINALLY GOT IN to see this Stern. He wasn't an old man at all. He looked up from his desk, flicked his eyes over me once, and picked up a pencil. "Sit over there, Sonny."

I stood where I was until he looked up again. Then I said, "Look, if a midget walks in here, what do you say—sit over there, Shorty?"

He put the pencil down again and stood up. He smiled. His smile was as quick and sharp as his eyes. "I was wrong," he said, "but how am I supposed to know you don't want to be called Sonny?"

That was better, but I was still mad. "I'm fifteen and I don't have to like it. Don't rub my nose in it."

He smiled again and said okay, and I went and sat down.

"What's your name?"

"Gerard."

"First or last?"

"Both," I said.

"Is that the truth?"

I said, "No. And don't ask me where I live either."

He put down his pencil. "We're not going to get very far this way."

"That's up to you. What are you worried about? I got feelings of hostility? Well, sure I have. I got lots more things than that wrong with me or I wouldn't be here. Are you going to let that stop you?"

"Well, no, but—"

"So what else is bothering you? How you're going to get paid?" I took out a thousand-dollar bill and laid it on the desk. "That's so you won't have to bill me. *You* keep track of it. Tell me when it's used up and I'll give you more. So you don't need my address. Wait," I said, when he reached toward the money. "Let it lay there. I want to be sure you and I are going to get along."

He folded his hands. "I don't do business this way, Son—I mean, Gerard."

"Gerry," I told him. "You do, if you do business with me."

"You make things difficult, don't you? Where did you get a thousand dollars?"

"I won a contest. Twenty-five words or less about how much fun it is to do my daintier underthings with Sudso." I leaned forward. "This time it's the truth."

"All right," he said.

I was surprised. I think he knew it, but he didn't say anything more. Just waited for me to go ahead.

"Before we start—if we start," I said, "I got to know something. The things I say to you—what comes out while you're working on me—is that just between us, like a priest or a lawyer?"

"Absolutely," he said.

"No matter what?"

"No matter what."

I watched him when he said it. I believed him.

"Pick up your money," I said. "You're on."

He didn't do it. He said, "As you remarked a minute ago, that is up to me. You can't buy these treatments like a candy bar. We have to work together. If either one of us can't do that, it's useless. You can't walk in on the first psychotherapist you find in the phone book and make any demand that occurs to you just because you can pay for it."

I said tiredly, "I didn't get you out of the phone book and I'm

not just guessing that you can help me. I winnowed through a dozen or more head-shrinkers before I decided on you."

"Thanks," he said, and it looked as if he was going to laugh at me, which I never like. "Winnowed, did you say? Just how?"

"Things you hear, things you read. You know. I'm not saying, so just file that with my street address."

He looked at me for a long time. It was the first time he'd used those eyes on me for anything but a flash glance. Then he picked up the bill.

"What do I do first?" I demanded.

"What do you mean?"

"How do we start?"

"We started when you walked in here."

So then I had to laugh. "All right, you got me. All I had was an opening. I didn't know where you would go from there, so I couldn't be there ahead of you."

"That's very interesting," Stern said. "Do you usually figure everything out in advance?"

"Always."

"How often are you right?"

"All the time. Except—but I don't have to tell you about no exceptions."

He really grinned this time. "I see. One of my patients has been talking."

"One of your ex-patients. Your patients don't talk."

"I ask them not to. That applies to you, too. What did you hear?"

"That you know from what people say and do what they're about to say and do, and that sometimes you let'm do it and sometimes you don't. How did you learn to do that?"

He thought a minute. "I guess I was born with an eye for details, and then let myself make enough mistakes with enough people until I learned not to make too many more. How did you learn to do it?"

I said, "You answer that and I won't have to come back here."

"You really don't know?"

"I wish I did. Look, this isn't getting us anywhere, is it?"

He shrugged. "Depends on where you want to go." He paused, and I got the eyes full strength again. "Which thumbnail description of psychiatry do you believe at the moment?"

"I don't get you."

\* \* \*

Stern slid open a desk drawer and took out a blackened pipe. He smelled it, turned it over while looking at me. "Psychiatry attacks the onion of the self, removing layer after layer until it gets down to the little sliver of unsullied ego. Or: psychiatry drills like an oil well, down and sidewise and down again, through all the muck and rock, until it strikes a layer that yields. Or: psychiatry grabs a handful of sexual motivations and throws them on the pinball-machine of your life, so they bounce on down against episodes. Want more?"

I had to laugh. "That last one was pretty good."

"That last one was pretty bad. They are all bad. They all try to simplify something which is complex by its very nature. The only thumbnail you'll get from me is this: no one knows what's really wrong with you but you; no one can find a cure for it but you; no one but you can identify it as a cure; and once you find it, no one but you can do anything about it."

"What are you here for?"

"To listen."

"I don't have to pay somebody no day's wage every hour just to listen."

"True. But you're convinced that I listen selectively."

"Am I?" I wondered about it. "I guess I am. Well, don't you?"

"No, but you'll never believe that."

I laughed. He asked me what that was for. I said, "You're not calling me Sonny."

"Not you." He shook his head slowly. He was watching me while he did it, so his eyes slid in their sockets as his head moved. "What is it you want to know about yourself, that made you worried I might tell people?"

"I want to find out why I killed somebody," I said right away.

It didn't faze him a bit. "Lie down over there."

I got up. "On that couch?"

He nodded.

As I stretched out self-consciously, I said, "I feel like I'm in some damn cartoon."

"What cartoon?"

"Guy's built like a bunch of grapes," I said, looking at the ceiling. It was pale gray.

"What's the caption?"

"'I got trunks full of 'em.'"

"Very good," he said quietly.

I looked at him carefully. I knew then he was the kind of guy who laughs way down deep when he laughs at all.

He said, "I'll use that in a book of case histories some time. But it won't include yours. What made you throw that in?" When I didn't answer, he got up and moved to a chair behind me where I couldn't see him. "You can quit testing, Sonny. I'm good enough for your purposes."

I clenched my jaws so hard, my back teeth hurt. Then I relaxed. I relaxed all over. It was wonderful. "All right," I said, "I'm sorry." He didn't say anything, but I had that feeling again that he was laughing. Not at me, though.

"How old are you?" he asked me suddenly.

"Uh—fifteen."

"Uh—fifteen," he repeated. "What does the 'uh' mean?"

"Nothing. I'm fifteen."

"When I asked your age, you hesitated because some other number popped up. You discarded that and substituted 'fifteen.'"

"The hell I did! I *am* fifteen!"

"I didn't say you weren't." His voice came patiently. "Now what was the other number?"

I got mad again. "There wasn't any other number! What do you want to go pryin' my grunts apart for, trying to plant this and that and make it mean what you think it ought to mean?"

He was silent.

"I'm fifteen," I said defiantly, and then, "I don't like being only fifteen. You know that. I'm not trying to insist I'm fifteen."

He just waited, still not saying anything.

I felt defeated. "The number was eight."

"So you're eight. And your name?"

"Gerry." I got up on one elbow, twisting my neck around so I could see him. He had his pipe apart and was sighting through the stem at the desk lamp. "Gerry, without no 'uh!'"

"All right," he said mildly, making me feel real foolish.

I leaned back and closed my eyes.

Eight, I thought. Eight.

"It's cold in here," I complained.

Eight. Eight, plate, state, hate. I ate from the plate of the state and I hate. I didn't like any of that and I snapped my eyes open. The ceiling was still gray. It was all right. Stern was somewhere behind me with his pipe, and he was all right. I took two deep

breaths, three, and then let my eyes close. Eight. Eight years old. Eight, hate. Years, fears. Old, cold. *Damn* it! I twisted and twitched on the couch, trying to find a way to keep the cold out. I ate from the plate of the—

I grunted and with my mind I took all the eights and all the rhymes and everything they stood for, and made it all black. But it wouldn't stay black. I had to put something there, so I made a great big luminous figure eight and just let it hang there. But it turned on its side and inside the loops it began to shimmer. It was like one of those movie shots through binoculars. I was going to have to look through whether I liked it or not.

Suddenly I quit fighting it and let it wash over me. The binoculars came close, closer, and then I was there.

Eight. Eight years old, cold. Cold as a bitch in the ditch. The ditch was by a railroad. Last year's weeds were scratchy straw. The ground was red, and when it wasn't slippery, clingy mud, it was frozen hard like a flowerpot. It was hard like that now, dusted with hoar-frost, cold as the winter light that pushed up over the hills. At night the lights were warm, and they were all in other people's houses. In the daytime the sun was in somebody else's house too, for all the good it did me.

I was dying in that ditch. Last night it was as good a place as any to sleep, and this morning it was as good a place as any to die. Just as well. Eight years old, the sick-sweet taste of pork-fat and wet bread from somebody's garbage, the thrill of terror when you're stealing a gunnysack and you hear a footstep.

And I heard a footstep.

I'd been curled up on my side. I whipped over on my stomach because sometimes they kick your belly. I covered my head with my arms and that was as far as I could get.

After a while I rolled my eyes up and looked without moving. There was a big shoe there. There was an ankle in the shoe, and another shoe close by. I lay there waiting to get tromped. Not that I cared much any more, but it was such a damn shame. All these months on my own, and they'd never caught up with me, never even come close, and now this. It was such a shame I started to cry.

The shoe took me under the armpit, but it was not a kick. It rolled me over. I was so stiff from the cold, I went over like a plank. I just kept my arms over my face and head and lay there with my eyes closed. For some reason I stopped crying. I think peo-



ple only cry when there's a chance of getting help from somewhere.

When nothing happened, I opened my eyes and shifted my forearms a little so I could see up. There was a man standing over me and he was a mile high. He had on faded dungarees and an old Eisenhower jacket with deep sweat-stains under the arms. His face was shaggy, like the guys who can't grow what you could call a beard, but still don't shave.

He said, "Get up."

I looked down at his shoe, but he wasn't going to kick me. I pushed up a little and almost fell down again, except he put his big hand where my back would hit it. I lay against it for a second because I had to, and then got up to where I had one knee on the ground.

"Come on," he said. "Let's go."

I swear I felt my bones creak, but I made it. I brought a round white stone up with me as I stood. I hefted the stone. I had to look at it to see if I was really holding it, my fingers were that cold. I told him, "Stay away from me or I'll bust you in the teeth with this rock."

His hand came out and down so fast, I never saw the way he got one finger between my palm and the rock, and flicked it out of my grasp. I started to cuss at him, but he just turned his back and walked up the embankment toward the tracks. He put his chin on his shoulder and said, "Come on, will you?"

He didn't chase me, so I didn't run. He didn't talk to me, so I didn't argue. He didn't hit me, so I didn't get mad. I went along after him. He waited for me. He put out his hand to me and I spit at it. So he went on, up to the tracks, out of my sight. I clawed my way up. The blood was beginning to move in my hands and feet and they felt like four point-down porcupines. When I got up to the roadbed, the man was standing there waiting for me.

The track was level just there, but as I turned my head to look along it, it seemed to be a hill that was steeper and steeper and turned over above me. And next thing you know, I was lying flat on my back looking up at the cold sky.

The man came over and sat down on the rail near me. He didn't try to touch me. I gasped for breath a couple of times, and suddenly felt I'd be all right if I could sleep for a minute—

just a little minute. I closed my eyes. The man stuck his finger in my ribs, hard. It hurt.

"Don't sleep," he said.

I looked at him.

He said, "You're frozen stiff and weak with hunger. I want to take you home and get you warmed up and fed. But it's a long haul up that way, and you won't make it by yourself. If I carry you, will that be the same to you as if you walked it?"

"What are you going to do when you get me home?"

"I told you."

"All right," I said.

He picked me up and carried me down the track. If he'd said anything else in the world, I'd of laid right down where I was until I froze to death. Anyway, what did he want to ask me for, one way or the other? I couldn't of done anything.

I stopped thinking about it and dozed off.

I woke up once when he turned off the right of way. He dove into the woods. There was no path, but he seemed to know where he was going. The next time I woke from a crackling noise. He was carrying me over a frozen pond and the ice was giving under his feet. He didn't hurry. I looked down and saw the white cracks ray-ing out under his feet, and it didn't seem to matter a bit. I bleared off again.

He put me down at last. We were there. "There" was inside a room. It was very warm. He put me on my feet and I snapped out of it in a hurry. The first thing I looked for was the door. I saw it and jumped over there and put my back against the wall beside it, in case I wanted to leave. Then I looked around.

It was a big room. One wall was rough rock and the rest was logs with stuff shoved between them. There was a big fire going in the rock wall, not in a fireplace, exactly; it was a sort of hollow place. There was an old auto battery on a shelf opposite, with two yellowing electric light bulbs dangling by wires from it. There was a table, some boxes and a couple of three-legged stools. The air had a haze of smoke and such a wonderful, heartbreaking, candy-and-crackling smell of food that a little hose squirted inside my mouth.

The man said, "What have I got here, Baby?"

And the room was full of kids. Well, three of them, but somehow they seemed to be more than three kids. There was a girl about my age—eight, I mean—with blue paint on the side of her face.

She had an easel and a palette with lots of paints and a fistful of brushes, but she wasn't using the brushes. She was smearing the paint on with her hands. Then there was a little Negro girl about five with great big eyes who stood gaping at me. And in a wooden crate, set up on two sawhorses to make a kind of bassinet, was a baby. I guess about three or four months old. It did what babies do, drooling some, making small bubbles, waving its hands around very aimless, and kicking.

When the man spoke, the girl at the easel looked at me and then at the baby. The baby just kicked and drooled.

The girl said, "His name's Gerry. He's mad."

"What's he mad at?" the man asked. He was looking at the baby.

"Everything," said the girl. "Everything and everybody."

"Where'd he come from?"

I said, "Hey, what is this?" but nobody paid any attention. The man kept asking questions at the baby and the girl kept answering. Craziest thing I ever saw.

"He ran away from a state school," the girl said. "They fed him enough, but no one bleshed with him."

That's what she said—"bleshed."

I opened the door then and cold air hooted in. "You louse," I said to the man, "you're from the school."

"Close the door, Janie," said the man. The girl at the easel didn't move, but the door banged shut behind me. I tried to open it and it wouldn't move. I let out a howl, yanking at it.

"I think you ought to stand in the corner," said the man. "Stand him in the corner, Janie."

Janie looked at me. One of the three-legged stools sailed across to me. It hung in midair and turned on its side. It nudged me with its flat seat. I jumped back and it came after me. I dodged to the side, and that was the corner. The stool came on. I tried to bat it down and just hurt my hand. I ducked and it went lower than I did. I put one hand on it and tried to vault over it, but it just fell and so did I. I got up again and stood in the corner, trembling. The stool turned right side up and sank to the floor in front of me.

The man said, "Thank you, Janie." He turned to me. "Stand there and be quiet, you. I'll get to you later. You shouldn'ta kicked up all that fuss." And then, to the baby, he said, "He got anything we need?"

And again it was the little girl who answered. She said, "Sure. He's the one."

"Well," said the man. "What do you know!" He came over. "Gerry, you can live here. I don't come from the school. I'll never turn you in."

"Yeah, huh?"

"He hates you," said Janie.

"What am I supposed to do about that?" he wanted to know.

Janie turned her head to look into the bassinet. "Feed him." The man nodded and began fiddling around the fire.

Meanwhile, the little Negro girl had been standing in the one spot with her big eyes right out on her cheekbones, looking at me. Janie went back to her painting and the baby just lay there same as always, so I stared right back at the little Negro girl. I snapped, "What the devil are you gawking at?"

She grinned at me. "Gerry ho-ho," she said, and disappeared. I mean she really disappeared, went out like a light, leaving her clothes where she had been. Her little dress billowed in the air and fell in a heap where she had been, and that was that. She was gone.

"Gerry hee-hee," I heard. I looked up, and there she was, stark naked, wedged in a space where a little outcropping on the rock wall stuck out just below the ceiling. The second I saw her she disappeared again.

"Gerry ho-ho," she said. Now she was on top of the row of boxes they used as storage shelves, over on the other side of the room.

"Gerry hee-hee!" Now she was under the table. "Gerry ho-ho!" This time she was right in the corner with me, crowding me.

I yelped and tried to get out of the way and bumped the stool. I was afraid of it, so I shrank back again and the little girl was gone.

The man glanced over his shoulder from where he was working at the fire. "Cut it out, you kids," he said.

There was a silence, and then the girl came slowly out from the bottom row of shelves. She walked across to her dress and put it on.

"How did you do that?" I wanted to know.

"Ho-ho," she said.

Janie said, "It's easy. She's really twins."

"Oh," I said. Then another girl, exactly the same, came from somewhere in the shadows and stood beside the first. They were

identical. They stood side by side and stared at me. This time I let them stare.

"That's Bonnie and Beanie," said the painter. "This is Baby and that—" she indicated the man—"that's Lone. And I'm Janie."

I couldn't think of what to say, so I said, "Yeah."

Lone said, "Water, Janie." He held up a pot. I heard water trickling, but didn't see anything. "That's enough," he said, and hung the pot on a crane. He picked up a cracked china plate and brought it over to me. It was full of stew with great big lumps of meat in it, and thick gravy and dumplings and carrots. "Here, Gerry. Sit down."

I looked at the stool. "On that?"

"Sure."

"Not me," I said. I took the plate and hunkered down against the wall.

"Hey," he said after a time. "Take it easy. We've all had chow. No one's going to snatch it away from you. Slow down!"

I ate even faster than before. I was almost finished when I threw it all up. Then for some reason my head hit the edge of the stool. I dropped the plate and spoon and slumped there. I felt real bad.

Lone came over and looked at me. "Sorry, kid," he said. "Clean up, will you, Janie?"

Right in front of my eyes, the mess on the floor disappeared. I didn't care about that or anything else just then. I felt the man's hand on the side of my neck. Then he tousled my hair.

"Beanie, get him a blanket. Let's all go to sleep. He ought to rest a while."

I felt the blanket go around me, and I think I was asleep before he put me down.

I don't know how much later it was when I woke up. I didn't know where I was and that scared me. I raised my head and saw the dull glow of the embers in the fireplace. Lone was stretched out on it in his clothes. Janie's easel stood in the reddish blackness like some great preying insect. I saw the baby's head pop up out of the bassinet, but I couldn't tell whether he was looking straight at me or away. Janie was lying on the floor near the door and the twins were on the old table. Nothing moved except the baby's head, bobbing a little.

I got to my feet and looked around the room. Just a room, only

the one door. I tiptoed toward it. When I passed Janie, she opened her eyes.

"What's the matter?" she whispered.

"None of your business," I told her. I went to the door as if I didn't care, but I watched her. She didn't do anything. The door was as solid tight closed as when I'd tried it before.

I went back to Janie. She just looked up at me. She wasn't scared. I told her, "I got to go to the john."

"Oh," she said. "Why'n't you say so?"

Suddenly I grunted and grabbed my guts. The feeling I had I can't begin to talk about. I acted as if it was a pain, but it wasn't. It was like nothing else that ever happened to me before.

"Okay," Janie said. "Go on back to bed."

"But I got to—"

"You got to what?"

"Nothing." It was true. I didn't have to go no place.

"Next time tell me right away. I don't mind."

I didn't say anything. I went back to my blanket.

"That's all?" said Stern. I lay on the couch and looked up at the gray ceiling. He asked, "How old are you?"

"Fifteen," I said dreamily. He waited until, for me, the gray ceiling acquired walls and a floor, a rug and lamps and a desk and a chair with Stern in it. I sat up and held my head a second, and then I looked at him. He was fooling with his pipe and looking at me. "What did you do to me?"

"I told you. I don't do anything here. You do it."

"You hypnotized me."

"I did not." His voice was quiet, but he really meant it.

"What was all that, then? It was . . . it was like it was happening for real all over again."

"Feel anything?"

"Everything." I shuddered. "Every damn thing. What was it?"

"Anyone doing it feels better afterward. You can go over it all again now any time you want to, and every time you do, the hurt in it will be less. You'll see."

It was the first thing to amaze me in years. I chewed on it and then asked, "If I did it by myself, how come it never happened before?"

"It needs someone to listen."

"Listen? Was I talking?"

"A blue streak."

"Everything that happened?"

"How can I know? I wasn't there. You were."

"You don't believe it happened, do you? Those disappearing kids and the footstool and all?"

He shrugged. "I'm not in the business of believing or not believing. Was it real to you?"

"Oh, hell, yes!"

"Well, then, that's all that matters. Is that where you live, with those people?"

I bit off a fingernail that had been bothering me. "Not for a long time. Not since Baby was three." I looked at him. "You remind me of Lone."

"Why?"

"I don't know. No, you don't," I added suddenly. "I don't know what made me say that." I lay down abruptly.

The ceiling was gray and the lamps were dim. I heard the pipe-stem click against his teeth. I lay there for a long time.

"Nothing happens," I told him.

"What did you expect to happen?"

"Like before."

"There's something there that wants out. Just let it come."

It was as if there was a revolving drum in my head, and on it were photographed the places and things and people I was after. And it was as if the drum was spinning very fast, so fast I couldn't tell one picture from another. I made it stop, and it stopped at a blank segment. I spun it again, and stopped it again.

"Nothing happens," I said.

"Baby is three," he repeated.

"Oh," I said. "That." I closed my eyes.

That might be it. Might, sight, night, light. I might have the sight of a light in the night. Maybe the baby. Maybe the sight of the baby at night because of the light . . .

There was night after night when I lay on that blanket, and a lot of nights I didn't. Something was going on all the time in Lone's house. Sometimes I slept in the daytime. I guess the only time everybody slept at once was when someone was sick, like me the first time I arrived there. It was always sort of dark in the room, the same night and day, the fire going, the two old bulbs *hanging*

yellow by their wires from the battery. When they got too dim, Janie fixed the battery and they got bright again.

Janie did everything that needed doing, whatever no one else felt like doing. Everybody else did things, too. Lone was out a lot. Sometimes he used the twins to help him, but you never missed them, because they'd be here and gone and back again *bing!* like that. And Baby, he just stayed in his bassinet.

I did things myself. I cut wood for the fire and I put up more shelves, and then I'd go swimming with Janie and the twins sometimes. And I talked to Lone. I didn't do a thing that the others couldn't do, but they all did things I couldn't do. I was mad, mad all the time about that. But I wouldn't of known what to do with myself if I wasn't mad all the time about something or other. It didn't keep us from bleshing. Bleshing, that was Janie's word. She said Baby told it to her. She said it meant everyone all together being something, even if they all did different things. Two arms, two legs, one body, one head, all working together, although a head can't walk and arms can't think. Lone said maybe it was a mixture of "blending" and "meshing," but I don't think he believed that himself. It was a lot more than that.

Baby talked all the time. He was like a broadcasting station that runs twenty-four hours a day, and you can get what it's sending any time you tune in, but it'll keep sending whether you tune in or not. When I say he talked, I don't mean exactly that. He semaphored mostly. You'd think those wandering, vague movements of his hands and arms and legs and head were meaningless, but they weren't. It was semaphore, only instead of a symbol for a sound, or such like, the movements were whole thoughts.

I mean spread the left hand and shake the right high up, and thump with the left heel, and it means, "Anyone who thinks a starling is a pest just don't know anything about how a starling thinks" or something like that.

Lone couldn't read the stuff and neither could I. The twins could, but they didn't give a damn. Janie used to watch him all the time. He always knew what you meant if you wanted to ask him something, and he'd tell Janie and she'd say what it was. Part of it, anyway. Nobody could get it all, not even Janie. Lone once told me that all babies know that semaphore. But when nobody receives it, they quit doing it and pretty soon they forget. They *almost* forget. There's always some left. That's why certain gestures are funny the world over, and certain others make you mad. But like every-



thing else Lone said, I don't know whether he believed it or not.

All I know is Janie would sit there and paint her pictures and watch Baby, and sometimes she'd bust out laughing, and sometimes she'd get the twins and make them watch and they'd laugh, too, or they'd wait till he was finished what he was saying and then they'd creep off to a corner and whisper to each other about it. Baby never grew any. Janie did, and the twins, and so did I, but not Baby. He just lay there.

Janie kept his stomach full and cleaned him up every two or three days. He didn't cry and he didn't make any trouble. No one ever went near him.

Janie showed every picture she painted to Baby, before she cleaned the boards and painted new ones. She had to clean them because she only had three of them. It was a good thing, too, because I'd hate to think what that place would of been like if she'd kept them all; she did four or five a day. Lone and the twins were kept hopping getting turpentine for her. She could shift the paints back into the little pots on her easel without any trouble, just by looking at the picture one color at a time, but turps was something else again. She told me that Baby remembered all her pictures and that's why she didn't have to keep them. They were all pictures of machines and gear-trains and mechanical linkages and what looked like electric circuits and things like that. I never thought too much about them.

I went out with Lone to get some turpentine and a couple of picnic hams, one time. We went through the woods to the railroad track and down a couple of miles to where we could see the glow of a town. Then the woods again, and some alleys, and a back street.

Lone was like always, walking along, thinking, thinking.

We came to a hardware store and he went up and looked at the lock and came back to where I was waiting, shaking his head. Then we found a general store. Lone grunted and we went and stood in the shadows by the door. I looked in.

All of a sudden, Beanie was in there, naked like she always was when she traveled like that. She came and opened the door from the inside. We went in and Lone closed it and locked it.

"Get along home, Beanie," he said, "before you catch your death."

She grinned at me and said, "Ho-ho," and disappeared.

We found a pair of fine hams and a two-gallon can of turpentine.

I took a bright yellow ballpoint pen and Lone cuffed me and made me put it back.

"We only take what we need," he told me.

After we left, Beanie came back and locked the door and went home again. I only went with Lone a few times, when he had more to get than he could carry easily.

I was there about three years. That's all I can remember about it. Lone was there or he was out, and you could hardly tell the difference. The twins were with each other most of the time. I got to like Janie a lot, but we never talked much. Baby talked all the time, only I don't know what about.

We were all busy and we blessed.

I sat up on the couch suddenly.

Stern said, "What's the matter?"

"Nothing's the matter. This isn't getting me any place."

"You said that when you'd barely started. Do you think you've accomplished anything since then?"

"Oh, yeah, but—"

"Then how can you be sure you're right this time?" When I didn't say anything, he asked me, "Didn't you like this last stretch?"

I said angrily, "I didn't like or not like. It didn't mean nothing. It was just—just talk."

"So what was the difference between this last session and what happened before?"

"My gosh, plenty! The first one, I felt everything. It was all really happening to me. But this time—nothing."

"Why do you suppose that was?"

"I don't know. You tell me."

"Suppose," he said thoughtfully, "that there was some episode so unpleasant to you that you wouldn't dare relive it."

"Unpleasant? You think freezing to death isn't unpleasant?"

"There are all kinds of unpleasantness. Sometimes the very thing you're looking for—the thing that'll clear up your trouble—is so revolting to you that you won't go near it. Or you try to hide it. Wait," he said suddenly, "maybe 'revolting' and 'unpleasant' are inaccurate words to use. It might be something very desirable to you. It's just that you don't want to get straightened out."

"I want to get straightened out."

He waited as if he had to clear something up in his mind, and

then said, "There's something in that 'Baby is three' phrase that bounces you away. Why is that?"

"Damn if I know."

"Who said it?"

"I dunno . . . uh . . ."

He grinned. "Uh?"

I grinned back at him. "I said it."

"Okay. When?"

I quit grinning. He leaned forward, then got up.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I didn't think anyone could be that mad." I didn't say anything. He went over to his desk. "You don't want to go on any more, do you?"

"No."

"Suppose I told you you want to quit because you're right on the very edge of finding out what you want to know?"

"Why don't you tell me and see what I do?"

He just shook his head. "I'm not telling you anything. Go on, leave if you want to. I'll give you back your change."

"How many people quit just when they're on top of the answer?"

"Quite a few."

"Well, I ain't going to." I lay down.

He didn't laugh and he didn't say, "Good," and he didn't make any fuss about it. He just picked up his phone and said, "Cancel everything for this afternoon," and went back to his chair, up there out of my sight.

It was very quiet in there. He had the place soundproofed.

I said, "Why do you suppose Lone let me live there so long when I couldn't do any of the things that the other kids could?"

"Maybe you could."

"Oh, no," I said positively. "I used to try. I was strong for a kid my age and I knew how to keep my mouth shut, but aside from those two things I don't think I was any different from any kid. I don't think I'm any different right now, except what difference there might be from living with Lone and his bunch."

"Has this anything to do with 'Baby is three'?"

I looked up at the gray ceiling. "Baby is three. Baby is three. I went up to a big house with a winding drive that ran under a sort of theater-marquee thing. Baby is three. Baby . . ."

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-three," I said, and the next thing you know I was up off that couch like it was hot, and heading for the door.

"Don't be foolish," Stern said. "Want me to waste a whole afternoon?"

"What's that to me? I'm paying for it."

"All right, it's up to you."

I went back. "I don't like any part of this," I said.

"Good. We're getting warm then."

"What made me say 'Thirty-three'? I ain't thirty-three. I'm fifteen. And another thing . . ."

"Yes?"

"It's about that 'Baby is three.' It's me saying it, all right. But when I think about it—it's not my voice."

"Like thirty-three's not your age?"

"Yeah," I whispered.

"Gerry," he said warmly, "there's nothing to be afraid of."

I realized I was breathing too hard. I pulled myself together. I said, "I don't like remembering saying things in somebody else's voice."

"Look," he told me. "This head-shrinking business, as you called it a while back, isn't what most people think. When I go with you into the world of your mind—or when you go yourself, for that matter—what we find isn't so very different from the so-called real world. It seems so at first, because the patient comes out with all sorts of fantasies and irrationalities and weird experiences. But everyone lives in that kind of world. When one of the ancients coined the phrase 'truth is stranger than fiction,' he was talking about that.

"Everywhere we go, everything we do, we're surrounded by symbols, by things so familiar we don't ever look at them or don't see them if we do look. If anyone ever could report to you exactly what he saw and thought while walking ten feet down the street, you'd get the most twisted, clouded, partial picture you ever ran across. And nobody ever looks at what's around him with any kind of attention until he gets into a place like this. The fact that he's looking at past events doesn't matter; what counts is that he's seeing clearer than he ever could before, just because, for once, he's trying.

"Now—about this 'thirty-three' business. I don't think a man could get a nastier shock than to find he has someone else's mem-

ories. The ego is too important to let slide that way. But consider: all your thinking is done in code and you have the key to only about a tenth of it. So you run into a stretch of code which is abhorrent to you. Can't you see that the only way you'll find the key to it is to stop avoiding it?"

"You mean I'd started to remember with . . . with somebody else's mind?"

"It looked like that to you for a while, which means something. Let's try to find out what."

"All right." I felt sick. I felt tired. And I suddenly realized that being sick and being tired was a way of trying to get out of it.

"Baby is three," he said.

Baby is maybe. Me, three, thirty-three, me, you Kew you.

"Kew!" I yelled. Stern didn't say anything. "Look, I don't know why, but I think I know how to get to this, and this isn't the way. Do you mind if I try something else?"

"You're the doctor," he said.

I had to laugh. Then I closed my eyes.

There, through the edges of the hedges, the ledges and wedges of windows were shouldering up to the sky. The lawns were sprayed-on green, neat and clean, and all the flowers looked as if they were afraid to let their petals break and be untidy.

I walked up the drive in my shoes. I'd had to wear shoes and my feet couldn't breathe. I didn't want to go to the house, but I had to.

I went up the steps between the big white columns and looked at the door. I wished I could see through it, but it was too white and thick. There was a window the shape of a fan over it, too high up, though, and a window on each side of it, but they were all crudded up with colored glass. I hit on the door with my hand and left dirt on it.

Nothing happened, so I hit it again. It got snatched open and a tall, thin colored woman stood there. "What you want?"

I said I had to see Miss Kew.

"Well, Miss Kew don't want to see the likes of you," she said. She talked too loud. "You got a dirty face."

I started to get mad then. I was already pretty sore about having to come here, walking around near people in the daytime and all. I said, "My face ain't got nothin' to do with it. Where's Miss Kew? Go on, find her for me."

She gasped. "You can't speak to me like that!"

I said, "I didn't want to speak to you like any way. Let me in." I started wishing for Janie. Janie could of moved her. But I had to handle it by myself. I wasn't doing so hot, either. She slammed the door before I could so much as curse at her.

So I started kicking on the door. For that, shoes are great. After a while, she snatched the door open again so sudden I almost went on my can. She had a broom with her. She screamed at me, "You get away from here, you trash, or I'll call the police!" She pushed me and I fell.

I got up off the porch floor and went for her. She stepped back and whipped me one with the broom as I went past, but anyhow I was inside now. The woman was making little shrieking noises and coming for me. I took the broom away from her and then somebody said, "Miriam!" in a voice like a grown goose.

I froze and the woman went into hysterics. "Oh, Miss Kew, look out! He'll kill us all. Get the police. Get the—"

"Miriam!" came the honk, and Miriam dried up.

There at the top of the stairs was this prune-faced woman with a dress on that had lace on it. She looked a lot older than she was, maybe because she held her mouth so tight. I guess she was about thirty-three—*thirty-three*. She had mean eyes and a small nose.

I asked, "Are you Miss Kew?"

"I am. What is the meaning of this invasion?"

"I got to talk to you, Miss Kew."

"Don't say 'got to.' Stand up straight and speak out."

The maid said, "I'll get the police."

Miss Kew turned on her. "There's time enough for that, Miriam. Now, you dirty little boy, what do you want?"

"I got to speak to you by yourself," I told her.

"Don't you let him do it, Miss Kew," cried the maid.

"Be quiet, Miriam. Little boy, I told you not to say 'Got to.' You may say whatever you have to say in front of Miriam."

"Like hell." They both gasped. I said, "Lone told me not to."

"Miss Kew, are you goin' to let him—"

"Be quiet, Miriam! Young man, you will keep a civil—" Then her eyes popped up real round. "Who did you say . . ."

"Lone said so."

"Lone." She stood there on the stairs looking at her hands. Then she said, "Miriam, that will be all." And you wouldn't know it was the same woman, the way she said it.

The maid opened her mouth, but Miss Kew stuck out a finger that might as well of had a riflesight on the end of it. The maid beat it.

"Hey," I said, "here's your broom." I was just going to throw it, but Miss Kew got to me and took it out of my hand.

"In there," she said.

She made me go ahead of her into a room as big as our swimming hole. It had books all over and leather on top of the tables, with gold flowers drawn into the corners.

She pointed to a chair. "Sit there. No, wait a moment." She went to the fireplace and got a newspaper out of a box and brought it over and unfolded it on the seat of the chair. "Now sit down."

I sat on the paper and she dragged up another chair, but didn't put no paper on it.

"What is it? Where is Lone?"

"He died," I said.

She pulled in her breath and went white. She stared at me until her eyes started to water.

"You sick?" I asked her. "Go ahead, throw up. It'll make you feel better."

"Dead? Lone is dead?"

"Yeah. There was a flash flood last week and when he went out the next night in that big wind, he walked under a old oak tree that got gullied under by the flood. The tree come down on him."

"Came down on him," she whispered. "Oh, no . . . it's not true."

"It's true, all right. We planted him this morning. We couldn't keep him around no more. He was beginning to st—"

"Stop!" She covered her face with her hands.

"What's the matter?"

"I'll be all right in a moment," she said in a low voice. She went and stood in front of the fireplace with her back to me. I took off one of my shoes while I was waiting for her to come back. But instead she talked from where she was. "Are you Lone's little boy?"

"Yeah. He told me to come to you."

"Oh, my dear child!" She came running back and I thought for a second she was going to pick me up or something, but she stopped short and wrinkled up her nose a little bit. "Wh-what's your name?"

"Gerry," I told her.

"Well, Gerry, how would you like to live with me in this nice big house and—and have new clean clothes—and everything?"

"Well, that's the whole idea. Lone told me to come to you. He said you got more dough than you know what to do with, and he said you owed him a favor."

"A favor?" That seemed to bother her.

"Well," I tried to tell her, "he said he done something for you once and you said some day you'd pay him back for it if you ever could. This is it."

"What did he tell you about that?" She'd got her honk back by then.

"Not a damn thing."

"Please don't use that word," she said, with her eyes closed. Then she opened them and nodded her head. "I promised and I'll do it. You can live here from now on. If—if you want to."

"That's got nothin' to do with it. Lone *told* me to."

"You'll be happy here," she said. She gave me an up-and-down. "I'll see to that."

"Okay. Shall I go get the other kids?"

"*Other* kids—children?"

"Yeah. This ain't for just me. For all of us—the whole gang."

"Don't say 'ain't.'" She leaned back in her chair, took out a silly little handkerchief and dabbed her lips with it, looking at me the whole time. "Now tell me about these—these other children."

"Well, there's Janie, she's eleven like me. And Bonnie and Beanie are eight, they're twins, and Baby. Baby is three."

"Baby is three," she said.

I screamed. Stern was kneeling beside the couch in a flash, holding his palms against my cheeks to hold my head still; I'd been whipping it back and forth.

"Good boy," he said. "You found it. You haven't found out *what* it is, but now you know *where* it is."

"But for sure," I said hoarsely. "Got water?"

He poured me some water out of a thermos flask. It was so cold it hurt. I lay back and rested, like I'd climbed a cliff. I said, "I can't take anything like that again."

"You want to call it quits for today?"

"What about you?"

"I'll go on as long as you want me to."



I thought about it. "I'd like to go on, but I don't want no thumping around. Not for a while yet."

"If you want another of those inaccurate analogies," Stern said, "psychiatry is like a road map. There are always a lot of different ways to get from one place to another place."

"I'll go around by the long way," I told him. "The eight-lane highway. Not that track over the hill. My clutch is slipping. Where do I turn off?"

He chuckled. I liked the sound of it. "Just past that gravel driveway."

"I been there. There's a bridge washed out."

"You've been on this whole road before," he told me. "Start at the other side of the bridge."

"I never thought of that. I figured I had to do the whole thing, every inch."

"Maybe you won't have to, maybe you will, but the bridge will be easy to cross when you've covered everything else. Maybe there's nothing of value on the bridge and maybe there is, but you can't get near it till you've looked everywhere else."

"Let's go." I was real eager, somehow.

"Mind a suggestion?"

"No."

"Just talk," he said. "Don't try to get too far into what you're saying. That first stretch, when you were eight—you really lived it. The second one, all about the kids, you just talked about. Then, the visit when you were eleven, you felt that. Now just talk again."

"All right."

He waited, then said quietly, "In the library. You told her about the other kids."

I told her about . . . and then she said . . . and something happened, and I screamed. She comforted me and I cussed at her.

But we're not thinking about that now. We're going on.

In the library. The leather, the table, and whether I'm able to do with Miss Kew what Lone said.

What Lone said was, "There's a woman lives up on the top of the hill in the Heights section, name of Kew. She'll have to take care of you. You got to get her to do that. Do everything she tells you, only stay together. Don't you ever let any one of you get away from the others, hear? Aside from that, just you keep Miss Kew happy and she'll keep you happy. Now you do what I say."

That's what Lone said. Between every word there was a link like steel cable, and the whole thing made something that couldn't be broken. Not by me it couldn't.

Miss Kew said, "Where are your sisters and the baby?"

"I'll bring 'em."

"Is it near here?"

"Near enough." She didn't say anything to that, so I got up. "I'll be back soon."

"Wait," she said. "I—really, I haven't had time to think. I mean—I've got to get things ready, you know."

I said, "You don't need to think and you are ready. So long."

From the door I heard her saying, louder and louder as I walked away, "Young man, if you're to live in this house, you'll learn to be a good deal better mannered—" and a lot more of the same.

I yelled back at her, "Okay, *okay!*" and went out.

The sun was warm and the sky was good, and pretty soon I got back to Lone's house. The fire was out and Baby stunk. Janie had knocked over her easel and was sitting on the floor by the door with her head in her hands. Bonnie and Beanie were on a stool with their arms around each other, pulled up together as close as they could get, as if it was cold in there, although it wasn't.

I hit Janie in the arm to snap her out of it. She raised her head. She had gray eyes—or maybe it was more a kind of green—but now they had a funny look about them, like water in a glass that had some milk left in the bottom of it.

I said, "What's the matter around here?"

"What's the matter with what?" she wanted to know.

"All of yez," I said.

She said, "We don't give a damn, that's all."

"Well, all right," I said, "but we got to do what Lone said. Come on."

"No." I looked at the twins. They turned their backs on me. Janie said, "They're hungry."

"Well, why not give 'em something?"

She just shrugged. I sat down. What did Lone have to go get himself squashed for?

"We can't blesh no more," said Janie. It seemed to explain everything.

"Look," I said, "I've got to be Lone now."

Janie thought about that, and Baby kicked his feet. Janie looked at him. "You can't," she said.

"I know where to get the heavy food and the turpentine," I said. "I can find that springy moss to stuff in the logs, and cut wood, and all."

But I couldn't call Bonnie and Beanie from miles away to unlock doors. I couldn't just say a word to Janie and make her get water and blow up the fire and fix the battery. I couldn't make us blesh.

We all stayed like that for a long time. Then I heard the bassinet creak. I looked up. Janie was staring into it.

"All right," she said. "Let's go."

"Who says so?"

"Baby."

"Who's running things now?" I said, mad. "Me or Baby?"

"Baby," Janie said.

I got up and went over to bust her one in the mouth, and then I stopped. If Baby could make them do what Lone wanted, then it would get done. If I started pushing them all around, it wouldn't. So I didn't say anything. Janie got up and walked out the door. The twins watched her go. Then Bonnie disappeared. Beanie picked up Bonnie's clothes and walked out. I got Baby out of the bassinet and draped him over my shoulders.

It was better when we were all outside. It was getting late in the day and the air was warm. The twins flitted in and out of the trees like a couple of flying squirrels, and Janie and I walked along like we were going swimming or something. Baby started to kick, and Janie looked at him a while and got him fed, and he was quiet again.

When we came close to town, I wanted to get everybody close together, but I was afraid to say anything. Baby must of said it instead. The twins came back to us and Janie gave them their clothes and they walked ahead of us, good as you please. I don't know how Baby did it. They sure hated to travel that way.

We didn't have no trouble except one guy we met on the street near Miss Kew's place. He stopped in his tracks and gaped at us, and Janie looked at him and made his hat go so far down over his eyes that he like to pull his neck apart getting it back up again.

What do you know, when we got to the house somebody had washed off all the dirt I'd put on the door. I had one hand on Baby's arm and one on his ankle and him draped over my neck, so I kicked the door and left some more dirt.

"There's a woman here name of Miriam," I told Janie. "She says anything, tell her to go to hell."

The door opened and there was Miriam. She took one look and jumped back six feet. We all trailed inside. Miriam got her wind and screamed, "Miss Kew! Miss Kew!"

"Go to hell," said Janie, and looked at me. I didn't know what to do. It was the first time Janie ever did anything I told her to.

Miss Kew came down the stairs. She was wearing a different dress, but it was just as stupid and had just as much lace. She opened her mouth and nothing came out, so she just left it open until something happened. Finally she said, "Dear gentle Lord preserve us!"

The twins lined up and gawked at her. Miriam sidled over to the wall and sort of slid along it, keeping away from us, until she could get to the door and close it. She said, "Miss Kew, if those are the children you said were going to live here, I quit."

Janie said, "Go to hell."

Just then, Bonnie squatted down on the rug. Miriam squawked and jumped at her. She grabbed hold of Bonnie's arm and went to snatch her up. Bonnie disappeared, leaving Miriam with one small dress and the damndest expression on her face. Beanie grinned enough to split her head in two and started to wave like mad. I looked where she was waving, and there was Bonnie, naked as a jaybird, up on the banister at the top of the stairs.

Miss Kew turned around and saw her and sat down plump on the steps. Miriam went down, too, like she'd been slugged. Beanie picked up Bonnie's dress and walked up the steps past Miss Kew and handed it over. Bonnie put it on. Miss Kew sort of lolled around and looked up. Bonnie and Beanie came back down the stairs hand in hand to where I was. Then they lined up and gaped at Miss Kew.

"What's the matter with her?" Janie asked me.

"She gets sick every once in a while."

"Let's go back home."

"No," I told her.

Miss Kew grabbed the banister and pulled herself up. She stood there hanging on to it for a while with her eyes closed. All of a sudden she stiffened herself. She looked about four inches taller. She came marching over to us.

"Gerard," she honked.

I think she was going to say something different. But she sort of checked herself and pointed. "What in heaven's name is *that*?" And she aimed her finger at me.

I didn't get it right away, so I turned around to look behind me. "What?"

"That! That!"

"Oh!" I said. "That's Baby."

I slung him down off my back and held him up for her to look at. She made a sort of moaning noise and jumped over and took him away from me. She held him out in front of her and moaned again and called him a poor little thing, and ran and put him down on a long bench thing with cushions under the colored-glass window. She bent over him and put her knuckle in her mouth and bit on it and moaned some more. Then she turned to me.

"How long has he been like this?"

I looked at Jane and she looked at me. I said, "He's always been like he is."

She made a sort of cough and ran to where Miriam was lying flaked on the floor. She slapped Miriam's face a couple of times back and forth. Miriam sat up and looked us over. She closed her eyes and shivered and sort of climbed up Miss Kew hand over hand until she was on her feet.

"Pull yourself together," said Miss Kew between her teeth. "Get a basin with some hot water and soap. Washcloth. Towels. Hurry!" She gave Miriam a big push. Miriam staggered and grabbed at the wall, and then ran out.

Miss Kew went back to Baby and hung over him, titch-titching with her lips all tight.

"Don't mess with him," I said. "There's nothin' wrong with him. We're hungry."

She gave me a look like I punched her. "Don't speak to me!"

"Look," I said, "we don't like this any more'n you do. If Lone hadn't told us to, we wouldn't never have come. We were doing all right where we were."

"Don't say 'wouldn't never,'" said Miss Kew. She looked at all of us, one by one. Then she took that silly little hunk of handkerchief and pushed it against her mouth.

"See?" I said to Janie. "All the time gettin' sick."

"Ho-ho," said Bonnie.

Miss Kew gave her a long look. "Gerard," she said in a choked

sort of voice, "I understood you to say that these children were your sisters."

"Well?"

She looked at me as if I was real stupid. "We don't have little colored girls for sisters, Gerard."

Janie said, "We do."

Miss Kew walked up and back, real fast. "We have a great deal to do," she said, talking to herself.

Miriam came in with a big oval pan and towels and stuff on her arm. She put it down on the bench thing and Miss Kew stuck the back of her hand in the water, then picked up Baby and dunked him right in it. Baby started to kick.

I stepped forward and said, "Wait a minute. Hold on now. What do you think you're doing?"

Janie said, "Shut up, Gerry. He says it's all right."

"All right? She'll drown him."

"No, she won't. Just shut up."

Working up a froth with the soap, Miss Kew smeared it on Baby and turned him over a couple of times and scrubbed at his head and like to smothered him in a big white towel. Miriam stood gawking while Miss Kew lashed up a dishcloth around him so it come out pants. When she was done, you wouldn't of known it was the same baby. And by the time Miss Kew finished with the job, she seemed to have a better hold on herself. She was breathing hard and her mouth was even tighter. She held out the baby to Miriam.

"Take this poor thing," she said, "and put him—"

But Miriam backed away. "I'm sorry, Miss Kew, but I am leaving here and I don't care."

Miss Kew got her honk out. "You can't leave me in a predicament like this! These children need help. Can't you see that for yourself?"

Miriam looked me and Janie over. She was trembling. "You ain't safe, Miss Kew. They ain't just dirty. They're crazy!"

"They're victims of neglect, and probably no worse than you or I would be if we'd been neglected. And don't say 'ain't.' Gerard!"

"What?"

"Don't say—oh, dear, we have so much to do. Gerard, if you and your—these other children are going to live here, you shall have to make a great many changes. You cannot live under this roof and behave as you have so far. Do you understand that?"

"Oh, sure. Lone said we was to do whatever you say and keep you happy."

"Will you do whatever I say?"

"That's what I just said, isn't it?"

"Gerard, you shall have to learn not to speak to me in that tone. Now, young man, if I told you to do what Miriam says, too, would you do it?"

I said to Jane, "What about that?"

"I'll ask Baby." Janie looked at Baby and Baby wobbled his hands and drooled some. She said, "It's okay."

Miss Kew said, "Gerard, I asked you a question."

"Keep your pants on," I said. "I got to find out, don't I? Yes, if that's what you want, we'll listen to Miriam, too."

Miss Kew turned to Miriam. "You hear that, Miriam?"

Miriam looked at Miss Kew and at us and shook her head. Then she held out her hands a bit to Bonnie and Beanie.

They went right to her. Each one took hold of a hand. They looked up at her and grinned. They were probably planning some sort of hellishness, but I guess they looked sort of cute. Miriam's mouth twitched and I thought for a second she was going to look human. She said, "All right, Miss Kew."

Miss Kew walked over and handed her the baby and she started upstairs with him. Miss Kew herded us along after Miriam. We all went upstairs.

They went to work on us then and for three years they never stopped.

"That was hell," I said to Stern.

"They had their work cut out."

"Yeah, I s'pose they did. So did we. Look, we were going to do exactly what Lone said. Nothing on earth could of stopped us from doing it. We were tied and bound to doing every last little thing Miss Kew said to do. But she and Miriam never seemed to understand that. I guess they felt they had to push every inch of the way. All they had to do was make us understand what they wanted, and we'd of done it. That's okay when it's something like telling me not to climb into bed with Janie.

"Miss Kew raised holy hell over that. You'd of thought I'd robbed the Crown Jewels, the way she acted. But when it's something like, 'You must behave like little ladies and gentlemen,' it just doesn't mean a thing. And two out of three orders she gave us were like that. 'Ah-ah!' she'd say. 'Language, language!' For the

longest time I didn't dig that at all. I finally asked her what the hell she meant, and then she finally came out with it. But you see what I mean."

"I certainly do," Stern said. "Did it get easier as time went on?"

"We only had real trouble twice, once about the twins and once about Baby. That one was real bad."

"What happened?"

"About the twins? Well, when we'd been there about a week or so we began to notice something that sort of stunk. Janie and me, I mean. We began to notice that we almost never got to see Bonnie and Beanie. It was like that house was two houses, one part for Miss Kew and Janie and me, and the other part for Miriam and the twins. I guess we'd have noticed it sooner if things hadn't been such a hassel at first, getting us into new clothes and making us sleep all the time at night, and all that. But here was the thing: We'd all get turned out in the side yard to play, and then along comes lunch, and the twins got herded off to eat with Miriam while we ate with Miss Kew. So Janie said, 'Why don't the twins eat with us?'

"'Miriam's taking care of them, dear,' Miss Kew says.

"Janie looked at her with those eyes. 'I know that. Let 'em eat here and I'll take care of 'em.'

"Miss Kew's mouth got all tight again and she said, 'They're little colored girls, Jane. Now eat your lunch.'

"But that didn't explain anything to Jane or me, either. I said, 'I want 'em to eat with us. Lone said we should stay together.'

"'But you *are* together,' she says. 'We all live in the same house. We all eat the same food. Now let us not discuss the matter.'

"I looked at Janie and she looked at me, and she said, 'So why can't we all do this livin' and eatin' right here?'

"Miss Kew put down her fork and looked hard. 'I have explained it to you and I have said that there will be no further discussion.'

"Well, I thought that was real nowhere. So I just rocked back my head and bellowed, 'Bonnie! Beanie!' And *bing*, there they were.

"So all hell broke loose. Miss Kew ordered them out and they wouldn't go, and Miriam come steaming in with their clothes, and she couldn't catch them, and Miss Kew got to honking at them and finally at me. She said this was too much. Well, maybe she had had a hard week, but so had we. So Miss Kew ordered us to leave.

"I went and got Baby and started out, and along came Janie and the twins. Miss Kew waited till we were all out the door and next thing you know she ran out after us. She passed us and got in front of me and made me stop. So we all stopped.



"Is this how you follow Lone's wishes?" she asked.

"I told her yes. She said she understood Lone wanted us to stay with her. And I said, 'Yeah, but he wanted us to stay together more.'

"She said come back in, we'd have a talk. Jane asked Baby and Baby said okay, so we went back. We had a compromise. We didn't eat in the dining room no more. There was a side porch, a sort of verandah thing with glass windows, with a door to the dining room and a door to the kitchen, and we all ate out there after that. Miss Kew ate by herself.

"But something funny happened because of that whole cockeyed hassel."

"What was that?" Stern asked me.

I laughed. "Miriam. She looked and sounded like always, but she started slipping us cookies between meals. You know, it took me years to figure out what all that was about. I mean it. From what I've learned about people, there seems to be two armies fightin' about race. One's fightin' to keep 'em apart, and one's fightin' to get 'em together. But I don't see why both sides are so *worried* about it! Why don't they just forget it?"

"They can't. You see, Gerry, it's necessary for people to believe they are superior in some fashion. You and Lone and the kids—you were a pretty tight unit. Didn't you feel you were a little better than all of the rest of the world?"

"Better? How could we be better?"

"Different, then."

"Well, I suppose so, but we didn't think about it. Different, yes. Better, no."

"You're a unique case," Stern said. "Now go on and tell me about the other trouble you had. About Baby."

"Baby. Yeah. Well, that was a couple of months after we moved to Miss Kew's. Things were already getting real smooth, even then. We'd learned all the 'yes, ma'am, no, ma'am' routines by then and she'd got us catching up with school—regular periods morning and afternoon, five days a week. Jane had long ago quit taking care of Baby, and the twins walked to wherever they went. That was funny. They could pop from one place to another right in front of Miss Kew's eyes and she wouldn't believe what she saw. She was too upset about them suddenly showing up bare. They quit doing it and she was happy about it. She was happy about a lot of things. It had been years since she'd seen anybody—years. She'd even had the

meters put outside the house so no one would ever have to come in. But with us there, she began to liven up. She quit wearing those old-lady dresses and began to look halfway human. She ate with us sometimes, even.

"But one fine day I woke up feeling real weird. It was like somebody had stolen something from me when I was asleep, only I didn't know what. I crawled out of my window and along the ledge into Janie's room, which I wasn't supposed to do. She was in bed. I went and woke her up. I can still see her eyes, the way they opened a little slit, still asleep, and then popped up wide. I didn't have to tell her something was wrong. She knew, and she knew what it was.

"'Baby's gone!' she said.

"We didn't care then who woke up. We pounded out of her room and down the hall and into the little room at the end where Baby slept. You wouldn't believe it. The fancy crib he had, and the white chest of drawers, and all that mess of rattles and so on, they were gone, and there was just a writing desk there. I mean it was as if Baby had never been there at all.

"We didn't say anything. We just spun around and busted into Miss Kew's bedroom. I'd never been in there but once and Jane only a few times. But forbidden or not, this was different. Miss Kew was in bed, with her hair braided. She was wide awake before we could get across the room. She pushed herself back and up until she was sitting against the headboard. She gave the two of us the cold eye.

"'What is the meaning of this?' she wanted to know.

"'Where's Baby?' I yelled at her.

"'Gerard,' she says, 'there is no need to shout.'

"Jane was a real quiet kid, but she said, 'You better tell us where he is, Miss Kew,' and it would of scared you to look at her when she said it.

"So all of a sudden Miss Kew took off the stone face and held out her hands to us. 'Children,' she said, 'I'm sorry. I really am sorry. But I've just done what is best. I've sent Baby away. He's gone to live with some children like him. We could never make him really happy here. You know that.'

"Jane said, 'He never told us he wasn't happy.'

"Miss Kew brought out a hollow kind of laugh. 'As if he could talk, the poor little thing!'

"'You better get him back here,' I said. 'You don't know what you're fooling with. I told you we wasn't ever to break up.'

"She was getting mad, but she held on to herself. 'I'll try to ex-

plain it to you, dear,' she said. 'You and Jane here and even the twins are all normal, healthy children and you'll grow up to be fine men and women. But poor Baby's—different. He's not going to grow very much more, and he'll never walk and play like other children.'

"That doesn't matter,' Jane said. 'You had no call to send him away.'

"And I said, 'Yeah. You better bring him back, but quick.'

"Then she started to jump salty. 'Among the many things I have taught you is, I am sure, not to dictate to your elders. Now, then, you run along and get dressed for breakfast, and we'll say no more about this.'

"I told her, nice as I could, 'Miss Kew, you're going to wish you brought him back right now. But you're going to bring him back soon. Or else.'

"So then she got up out of her bed and ran us out of the room."

I was quiet a while, and Stern asked, "What happened?"

"Oh," I said, "she brought him back." I laughed suddenly. "I guess it's funny now, when you come to think of it. Nearly three months of us getting bossed around, and her ruling the roost, and then all of a sudden we lay down the law. We'd tried our best to be good according to her ideas, but, by God, that time she went too far. She got the treatment from the second she slammed her door on us. She had a big china pot under her bed, and it rose up in the air and smashed through her dresser mirror. Then one of the drawers in the dresser slid open and a glove come out of it and smacked her face.

"She went to jump back on the bed and a whole section of plaster fell off the ceiling onto the bed. The water turned on in her little bathroom and the plug went in, and just about the time it began to overflow, all her clothes fell off their hooks. She went to run out of the room, but the door was stuck, and when she yanked on the handle it opened real quick and she spread out on the floor. The door slammed shut again and more plaster come down on her. Then we went back in and stood looking at her. She was crying. I hadn't known till then that she could.

"'You going to get Baby back here?' I asked her.

"She just lay there and cried. After a while she looked up at us. It was real pathetic. We helped her up and got her to a chair. She just looked at us for a while, and at the mirror, and at the busted ceiling, and then she whispered, 'What happened? What happened?'

"'You took Baby away,' I said. 'That's what.'

"So she jumped up and said real low, real scared, but real strong: 'Something struck the house. An airplane. Perhaps there was an earthquake. We'll talk about Baby after breakfast.'

"I said, 'Give her more, Janie.'

"A big gob of water hit her on the face and chest and made her nightgown stick to her, which was the kind of thing that upset her most. Her braids stood straight up in the air, more and more, till they dragged her standing straight up. She opened her mouth to yell and the powder puff off the dresser rammed into it. She clawed it out.

"'What are you doing? What are you doing?' she says, crying again.

"Janie just looked at her, and put her hands behind her, real smug. 'We haven't done anything,' she said.

"And I said, 'Not yet we haven't. You going to get Baby back?'

"And she screamed at us, 'Stop it! Stop it! Stop talking about that mongoloid idiot! It's no good to anyone, not even itself! How could I ever make believe it's mine?'

"I said, 'Get rats, Janie.'

"There was a scuttling sound along the baseboard. Miss Kew covered her face with her hands and sank down on the chair. 'Not rats,' she said. 'There are no rats here.' Then something squeaked and she went all to pieces. Did you ever see anyone really go to pieces?'

"Yes," Stern said.

"I was about as mad as I could get," I said, "but that was almost too much for me. Still, she shouldn't have sent Baby away. It took a couple of hours for her to get straightened out enough so she could use the phone, but we had Baby back before lunch time." I laughed.

"What's funny?'

"She never seemed able to rightly remember what had happened to her. About three weeks later I heard her talking to Miriam about it. She said it was the house settling suddenly. She said it was a good thing she'd sent Baby out for that medical checkup—the poor little thing might have been hurt. She really believed it, I think."

"She probably did. That's fairly common. We don't believe anything we don't want to believe."

"How much of this do you believe?" I asked him suddenly.

"I told you before—it doesn't matter. I don't want to believe or disbelieve it."

"You haven't asked me how much of it I believe."

"I don't have to. You'll make up your own mind about that."

"Are you a *good* psychotherapist?"

"I think so," he said. "Whom did you kill?"

The question caught me absolutely off guard. "Miss Kew," I said. Then I started to cuss and swear. "I didn't mean to tell you that."

"Don't worry about it," he said. "What did you do it for?"

"That's what I came here to find out."

"You must have really hated her."

I started to cry. Fifteen years old and crying like that!

He gave me time to get it all out. The first part of it came out in noises, grunts and squeaks that hurt my throat. Much more than you'd think came out when my nose started to run. And finally—words.

"Do you know where I came from? The earliest thing I can remember is a punch in the mouth. I can still see it coming, a fist as big as my head. Because I was crying. I been afraid to cry ever since. I was crying because I was hungry. Cold, maybe. Both. After that, big dormitories, and whoever could steal the most got the most. Get the hell kicked out of you if you're bad, get a big reward if you're good. Big reward: they let you alone. Try to live like that. Try to live so the biggest, most wonderful thing in the whole damn world is just to have 'em let you alone!

"So a spell with Lone and the kids. Something wonderful: you belong. It never happened before. Two yellow bulbs and a fireplace and they light up the world. It's all there is and all there ever has to be.

"Then the big change: clean clothes, cooked food, five hours a day school; Columbus and King Arthur and a 1925 book on Civics that explains about septic tanks. Over it all a great big square-cut lump of ice, and you watch it melting and the corners curve, and you know it's because of you, Miss Kew . . . hell, she had too much control over herself ever to slobber over us, but it was there, that feeling. Lone took care of us because it was part of the way he lived. Miss Kew took care of us, and none of it was the way she lived. It was something she wanted to do.

"She had a weird idea of 'right' and a wrong idea of 'wrong,' but she stuck to them, tried to make her ideas do us good. When she couldn't understand, she figured it was her own failure . . . and there was an almighty lot she didn't understand and never could.

What went right was our success. What went wrong was her mistake. That last year, that was . . . oh, good."

"So?"

"So I killed her. Listen," I said. I felt I had to talk fast. I wasn't short of time, but I had to get rid of it. "I'll tell you all I know about it. The one day before I killed her. I woke up in the morning and the sheets crackly clean under me, the sunlight coming in through white curtains and bright red-and-blue drapes. There's a closet full of my clothes—mine, you see; I never had anything that was really mine before—and downstairs Miriam clinking around with breakfast and the twins laughing. Laughing with *her*, mind you, not just with each other like they always did before.

"In the next room, Janie moving around, singing, and when I see her, I know her face will shine inside and out. I get up. There's *hot* water and the toothpaste bites my tongue. The clothes fit me and I go downstairs and they're all there and I'm glad to see them and they're glad to see me, and we no sooner get set around the table when Miss Kew comes down and everyone calls out to her at once.

"And the morning goes by like that, school with a recess, there in the big long living room. The twins with the ends of their tongues stuck out, drawing the alphabet instead of writing it, and then Jane, when it's time, painting a picture, a real picture of a cow with trees and a yellow fence that goes off into the distance. Here I am lost between the two parts of a quadratic equation, and Miss Kew bending close to help me, and I smell the sachet she has on her clothes. I hold up my head to smell it better, and far away I hear the shuffle and klunk of filled pots going on the stove back in the kitchen.

"And the afternoon goes by like that, more school and some study and boiling out into the yard, laughing. The twins chasing each other, running on their two feet to get where they want to go; Jane dappling the leaves in her picture, trying to get it just the way Miss Kew says it ought to be. And Baby, he's got a big play-pen. He don't move around much any more, he just watches and dribbles some, and gets packed full of food and kept as clean as a new sheet of tinfoil.

"And supper, and the evening, and Miss Kew reading to us, changing her voice every time someone else talks in the story, reading fast and whispery when it embarrasses her, but reading every word all the same.

"And I had to go and kill her. And that's all."

\* \* \*

"You haven't said why," Stern said.

"What are you—stupid?" I yelled.

Stern didn't say anything. I turned on my belly on the couch and propped up my chin in my hands and looked at him. You never could tell what was going on with him, but I got the idea that he was puzzled.

"I said why," I told him.

"Not to me."

I suddenly understood that I was asking too much of him. I said slowly, "We all woke up at the same time. We all did what somebody else wanted. We lived through a day someone else's way, thinking someone else's thoughts, saying other people's words. Jane painted someone else's pictures, Baby didn't talk to anyone, and we were all happy with it. Now do you see?"

"Not yet."

"God!" I said. I thought for a while. "We didn't blesh."

"Blesh? Oh. But you didn't after Lone died, either."

"That was different. That was like a car running out of gas, but the car's there—there's nothing wrong with it. It's just waiting. But after Miss Kew got done with us, the car was taken all to pieces, see?"

It was his turn to think a while. Finally he said, "The mind makes us do funny things. Some of them seem completely reasonless, wrong, insane. But the cornerstone of the work we're doing is this: there's a chain of solid, unassailable logic in the things we do. Dig deep enough and you find cause and effect as clearly in this field as you do in any other. I said *logic*, mind; I didn't say 'correctness' or 'rightness' or 'justice' or anything of the sort. Logic and truth are two very different things, but they often look the same to the mind that's performing the logic.

"When that mind is submerged, working at cross-purposes with the surface mind, then you're all confused. Now in your case, I can see the thing you're pointing at—that in order to preserve or to rebuild that peculiar bond between you kids, you had to get rid of Miss Kew. But I don't see the logic. I don't see that regaining that 'bleshing' was worth destroying this new-found security which you admit was enjoyable."

I said, desperately, "Maybe it wasn't worth destroying it."

Stern leaned forward and pointed his pipe at me. "It was because it made you do what you did. After the fact, maybe things look dif-

ferent. But when you were moved to do it, the important thing was to destroy Miss Kew and regain this thing you'd had before. I don't see why and neither do you."

"How are we going to find out?"

"Well, let's get right to the most unpleasant part, if you're up to it."

I lay down. "I'm ready."

"All right. Tell me everything that happened just before you killed her."

I fumbled through that last day, trying to taste the food, hear the voices. A thing came and went and came again: it was the crisp feeling of the sheets. I thrust it away because it was at the beginning of that day, but it came back again, and I realized it was at the end, instead.

I said, "What I just told you, all that about the children doing things other people's way instead of their own, and Baby not talking, and everyone happy about it, and finally that I had to kill Miss Kew. It took a long time to get to that, and a long time to start doing it. I guess I lay in bed and thought for four hours before I got up again. It was dark and quiet. I went out of the room and down the hall and into Miss Kew's bedroom and killed her."

"How?"

"That's all there is!" I shouted, as loud as I could. Then I quieted down. "It was awful dark . . . it still is. I don't know. I don't want to know. She did love us. I know she did. But I had to kill her."

"All right, all right," Stern said. "I guess there's no need to get too gruesome about this. You're—"

"What?"

"You're quite strong for your age, aren't you, Gerard?"

"I guess so. Strong enough, anyway."

"Yes," he said.

"I still don't see that logic you were talking about." I began to hammer on the couch with my fist, hard, once for each word: "Why—did—I—have—to—go—and—do—that?"

"Cut that out," he said. "You'll hurt yourself."

"I ought to get hurt," I said.

"Ah?" said Stern.

I got up and went to the desk and got some water. "What am I going to do?"



"Tell me what you did after you killed her, right up until the time you came here."

"Not much," I said. "It was only last night. I went back to my room, sort of numb. I put all my clothes on except my shoes. I carried them. I went out. Walked a long time, trying to think, went to the post office when it opened. Miss Kew used to let me go for the mail sometimes. Found this check waiting for me for the contest. Cashed it at the bank, opened an account, took eleven hundred bucks. Got the idea of getting some help from a psychiatrist, spent most of the day looking for one, came here. That's all."

"Didn't you have any trouble cashing the check?"

"I never have any trouble making people do what I want them to do."

He gave a surprised grunt.

"I know what you're thinking—I couldn't make Miss Kew do what I wanted."

"That's part of it," he admitted.

"If I had of done that," I told him, "she wouldn't of been Miss Kew any more. Now the banker—all I made him do was be a banker."

I looked at him and suddenly realized why he fooled with that pipe all the time. It was so he could look down at it and you wouldn't be able to see his eyes.

"You killed her," he said—and I knew he was changing the subject—"and destroyed something that was valuable to you. It must have been less valuable to you than the chance to rebuild this thing you used to have with the other kids. And you're not sure of the value of that." He looked up. "Does that describe your main trouble?"

"Just about."

"You know the single thing that makes people kill?" When I didn't answer, he said, "Survival. To save the self or something which identifies with the self. And in this case that doesn't apply, because your setup with Miss Kew had far more survival value for you, singly and as a group, than the other."

"So maybe I just didn't have a good enough reason to kill her."

"You had, because you did it. We just haven't located it yet. I mean we have the reason, but we don't know why it was important enough. The answer is somewhere in you."

"Where?"

He got up and walked some. "We have a pretty consecutive life-story here. There's fantasy mixed with the fact, of course, and

there are areas in which we have no detailed information, but we have a beginning and a middle and an end. Now, I can't say for sure, but the answer may be in that bridge you refused to cross a while back. Remember?"

I remembered, all right. I said, "Why that? Why can't we try something else?"

He quietly pointed out, "Because you just said it. Why are you shying away from it?"

"Don't go making big ones out of little ones," I said. Sometimes the guy annoyed me. "That bothers me. I don't know why, but it does."

"Something's lying hidden in there, and you're bothering *it* so it's fighting back. Anything that fights to stay concealed is very possibly the thing we're after. Your trouble is concealed, isn't it?"

"Well, yes," I said, and I felt that sickness and faintness again, and again I pushed it away. Suddenly I wasn't going to be stopped any more. "Let's go get it." I lay down.

He let me watch the ceiling and listen to silence for a while, and then he said, "You're in the library. You've just met Miss Kew. She's talking to you; you're telling her about the children."

I lay very still. Nothing happened. Yes, it did; I got tense inside, all over, from the bones out, more and more. When it got as bad as it could, still nothing happened.

I heard him get up and cross the room to the desk. He fumbled there for a while; things clicked and hummed. Suddenly I heard my own voice:

*"Well, there's Jane, she's eleven like me. And Bonnie and Beanie are eight, they're twins, and Baby. Baby is three."*

*And the sound of my own scream—*

And nothingness.

Sputtering up out of the darkness, I came flailing out with my fists. Strong hands caught my wrists. They didn't check my arms; they just grabbed and rode. I opened my eyes. I was soaking wet. The thermos lay on its side on the rug. Stern was crouched beside me, holding my wrists. I quit struggling.

"What happened?"

He let me go and stood back watchfully. "Lord," he said, "what a charge!"

I held my head and moaned. He threw me a hand-towel and I used it. "What hit me?"

"I've had you on tape the whole time," he explained. "When you

wouldn't get into that recollection, I tried to nudge you into it by using your own voice as you recounted it before. It works wonders sometimes."

"It worked wonders this time," I growled. "I think I blew a fuse."

"In effect, you did. You were on the trembling verge of going into the thing you don't want to remember, and you let yourself go unconscious rather than do it."

"What are you so pleased about?"

"Last-ditch defense," he said tersely. "We've got it now. Just one more try."

"Now hold on. The last-ditch defense is that I drop dead."

"You won't. You've contained this episode in your subconscious mind for a long time and it hasn't hurt you."

"Hasn't it?"

"Not in terms of killing you."

"How do you know it won't when we drag it out?"

"You'll see."

I looked up at him sideways. Somehow he struck me as knowing what he was doing.

"You know a lot more about yourself now than you did at the time," he explained softly. "You can apply insight. You can evaluate it as it comes up. Maybe not completely, but enough to protect yourself. Don't worry. Trust me. I can stop it if it gets too bad. Now just relax. Look at the ceiling. Be aware of your toes. Don't look at your toes. Look straight up. Your toes, your big toes. Don't move your toes, but feel them. Count outward from your big toes, one count for each toe. One, two, three. Feel that third toe. Feel the toe, feel it, feel it go limp, go limp, go limp. The toe next to it on both sides gets limp. So limp because your toes are limp, all of your toes are limp—"

"What are you doing?" I shouted at him.

He said in the same silky voice, "You trust me and so do your toes trust me. They're all limp because you trust me. You—"

"You're trying to hypnotize me. I'm not going to let you do that."

"You're going to hypnotize yourself. You do everything yourself. I just point the way. I point your toes to the path. Just point your toes. No one can make you go anywhere you don't want to go, but you want to go where your toes are pointed, where your toes are limp, where your . . ."

On and on and on. And where was the dangling gold ornament, the light in the eyes, the mystic passes? He wasn't even sitting where I could see him. Where was the talk about how sleepy I was

supposed to be? Well, he knew I wasn't sleepy and didn't want to be sleepy. I just wanted to be toes. I just wanted to be limp, just a limp toe. No brains in a toe, a toe to go, go, go eleven times, eleven, I'm eleven . . .

I split in two, and it was all right, the part that watched the part that went back to the library, and Miss Kew leaning toward me, but not too near, me with the newspaper crackling under me on the library chair, me with one shoe off and my limp toes dangling . . . and I felt a mild surprise at this. For this was hypnosis, but I was quite conscious, quite altogether there on the couch with Stern droning away at me, quite able to roll over and sit up and talk to him and walk out if I wanted to, but I just didn't want to. Oh, if this was what hypnosis was like, I was all for it. I'd work at this. This was all right.

There on the table I'm able to see that the gold will unfold on the leather, and whether I'm able to stay by the table with you, with Miss Kew, with Miss Kew . . .

". . . and Bonnie and Beanie are eight, they're twins, and Baby. Baby is three."

"Baby is three," she said.

There was a pressure, a stretching apart, and a . . . a breakage. And with a tearing agony and a burst of triumph that drowned the pain, it was done.

And this is what was inside. All in one flash, but all this.

Baby is three? My baby would be three if there were a baby, which there never was . . .

Lone, I'm open to you. Open, is this open enough?

His irises like wheels. I'm sure they spin, but I never catch them at it. The probe that passes invisibly from his brain, through his eyes, into mine. Does he know what it means to me? Does he care? He doesn't care, he doesn't know; he empties me and I fill as he directs me to; he drinks and waits and drinks again and never looks at the cup.

When I saw him first, I was dancing in the wind, in the wood, in the wild, and I spun about and he stood there in the leafy shadows, watching me. I hated him for it. It was not my wood, not my gold-spangled fern-tangled glen. But it was my dancing that he took, freezing it forever by being there. I hated him for it, hated the way he looked, the way he stood, ankle-deep in the kind wet ferns, looking like a tree with roots for feet and clothes the color of earth.

As I stopped he moved, and then he was just a man, a great ape-shouldered, dirty animal of a man, and all my hate was fear suddenly and I was just as frozen.

He knew what he had done and he didn't care. Dancing . . . never to dance again, because never would I know the woods were free of eyes, free of tall, uncaring, dirty animal men. Summer days with the clothes choking me, winter nights with the precious decencies round and about me like a shroud, and never to dance again, never to remember dancing without remembering the shock of knowing he had seen me. How I hated him! Oh, how I hated him!

To dance alone where no one knew, that was the single thing I hid to myself when I was known as Miss Kew, that Victorian, older than her years, later than her time; correct and starched, lace and linen and lonely. Now indeed I would be all they said, through and through, forever and ever, because he had robbed me of the one thing I dared to keep secret.

He came out into the sun and walked to me, holding his great head a little on one side. I stood where I was, frozen inwardly and outwardly and altogether by the core of anger and the layer of fear. My arm was still out, my waist still bent from my dance, and when he stopped, I breathed again because by then I had to.

He said, "You read books?"

I couldn't bear to have him near me, but I couldn't move. He put out his hard hand and touched my jaw, turned my head up until I had to look into his face. I cringed away from him, but my face would not leave his hand, though he was not holding it, just lifting it. "You got to read some books for me. I got no time to find them."

I asked him, "Who are you?"

"Lone," he said. "You going to read books for me?"

"No. Let me go, let me go!"

He laughed at me. He wasn't holding me.

"What books?" I cried.

He thumped my face, not very hard. It made me look up a bit more. He dropped his hand away. His eyes, the irises were going to spin . . .

"Open up in there," he said. "Open way up and let me see."

There were books in my head, and he was looking at the titles . . . he was not looking at the titles, for he couldn't read. He was looking at what I knew of the books. I suddenly felt terribly useless, because I had only a fraction of what he wanted.

"What's that?" he barked.

I knew what he meant. He'd gotten it from inside my head. I didn't know it was in there, even, but he found it.

"Telekinesis," I said.

"How is it done?"

"Nobody knows if it can be done. Moving physical objects with the mind!"

"It can be done," he said. "This one?"

"Teleportation. That's the same thing—well, almost. Moving your own body with mind power."

"Yeah, yeah, I see it," he said gruffly.

"Molecular interpenetration. Telepathy and clairvoyance. I don't know anything about them. I think they're silly."

"Read about 'em. It don't matter if you understand or not. What's this?"

It was there in my brain, on my lips. "*Gestalt.*"

"What's that?"

"Group. Like a cure for a lot of diseases with one kind of treatment. Like a lot of thoughts expressed in one phrase. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts."

"Read about that, too. Read a whole lot about that. That's the *most* you got to read about. That's important."

He turned away, and when his eyes came away from mine it was like something breaking, so that I staggered and fell to one knee. He went off into the woods without looking back. I got my things and ran home. There was anger, and it struck me like a storm. There was fear, and it struck me like a wind. I knew I would read the books, I knew I would come back, I knew I would never dance again.

So I read the books and I came back. Sometimes it was every day for three or four days, and sometimes, because I couldn't find a certain book, I might not come back for ten. He was always there in the little glen, waiting, standing in the shadows, and he took what he wanted of the books and nothing of me. He never mentioned the next meeting. If he came there every day to wait for me, or if he only came when I did, I have no way of knowing.

He made me read books that contained nothing for me, books on evolution, on social and cultural organization, on mythology, and ever so much on symbiosis. What I had with him were not conversations; sometimes nothing audible would pass between us but his grunt of surprise or small, short hum of interest.

He tore the books out of me the way he would tear berries from a bush, all at once; he smelled of sweat and earth and the green

juices his heavy body crushed when he moved through the wood.

If he learned anything from the books, it made no difference in him.

There came a day when he sat by me and puzzled something out.

He said, "What book has something like this?" Then he waited for a long time, thinking. "The way a termite can't digest wood, you know, and microbes in the termite's belly can, and what the termite eats is what the microbe leaves behind. What's that?"

"Symbiosis," I remembered. I remembered the words. Lone tore the content from words and threw the words away. "Two kinds of life depending upon one another for existence."

"Yeah. Well, is there a book about four-five kinds doing that?"

"I don't know."

Then he asked, "What about this? You got a radio station, you got four-five receivers, each receiver is fixed up to make something different happen, like one digs and one flies and one makes noise, but each one takes orders from the one place. And each one has its own power and its own thing to do, but they are all apart. Now: is there life like that, instead of radio?"

"Where each organism is a part of the whole, but separated? I don't think so . . . unless you mean social organizations, like a team, or perhaps a gang of men working, all taking orders from the same boss."

"No," he said immediately, "not like that. Like one single animal." He made a gesture with his cupped hand which I understood.

I asked, "You mean a *gestalt* life-form? It's fantastic."

"No book has about that, huh?"

"None I ever heard of."

"I got to know about that," he said heavily. "There is such a thing. I want to know if it ever happened before."

"I can't see how anything of the sort could exist."

"It does. A part that fetches, a part that figures, a part that finds out, and a part that talks."

"Talks? Only humans talk."

"I know," he said, and got up and went away.

I looked and looked for such a book, but found nothing remotely like it. I came back and told him so. He was still a very long time, looking off to the blue-on-blue line of the hilly horizon. Then he drove those about-to-spin irises at me and searched.

"You learn, but you don't think," he said, and looked again at the hills.

"This all happens with humans," he said eventually. "It happens piece by piece right under folks' noses, and they don't see it. You got mind-readers. You got people can move things with their mind. You got people can move themselves with their mind. You got people can figure anything out if you just think to ask them. What you ain't got is the one kind of person who can pull 'em all together, like a brain pulls together the parts that press and pull and feel heat and walk and think and all the other things.

"I'm one," he finished suddenly. Then he sat still for so long, I thought he had forgotten me.

"Lone," I said, "what do you do here in the woods?"

"I wait," he said. "I ain't finished yet." He looked at my eyes and snorted in irritation. "I don't mean 'finished' like you're thinking. I mean I ain't—completed yet. You know about a worm when it's cut, growin' whole again? Well, forget about the cut. Suppose it just grew that way, for the first time, see? I'm getting parts. I ain't finished. I want a book about that kind of animal that is me when I'm finished."

"I don't know of such a book. Can you tell me more? Maybe if you could, I'd think of the right book or a place to find it."

He broke a stick between his huge hands, put the two pieces side by side and broke them together with one strong twist.

"All I know is I got to do what I'm doing like a bird's got to nest when it's time. And I know that when I'm done I won't be anything to brag about. I'll be like a body stronger and faster than anything there ever was, without the right kind of head on it. But maybe that's because I'm one of the first. That picture you had, the cave-man . . ."

"Neanderthal."

"Yeah. Come to think of it, he was no great shakes. An early try at something new. That's what I'm going to be. But maybe the right kind of head'll come along after I'm all organized. Then it'll be something."

He grunted with satisfaction and went away.

I tried, for days I tried, but I couldn't find what he wanted. I found a magazine which stated that the next important evolutionary step in man would be a psychic rather than a physical direction, but it said nothing about a—shall I call it a *gestalt* organism? There was something about slime molds, but they seem to be more a hive activity of amoebae than even a symbiosis.

To my own unscientific, personally uninterested mind, there was



nothing like what he wanted except possibly a band marching together, everyone playing different kinds of instruments with different techniques and different notes, to make a single thing move along together. But he hadn't meant anything like that.

So I went back to him in the cool of an early fall evening, and he took what little I had in my eyes, and turned from me angrily with a gross word I shall not permit myself to remember.

"You can't find it," he told me. "Don't come back."

He got up and went to a tattered birch and leaned against it, looking out and down into the wind-tossed crackling shadows. I think he had forgotten me already. I know he leaped like a frightened animal when I spoke to him from so near. He must have been completely immersed in whatever strange thoughts he was having, for I'm sure he didn't hear me coming.

I said, "Lone, don't blame me for not finding it. I tried."

He controlled his startlement and brought those eyes down to me. "Blame? Who's blamin' anybody?"

"I failed you," I told him, "and you're angry."

He looked at me so long I became uncomfortable.

"I don't know what you're talkin' about," he said.

I wouldn't let him turn away from me. He would have. He would have left me forever with not another thought; he didn't *care!* It wasn't cruelty or thoughtlessness as I have been taught to know those things. He was as uncaring as a cat is of the bursting of a tulip bud.

I took him by the upper arms and shook him, it was like trying to shake the front of my house. "You *can* know!" I screamed at him. "You know what I read. You must know what I think!"

He shook his head.

"I'm a person, a woman," I raved at him. "You've used me and used me and you've given me nothing. You've made me break a lifetime of habits—reading until all hours, coming to you in the rain and on Sunday—you don't talk to me, you don't look at me, you don't know anything about me and you don't care. You put some sort of a spell on me that I couldn't break. And when you're finished, you say, 'Don't come back.'"

"Do I have to give something back because I took something?"

"People do."

He gave that short, interested hum. "What do you want me to give you? I ain't got anything."

I moved away from him. I felt . . . I don't know what I felt. After a time I said, "I don't know."

He shrugged and turned. I fairly leaped at him, dragging him back. "I want you to—"

"Well, damn it, what?"

I couldn't look at him; I could hardly speak. "I don't know. There's something, but I don't know what it is. It's something that—I couldn't say if I knew it." When he began to shake his head, I took his arms again. "You've read the books out of me; can't you read the . . . the *me* out of me?"

"I ain't never tried." He held my face up, and stepped close. "Here," he said.

His eyes projected their strange probe at me and I screamed. I tried to twist away. I hadn't wanted this, I was sure I hadn't. I struggled terribly. I think he lifted me right off the ground with his big hands. He held me until he was finished, and then let me drop. I huddled to the ground, sobbing. He sat down beside me. He didn't try to touch me. He didn't try to go away. I quieted at last and crouched there, waiting.

He said, "I ain't going to do much of that no more."

I sat up and tucked my skirt close around me and laid my cheek on my updrawn knees so I could see his face. "What happened?"

He cursed. "Damn mishmash inside you. Thirty-three years old—what you want to live like that for?"

"I live very comfortably," I said with some pique.

"Yeah," he said. "All by yourself for ten years now 'cept for someone to do your work. Nobody else."

"Men are animals, and women . . ."

"You really hate women. They all know something you don't."

"I don't want to know. I'm quite happy the way I am."

"Hell you are."

I said nothing to that. I despise that kind of language.

"Two things you want from me. Neither makes no sense." He looked at me with the first real expression I have ever seen in his face: a profound wonderment. "You want to know all about me, where I came from, how I got to be what I am."

"Yes, I do want that. What's the other thing I want that you know and I don't?"

"I was born some place and growed like a weed somehow," he said, ignoring me. "Folks who didn't give even enough of a damn to try the orphanage routine. I lived with some other folks for a while, tried school, didn't like it. Too small a town for them special schools for my kind, retarded, y'know. So I just ran loose, sort

of in training to be the village idiot. I'da made it if I'd stayed there, but I took to the woods instead."

"Why?"

He wondered why, and finally said, "I guess because the way people lived didn't make no sense to me. I saw enough up and down, back and forth, to know that they live a lot of different ways, but none of 'em was for me. Out here I can grow like I want."

"How is that?" I asked over one of those vast distances that built and receded between him and me so constantly.

"What I wanted to get from your books."

"You never told me."

For the second time he said, "You learn, but you don't think. There's a kind of—well, *person*. It's all made of separate parts, but it's all one person. It has like hands, it has like legs, it has like a talking mouth, and it has like a brain. That's me, a brain for that person. Damn feeble, too, but the best I know of."

"You're mad."

"No, I ain't," he said, unoffended and completely certain. "I already got the part that's like hands. I can move 'em anywhere and they do what I want, though they're too young yet to do much good. I got the part that talks. That one's real good."

"I don't think you talk very well at all," I said. I cannot stand incorrect English.

He was surprised. "I'm not talking about me! She's back yonder with the others."

"She?"

"The one that talks. Now I need one that thinks, one that can take anything and add it to anything else and come up with a right answer. And once they're all together, and all the parts get used together often enough, I'll be that new kind of thing I told you about. See? Only—I wish it had a better head on it than me."

My own head was swimming. "What made you start doing this?"

He considered me gravely. "What made you start growing hair in your armpits?" he asked me. "You don't figure a thing like that. It just happens."

"What is that . . . that thing you do when you look in my eyes?"

"You want a name for it? I ain't got one. I don't know how I do it. I know I can get anyone I want to do anything. Like you're going to forget about me."

I said in a choked voice, "I don't want to forget about you."

"You will." I didn't know then whether he meant I'd forget, or I'd want to forget. "You'll hate me, and then after a long time you'll be grateful. Maybe you'll be able to do something for me some time. You'll be that grateful that you'll be glad to do it. But you'll forget, all right, everything but a sort of . . . feeling. And my name, maybe."

I don't know what moved me to ask him, but I did, forlornly. "And no one will ever know about you and me?"

"Can't," he said. "Unless . . . well, unless it was the head of the animal, like me, or a better one." He heaved himself up.

"Oh, wait, wait!" I cried. He mustn't go yet, he mustn't. He was a tall, dirty beast of a man, yet he had enthralled me in some dreadful way. "You haven't given me the other . . . whatever it was."

"Oh," he said. "Yeah, that."

He moved like a flash. There was a pressure, a stretching apart, and a . . . a breakage. And with a tearing agony and a burst of triumph that drowned the pain, it was done.

I came up out of it, through two distinct levels:

I am eleven, breathless from shock from a transferred agony of that incredible entrance into the ego of another. And:

I am fifteen, lying on the couch while Stern drones on, ". . . quietly, quietly limp, your ankles and legs as limp as your toes, your belly goes soft, the back of your neck is as limp as your belly, it's quiet and easy and all gone soft and limper than limp . . ."

I sat up and swung my legs to the floor. "Okay," I said.

Stern looked a little annoyed. "This is going to work," he said, "but it can only work if you cooperate. Just lie—"

"It did work," I said.

"What?"

"The whole thing. A to Z." I snapped my fingers. "Like that."

He looked at me piercingly. "What do you mean?"

"It was right there, where you said. In the library. When I was eleven. When she said, 'Baby is three.' It knocked loose something that had been boiling around in her for three years, and it all came blasting out. I got it, full force; just a kid, no warning, no defenses. It had such a—a pain in it, like I never knew could be."

"Go on," said Stern.

"That's really all. I mean that's not what was in it; it's what it

did to me. What it was, a sort of hunk of her own self. A whole lot of things that happened over about four months, every bit of it. She knew Lone."

"You mean a whole *series* of episodes?"

"That's it."

"You got a series all at once? In a split second?"

"That's right. Look, for that split second I *was* her, don't you see? I was her, everything she'd ever done, everything she'd ever thought and heard and felt. Everything, everything, all in the right order if I wanted to bring it out like that. Any part of it if I wanted it by itself. If I'm going to tell you about what I had for lunch, do I have to tell you everything else I've ever done since I was born? No. I tell you I *was* her, and then and forever after I can remember anything she could remember up to that point. In just that one flash."

"A *gestalt*," he murmured.

"Aha!" I said, and thought about that. I thought about a whole lot of things. I put them aside for a moment and said, "Why didn't I know all this before?"

"You had a powerful block against recalling it."

I got up excitedly. "I don't see why. I don't see that at all."

"Just natural revulsion," he guessed. "How about this? You had a distaste for assuming a female ego, even for a second."

"You told me yourself, right at the beginning, that I didn't have that kind of a problem."

"Well, how does this sound to you? You say you felt pain in that episode. So—you wouldn't go back into it for fear of re-experiencing the pain."

"Let me think, let me think. Yeah, yeah, that's part of it—that thing of going into someone's mind. She opened up to me because I reminded her of Lone. I went in. I wasn't ready; I'd never done it before, except maybe a little, against resistance. I went all the way in and it was too much; it frightened me away from trying it for years. And there it lay, wrapped up, locked away. But as I grew older, the power to do that with my mind got stronger and stronger, and still I was afraid to use it. And the more I grew, the more I felt, down deep, that Miss Kew had to be killed before she killed the . . . what I am. My God!" I shouted. "Do you know what I am?"

"No," he said. "Like to tell me about it?"

"I'd like to," I said. "Oh, yes, I'd like that."

He had that professional open-minded expression on his face, not believing or disbelieving, just taking it all in. I had to tell him, and I suddenly realized that I didn't have enough words. I knew the things, but not the names for them.

*Lone took the meanings and threw the words away.*

Further back: "You read books. Read books for me."

The look of his eyes. That—"opening up" thing.

I went over to Stern. He looked up at me. I bent close. First he was startled, then he controlled it, then he came even closer to me.

"My God," he murmured. "I didn't look at those eyes before. I could have sworn those irises spun like wheels . . ."

Stern read books. He'd read more books than I ever imagined had been written. I slipped in there, looking for what I wanted.

I can't say exactly what it was like. It was like walking in a tunnel, and in this tunnel, all over the roof and walls, wooden arms stuck out at you, like the thing at the carnival, the merry-go-round, the thing you snatch the brass rings from. There's a brass ring on the end of each of these arms, and you can take any one of them you want to.

Now imagine you make up your mind which rings you want, and the arms hold only those. Now picture yourself with a thousand hands to grab the rings off with. Now just suppose the tunnel is a zillion miles long, and you can go from one end of it to the other, grabbing rings, in just the time it takes you to blink once. Well, it was like that, only easier.

It was easier for me to do than it had been for Lone.

Straightening up, I got away from Stern. He looked sick and frightened.

"It's all right," I said.

"What did you do to me?"

"I needed some words. Come on, come on. Get professional."

I had to admire him. He put his pipe in his pocket and gouged the tips of his fingers hard against his forehead and cheeks. Then he sat up and he was okay again.

"I know," I said. "That's how Miss Kew felt when Lone did it to her."

"What *are* you?"

"I'll tell you. I'm the central ganglion of a complex organism

which is composed of Baby, a computer; Bonnie and Beanie, teleports; Jane, telekineticist; and myself, telepath and central control. There isn't a single thing about any of us that hasn't been documented: the teleportation of the Yogi, the telekinetics of some gamblers, the idio-savant mathematicians, and most of all, the so-called poltergeist, the moving about of household goods through the instrumentation of a young girl. Only in this case every one of my parts delivers at peak performance.

"Lone organized it, or it formed around him; it doesn't matter which. I replaced Lone, but I was too underdeveloped when he died, and on top of that I got an occlusion from that blast from Miss Kew. To that extent you were right when you said the blast made me subconsciously afraid to discover what was in it. But there was another good reason for my not being able to get in under that 'Baby is three' barrier.

"We ran into the problem of what it was I valued more than the security Miss Kew gave us. Can't you see now what it was? My *gestalt* organism was at the point of death from that security. I figured she had to be killed or it—I—would be. Oh, the parts would live on: two little colored girls with a speech impediment, one introspective girl with an artistic bent, one mongoloid idiot, and me—ninety per cent short-circuited potentials and ten per cent juvenile delinquent." I laughed. "Sure, she had to be killed. It was self-preservation for the *gestalt*."

Stern bobbed around with his mouth and finally got out: "I don't—"

"You don't need to," I laughed. "This is wonderful. You're fine, hey, fine. Now I want to tell you this, because you can appreciate a fine point in your specialty. You talk about occlusions! I couldn't get past the 'Baby is three' thing because in it lay the clues to what I really am. I couldn't find that out because I was afraid to remember that I had failed in the thing I had to do to save the *gestalt*. Ain't that purty?"

"Failed? Failed how?"

"Look. I came to love Miss Kew, and I'd never loved anything before. Yet I had reason to kill her. She *had* to be killed; I *couldn't* kill her. What does a human mind do when presented with imperative, mutually exclusive alternatives?"

"It—it might simply quit. As you phrased it earlier, it might blow a fuse, retreat, refuse to function in that area."

"Well, I didn't do that. What else?"

"It might slip into a delusion that it had already taken one of the courses of action."

I nodded happily. "I didn't kill her. I decided I must; I got up, got dressed—and the next thing I knew I was outside, wandering, very confused. I got my money—and I understand now, with super-empathy, how I can win *anyone's* prize contest—and I went looking for a head-shrinker. I found a good one."

"Thanks," he said dazedly. He looked at me with a strangeness in his eyes. "And now that you know, what's solved? What are you going to do?"

"Go back home," I said happily. "Reactivate the super-organism, exercise it secretly in ways that won't make Miss Kew unhappy, and we'll stay with her as long as we know it pleases her. And we'll please her. She'll be happy in ways she's never dreamed about until now. She rates it, bless her strait-laced, hungry heart."

"And she can't kill your—*gestalt* organism?"

"Not a chance. Not now."

"How do you know it isn't dead already?"

"How?" I echoed. "How does your head know your arm works?"

He wet his lips. "You're going home to make a spinster happy. And after that?"

I shrugged. "After that?" I mocked. "Did the Peking man look at Homo Sap walking erect and say, 'What will he do after that?' We'll live, that's all, like a man, like a tree, like anything else that lives. We'll feed and grow and experiment and breed. We'll defend ourselves." I spread my hands. "We'll just do what comes naturally."

"But what can you do?"

"What can an electric motor do? It depends on where we apply ourselves."

Stern was very pale. "But you're the only such organism . . ."

"Are we? I don't know. I don't think so. I've told you the parts have been around for ages—the telepaths, the *poltergeists*. What was lacking was the ones to organize, to be heads to the scattered bodies. Lone was one, I'm one; there must be more. We'll find out as we mature."

"You—aren't mature yet?"

"Lord, no!" I laughed. "We're an infant. We're the equivalent of about a three-year-old child. So you see, there it is again, and this time I'm not afraid of it: Baby is three." I looked at my hands. "Baby is three," I said again, because the realization tasted good.



"And when this particular group-baby is five, it might want to be a fireman. At eight, maybe a cowboy or maybe an FBI man. And when it grows up, maybe it'll build a city, or perhaps it'll be President."

"Oh, God!" he said. "God!"

I looked down at him. "You're afraid," I said. "You're afraid of *Homo Gestalt*."

He made a wonderful effort and smiled. "That's bastard terminology."

"We're a bastard breed," I said. I pointed. "Sit over there."

He crossed the quiet room and sat at the desk. I leaned close to him and he went to sleep with his eyes open. I straightened up and looked around the room. Then I got the thermos flask and filled it and put it on the desk. I fixed the corner of the rug and put a clean towel at the head of the couch. I went to the side of the desk and opened it and looked at the tape recorder.

Like reaching out a hand, I got Beanie. She stood by the desk, wide-eyed.

"Look here," I told her. "Look good, now. What I want to do is erase all this tape. Go ask Baby how."

She blinked at me and sort of shook herself, and then leaned over the recorder. She was there—and gone—and back, just like that. She pushed past me and turned two knobs, moved a pointer until it clicked twice. The tape raced backward past the head swiftly, whining.

"All right," I said, "beat it."

She vanished.

I got my jacket and went to the door. Stern was still sitting at the desk, staring.

"A good head-shrinker," I murmured. I felt fine.

Outside I waited, then turned and went back in again.

Stern looked up at me. "Sit over there, Sonny."

"Gee," I said. "Sorry, sir. I got in the wrong office."

"That's all right," he said.

I went out and closed the door. All the way down to the store to buy Miss Kew some flowers, I was grinning about how he'd account for the loss of an afternoon and the gain of a thousand bucks.

## PART

## 2

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# THE CHILD POSSESSED

ANCIENT DEMONOLOGISTS explained possession as the occupation and domination of a human soul by an evil spirit. Modern psychiatrists no longer look for demons from outside, but they recognize that the problem is still very much with us. Writers remain free to look at it either way.

Ray Bradbury's child-story-to-end-all-child-stories actually is susceptible of more than one interpretation. It could be classified as pure horror-tale, or considered as differing in degree, but not in kind, from any other story about infants. It is probably in retreat from the implications of this latter possibility that we arbitrarily (but plausibly) choose to label *Small Assassin* a story of possession.

E. M. Forster's contribution is an almost-classic possession story. The beliefs of the ancient world are not only illustrated; they are possibly justified by the contrast between proper adults and boys who are improperly involved with wood-spirits. In *The Piper's Son*, Lewis Padgett adds a science-fiction touch to the formula. Here is possession as complete as any witch doctor of old could desire—but, by definition, only a villain of a future world (in which certain unusual abilities are taken for granted) could accomplish it!



## SMALL ASSASSIN

by Ray Bradbury

**J**UST WHEN the idea occurred to her that she was being murdered she could not tell. There had been little subtle signs, little suspicions for the past month; things as deep as sea tides in her, like looking at a perfectly calm stretch of cerulean water and liking it and wanting to bathe in it, and finding, just as the tide takes your body into it, that monsters dwell just under the surface, things unseen, bloated, many-armed, sharp-finned, malignant and inescapable.

A room floated around her in an effluvium of hysteria. Sharp instruments hovered and there were voices and people in sterile white masks.

My name, she thought. My name; what is it?

Alice Leiber. It came to her. David Leiber's wife. But it gave her no comfort. She was alone with these silent whispering white people and there was great pain and nausea and death-fear in her.

I am being murdered before their eyes. These doctors, these nurses don't realize. David doesn't know. Nobody knows except me and—the killer, the small assassin, the little murderer.

I am dying and I can't tell them how. They'd laugh and call me one in delirium. They'll see the murderer and hold him and like him and they won't think him responsible for my death. Here I am, in front of God and man, dying, and there is no one to believe my story, everyone to doubt me, comfort me with lies, bury me in ignorance, mourn me and salvage my murderer.

Where is David? she wondered. In the outer room, smoking one cigarette after another, listening to the long tickings of the very slow clock?

Sweat exploded from all of her body at once, and with it a crying and agonizing. Now. Now! Try and kill me, she screamed. Try, try, but I won't die! I won't!

There was a hollow in her. A vacuity. Suddenly there was no pain. Exhaustion. Blackness. It was over. It was all over. Oh, God. She plummeted rapidly down and struck against a black nothingness which gave way to another nothing and another nothing and another and still another. . . .

\* \* \*

Footsteps. Gentle, approaching footsteps. The sound of people trying to be quiet.

Far away, a voice said, "She's asleep. Don't disturb her."

An odor of tweeds, a pipe, a certain shaving lotion. She knew David was standing over her. And beyond him the immaculate odor of Dr. Jeffers.

She did not open her eyes. "I'm awake," she said, quietly. It was a surprise, a relief to be able to speak, to not be dead.

"Alice," someone said, and it was David beyond her closed eyes, his hands holding one of her tired ones.

Would you like to meet the murderer, David? she thought. That's who you're here to see now, aren't you?

David stood over her. She opened her eyes. The room came into focus. Moving a weak hand she pulled aside a coverlet.

The murderer looked up at David Leiber with a small red-faced, blue-eyed calm. Its eyes were deep and sparkling.

"Why!" cried David Leiber, smiling. "Why, he's a *fine* baby!"

Dr. Jeffers was waiting for David Leiber the day he showed up at the hospital to take his wife and new child home. He motioned Leiber into a chair in his office, gave him a cigar, lit one for himself, sat on the edge of his desk, puffing solemnly. Then he cleared his throat, looked David Leiber straight in the eye and said, "Your wife doesn't like her child, Dave."

"What!"

"It's been a hard thing for her. The whole thing. She'll need a lot of love in this next year. I didn't say much at the time, but she was hysterical in the delivery room. The strange things she said! Now, this may be simply a thing we can clear up with one or two questions." He sucked on his cigar. "Is this child a 'wanted' child, Dave?"

"Yes. It was planned. We planned it together. Alice was so happy, a year ago, when—"

"Mmm—that makes it more difficult. Because if the child was unplanned, it would be a simple case of a mother who hates the idea of motherhood. That doesn't fit Alice." Dr. Jeffers took his cigar from his lips, rubbed his hand across his jaw. "It must be something else, then. Perhaps something buried in her childhood that's coming out now. Or it might be the simple temporary doubt and distrust of any mother who's gone through the unusual pain and near-

death that Alice has. If so, then a little time should heal that. But if things don't get along, the three of you drop in on me. I'm always glad to see old friends, eh? Here, take another cigar along for—ah—for the baby."

It was a bright spring afternoon. Their car hummed along wide, tree-lined boulevards. Blue sky, flowers, a warm wind. Dave talked a lot, lit his cigar, talked some more. Alice answered directly, softly, relaxing a bit more as the trip progressed. But she held the baby not tightly enough or motherly enough to satisfy the queer ache in Dave's mind. She seemed to be carrying merely a porcelain figurine.

He tried joviality. "What'll we name him?" he asked.

Alice Leiber watched green trees slide by. "Let's not name him yet," she said. "I'd rather wait until we get an exceptional name for him. Don't blow smoke in his face." Her sentences ran together with no distinction of tone between one or the other. The last statement held no motherly reproof, no interest, no irritation. She just mouthed it and it was said.

The husband, disquieted, dropped the cigar from the window. "Sorry."

The baby rested in the crook of its mother's arm, shadows of sun and tree changing its face over and again. His blue eyes opened like fresh blue spring flowers. Moist noises came from the tiny, pink, elastic mouth.

Alice gave her baby a quick glance. Her husband felt her shiver against him.

"Cold?" he asked.

"A chill. Better raise the window, David."

It was more than a chill. He rolled the window thoughtfully up.

Suppertime.

David Leiber had brought the child from the nursery, propped him at a tiny bewildered angle, supported by many pillows, in a newly purchased high-chair.

Alice watched her knife and fork move. "He's not high-chair size," she said.

"Fun having him here, anyway," said Leiber, feeling fine. "Everything's fun. At the office, too. Orders up to my nose. If I don't watch myself I'll make another fifteen thousand this year. Hey, look at Junior, will you? Drooling all down his chin!" He reached over to dab at the baby's chin with his napkin. From the corner of his

eye he realized that Alice wasn't even watching. He finished the job.

"I guess it wasn't very interesting," he said, back again at his food. A minor irritation rose in him, disregarding all self-argument. "But one would think a mother'd take some interest in her own child!"

Alice jerked her chin up. "Don't speak that way. Not in front of him! Later, if you must."

"Later?" he cried. "In front of, in back of, what's the difference?" He quieted suddenly, swallowed, was sorry. "All right. Okay. I know how it is."

After dinner she let him carry the baby upstairs. She didn't tell him to; she *let* him.

Coming down, he found her standing by the radio, listening to music she wasn't hearing. Her eyes were closed, her whole attitude one of wondering, self-questioning.

Suddenly she was at him, against him, soft, quick; the same. Nothing different. Her lips found him, kept him. He was stunned by her. He laughed unexpectedly, and deeply. Now that the baby was gone, upstairs, out of the room, she had begun to breathe again, live again. She was free. She was whispering, rapidly, endlessly.

"Thank you, thank you, darling. For being yourself, always. Dependable, so very dependable!"

He had to laugh. "My father told me, 'Son, provide for your family!'"

Wearily, she rested her dark, shining hair against his neck. "You've overdone it. Sometimes I wish we were just the way we were when we were first married. No responsibilities, nothing but ourselves. No—no babies."

She took him too eagerly by the hand, a flushed strangeness in her white face, unnaturally intense.

"A third element's come in. Before, it was just you and me. We protected each other, and now we protect the baby, but get no protection from it. Do you understand? Lying in the hospital I had time to think a lot of things. The world is evil—"

"Is it?" he said.

"Yes. But laws protect us from it. And when there aren't laws, then love does the protecting. You're protected from my hurting you, by my love. You're vulnerable to me, of all people, but love shields you. I feel no fear of you, because love cushions all your irritations, unnatural instincts, hatreds and immaturities. But—what

about the baby? It's too young to know love, or a law of love, or anything, until we teach it. And in the meantime be vulnerable to it!"

"Vulnerable? To a baby?" He held her away from him and laughed gently.

"Does a baby know the difference between right and wrong?" she asked.

"No. But it'll learn."

"But a baby is so new, so amoral, so conscience-free," she argued. She stopped. Her arms dropped from him and she turned swiftly. "That noise? What was it?"

Leiber looked around the room. "I didn't hear—"

She stared at the library door. "In there," she said, slowly.

Leiber crossed the room and opened the door and switched the library lights off and on. "Not a thing," he said, and came back to her. "You're worn. To bed with you; right now."

Turning out the lights together, they walked quietly up the soundless hall stairs, not speaking. At the top she apologized. "My wild talk, darling. Forgive me. I'm just exhausted."

He understood, and said so.

She paused, undecided, by the nursery door. Then she fingered the brass knob sharply, walked in. He watched her approach the crib much too carefully, look down, and stiffen as if she had been struck in the face. "David!"

Leiber stepped forward, reached the crib.

The baby's face was bright red and very moist. The little pink mouth gestured. Bright blue eyes stared as if being strangled outward. Small red hands weaved in the air.

"Oh, he's just been crying," said Leiber.

"Has he?" Alice Leiber grasped the crib railing to hold herself erect. "I didn't *hear* him crying."

"The door was closed."

"Is that why he breathes so hard, why his face is red?"

"Sure. Poor little guy. Crying all alone in the dark. He can sleep in our room tonight, just in case he cries."

"You'll spoil him," his wife said.

Leiber felt her eyes follow as he rolled the crib into their bedroom. He undressed silently, sat on the edge of the bed. Suddenly he lifted his head, swore under his breath, snapped his fingers. "Damn it. Forgot to tell you. Have to fly to Chicago Friday."



"Oh, David." She seemed a little lost girl. "So soon?"

"I've put this trip off for two months, and now it's so critical I just *have* to make it."

"I'm afraid to be alone."

"We'll have the new cook here by Friday. She'll be here all the time. All you have to do is call. I'll only be away a little while."

"But I'm afraid. I don't know of what. You wouldn't believe me if I told you. I guess I'm crazy."

He was in bed now. She darkened the room; he heard her walk around the bed, throw back crisp sheets, slide in. He smelled the warm woman smell of her next to him. He said, "If you want me to wait a few extra days, perhaps I could—"

"No," she said, unconvinced. "You go. I know it's important. It's just that I keep thinking about what I told you. Laws and love and protection. Love protects you from me. But, the baby—" She took a breath. "What protects you from him, David?"

Before he could answer, before he could tell her how silly it was, speaking of infants, she switched on the bed light.

"Look," she said, pointing.

The baby lay wide awake in its crib, staring straight at him, with deep, sharp, blue eyes.

The lights went out again. She trembled against him.

"It's not nice, being afraid of the thing you birthed." Her whisper lowered, became harsh, fierce, swift. "He tried to kill me! He lies there, listens to us talking, waiting for you to go away so he can try to kill me again! I swear it!"

Sobs broke from her. "Please," he kept saying, soothing her. "Stop it, stop it. Please."

She cried in the dark for a long time. Very late she relaxed, shakingly, against him. Her breathing came soft, warm, regular, her body twitched its worn reflexes and she slept.

He drowsed.

And just before his eyes lidded wearily down, sinking into the deep sleep tides, he heard a strange little sound of awareness and awakeness in the room.

The sound of moist, small, pinkly elastic lips.

The baby.

And then—sleep.

In the morning, the sun blazed. Alice smiled.

David Leiber dangled his watch over the crib. "See, baby? Some-

thing bright. Something pretty. Sure. Sure. Something bright. Something pretty."

Alice smiled. She told him to go ahead, fly to Chicago, she'd try to be a brave girl, no need to worry.

The airplane went east with Leiber. There was a lot of sky, a lot of sun and clouds, and then Chicago came running over the horizon. Leiber dropped into the rush of ordering, planning, banqueting, making the rounds, telephoning, arguing in conference, downing coffee in scalding gulps between times. But he wrote letters each day and sent telegrams that said brief, nice, direct things to Alice, and baby.

On the evening of his sixth day away he received the long distance call. Los Angeles.

"Alice?"

"No, Dave. This is Jeffers."

"Doctor!"

"Hold onto yourself, son. Alice is sick. You'd better get the next plane home. It's pneumonia. I'll do everything I can, boy. If only it wasn't so soon after the baby. She needs strength."

Leiber dropped the phone into its cradle. The hotel room blurred and fell apart.

"Alice," he said, blindly, starting for the door.

The airplane went west and California came up, and to Leiber, home, came a vibrantly sudden materialization of Alice lying in bed, Dr. Jeffers standing in the sunlight at a window, and the reality of Leiber feeling his feet walking slowly, becoming more real and more real, until, when he reached her bed, everything was whole, intact, a reality.

Nobody spoke. Alice smiled, faintly. Jeffers talked, but only a little of it got through to David.

"Your wife's too good a mother, son. She worried more about your baby than herself!"

A muscle in Alice's cheek flattened out, taut, then—

Alice began to talk. She talked like a mother should, now. Or did she? Wasn't there a trace of anger, fear, repulsion in her voice?

"The baby wouldn't sleep," said Alice. "I thought he was sick. He just lay in his crib, staring. Late at night, he'd cry. Loud. He cried all night and all night. I couldn't quiet him. I couldn't sleep."

Dr. Jeffers nodded. "Tired herself right into pneumonia. But she's full of sulfa now, and she's on the safe side."

Leiber felt ill. "The baby, what about *him*?"

"Chipper as ever; healthy as a cock."

"Thanks, doctor."

The doctor took leave, walked down the stairs, opened the front door faintly, and was gone. Leiber listened to him go.

"David!"

He turned to her whisper.

"It was the baby, again," she said. "I try to lie to myself—convince myself I'm a fool. But the baby knew I was weak from the hospital. So he cried all night. And when he wasn't crying he'd be too quiet. If I switched the light on he'd be there, staring."

Leiber jerked inside. He remembered seeing the baby, awake in the dark, himself. Awake very late at night when babies should sleep. He pushed it aside. It was crazy.

Alice went on. "I was going to kill the baby. Yes, I was. When you'd been gone only an hour on your trip I went to his room and put my hands about his neck, and I stood there, for a long time, thinking, afraid. Then I put the covers up over his face and turned him over on his face and pressed him down and left him that way and ran out of the room."

He tried to stop her.

"No, let me finish," she said, hoarsely, looking at the wall. "When I left his room I thought, it's simple. Babies die every day of smothering. No one'll ever know. But when I came back to see him dead, David, he was alive! Yes, alive, turned over on his back, alive and smiling and breathing. And I couldn't touch him again after that. Perhaps the cook tended to him. I don't know. All I know is that his crying kept me awake and I thought all through the night, and walked around the rooms and now I'm sick." She was almost finished now. "The baby lies there and thinks of ways to kill me."

She was through. She collapsed inward on herself and finally slept. David Leiber stood for a long while over her. His brain was frozen in his head, not a cell of it stirred.

The next morning there was only one thing to do. He walked into Dr. Jeffers' office and told him the whole thing, and listened to Jeffers' tolerant replies.

"Let's take this thing slowly, son. It's quite natural for mothers to hate their children, sometimes. We have a label for it—ambivalence. The ability to hate, while loving. Lovers hate each other, frequently. Children detest their mothers—"

Leiber interrupted. "I never hated *my* mother."

"You won't admit it, naturally. People hate admitting hatred for loved ones."

"So Alice hates her baby."

"The best way to put it is that she has an obsession. She's gone a step further than plain, ordinary ambivalence. She blames the child for her near-death and her pneumonia. She's projecting her troubles, blaming them on the handiest object she can use as a source of blame. We *all* do it. We stumble into a chair and curse the furniture, not our own clumsiness. We miss a golf stroke and damn the turf or our club. All I can tell you is what I told you before. Find little ways of showing your affection. Find ways of showing her how harmless and innocent the child is. After a while, she'll settle down and begin to love the kid. If she doesn't come around in the next month or so, ask me and I'll recommend a good psychiatrist. Go on along now, and take that look off your face."

When summer came, things seemed to settle and become easy. Leiber never forgot to be thoughtful of his wife. She, in turn, took long walks, gained strength. She rarely burst out emotionally any more.

But on one certain midnight when a sudden summer wind swept around the house, shaking the trees like so many shining tambourines, Alice wakened, trembling, and slid over into her husband's arms.

She said, "Something's here in the room, watching us."

He switched on the light. "Dreaming again," he said. "You're better, though. Haven't been scared for a long time."

She sighed as he clicked off the light again. He held her, considering what a sweet, weird creature she was.

Then he heard the bedroom door sway open a few inches.

There was nobody at the door. No reason for it to come open. The wind had died.

He waited. It seemed like an hour he lay silently, in the dark.

Then, far away, wailing like some small meteor dying in the vast inky gulf of space, the baby began to cry in his nursery.

It was a small, lonely sound in the middle of the dark and the breathing of this woman in his arms and the wind beginning to sweep through the trees again.

Leiber counted to fifty. The crying continued.

Finally, carefully disengaging Alice's grip, he slipped from bed, put on his slippers, tiptoed out of the room.

He'd go downstairs, he thought tiredly, and fix some warm milk, and—

The blackness dropped out from under him. His foot slipped and plunged. Plunged into nothingness . . .

He thrust his hands out, caught frantically at the railing. His body stopped falling. He cursed.

Something soft had caused his feet to slip. It rustled and thumped down a few steps and stopped. His head rang. His heart hammered at the base of his throat, thick and shot with pain.

Why do people leave things strewn about a house? He groped with his fingers for the object that had almost spilled him headlong down the stairs.

His hand froze, startled. His breath went in.

The thing he held in his hand was a toy. A large cumbersome, patchwork doll he had brought as a joke, for—

*For the baby.*

Alice drove him to work the next day.

She slowed the car halfway downtown; pulled to the curb and stopped it. Then she turned on the seat and looked at her husband.

"I want to go away on a vacation. I don't know if you can make it now, darling, but, if not, please let me go alone. We can get someone to take care of the baby, I'm sure. But I just have to get away. I thought I was growing out of this—this *feeling*. But I'm not. I can't stand being in the room with him. He looks up at me as if he hates me too. I want to get away before something happens."

He got out on his side of the car, came around, motioned to her to move over, got in. "The only thing you're going to do is to see a good psychiatrist. And if he suggests a vacation, well, okay. But this can't go on; my stomach's in knots all the time." He started the car. "I'll drive."

Her head was down; she was trying to keep back tears. She looked up when they reached his office building. "All right. Make the appointment. I'll go talk to anyone you want, David."

He stood on the curb, watching her drive off, the wind taking hold of her long dark, shining hair. Upstairs, a minute later, he phoned Jeffers, got an appointment arranged with a reliable psychiatrist. That was *that*.

The day's work went uneasily. Things seemed to tangle and he kept seeing Alice all the time, mixed into everything he looked at.

So much of her fear had come over into him. She actually had *him* convinced that the child was somewhat unnatural. At the end of the day he was all exhaustion, and nothing else. His head throbbed. He was very willing to go home.

On the way down in the elevator he wondered, what if I told Alice about that toy I stumbled over on the stairs? Lord, wouldn't *that* send her off into hysterics! No, I won't ever tell her. After all, it was just one of those accidents.

Daylight lingered in the sky as he drove home in a taxi. In front of his Brentwood home he paid the driver and walked slowly up the cement walk, enjoying the light that was still in the sky. The white colonial front to the house looked unnaturally silent and uninhabited, and then, quietly, he remembered that this was Thursday, and the cook's day off, and he and Alice would have to scrounge for themselves or else eat on the Strip somewhere.

He took a deep breath of air. Traffic moved on the boulevard a block away. He turned the key in the door.

He stepped in, put his hat on the chair with his briefcase, started to shrug out of his coat, then looked up.

Late sunlight streamed down the stairwell from the window at the top of the house. Where the sunlight landed it took on the bright color of the patchwork doll still sprawled in a grotesque angle at the bottom of the stairs.

But he paid no attention to the patchwork doll.

He could only look, and not move, and look again at Alice.

Alice lay in a broken, grotesque, pallid gesturing and angling of her thin body. She was lying at the bottom of the stairs.

Alice was dead.

The house remained quiet, except for the sound of his heart.

She was dead.

He held her head in his hands, he felt of her fingers. He held her body. But she wouldn't live. He said her name, out loud, many times, and he tried, once again, by holding her to him to give her back some of the warmth she had lost, but that didn't help.

He stood up. He must have made a phone call. He didn't remember. He found himself, suddenly, upstairs. He opened the nursery door and walked inside and stared blankly at the crib. His stomach was sick. He couldn't see very well.

The baby's eyes were closed, but his face was red, moist with perspiration, as if he'd been crying long and hard.

"She's dead," said Leiber to the baby. "She's dead."

Then he started laughing. He was still laughing when Dr. Jeffers walked in and slapped him again and again across his cheeks.

"Snap out of it! Pull yourself together, son!"

"She fell down the stairs, doctor. She tripped on a patchwork doll and fell. I almost slipped on it the other night, myself. And now—"

The doctor shook him.

"Doc, doc, doc," said Leiber, hazily. "Funny thing. Funny. I—I finally thought of a name for the baby."

The doctor said nothing.

Leiber put his head back in his trembling hands and spoke the words. "I'm going to have him christened next Sunday. Know what name I'm giving him? I'm—I'm going to call him—*Lucifer!*"

It was eleven at night. A lot of strange people had come and gone through the house, taking the essential flame with them—Alice.

David Leiber sat across from the doctor in the library.

"Alice wasn't crazy," he said slowly. "She had good reason to fear the baby."

Jeffers exhaled. "Now you're following in her pattern. She blamed the child for her sickness, now you blame it for her death. She stumbled on a toy, remember that. You can't blame the child."

"You mean Lucifer?"

"Stop calling him Lucifer!"

Leiber shook his head. "Alice heard things at night. As if someone spied on us. You want to know what those noises were, doctor? I'll tell you. They were made by the baby! Yes, *my son!* Four months old, creeping around the dark halls at night, listening to us talk. Listening to *every word!*" He held to the sides of the chair. "And if I turned the lights on, a baby is a small object. It can conveniently hide behind furniture, a door, against a wall—below eye-level."

"I want you to stop this!" demanded Jeffers.

"Let me say what I think or I'll go crazy. When I went to Chicago, who was it kept Alice awake, tiring her, weakening her into pneumonia? The baby! And when Alice didn't die, then he tried killing me. It was simple; leave a toy doll on the stairs, then cry in the night until your father rouses up, tired of listening to you cry, and goes downstairs to fetch you warm milk, and stumbles. A crude trick, but effective. It didn't get me. But it killed Alice quite dead."

David Leiber stopped long enough to light a cigarette. "I should have caught on. I'd turn on the lights in the middle of the night,

many nights, and the baby'd be lying there, eyes wide. Most babies sleep constantly, all the time. Not *this* one. He stayed awake—thinking.”

“Babies don't think,” countered Jeffers.

“He stayed awake doing whatever he *could* do with his brain, then. What in hell do we know about a baby's brain? He had every reason to hate Alice; she suspected him for what he was—certainly not a normal child.”

Leiber leaned toward the doctor, tiredly. “It all ties up. Suppose a few babies out of all the millions are born instantaneously able to move, see, hear, think. Many insects are self-sufficient when born. In a few days most mammals and birds are adjusted. Little man-children take years to speak, faltering around on rubbery legs.

“But, suppose one child in a million is—strange? Born perfectly aware, able to think, instinctively. Wouldn't it be a perfect set-up, a perfect blind for anything the baby might want to do? He could pretend to be ordinary, weak, crying, ignorant. With just a *little* expenditure of energy he could crawl about a darkened house, listening. And how easy to place obstacles at the top of stairs. How easy to cry all night and tire a mother into pneumonia. How easy, right at birth, to be so close to the mother that *a few deft maneuvers might cause peritonitis!*”

“For God's sake!” Jeffers was on his feet. “That's a repulsive thing to say!”

“It's a repulsive thing I'm speaking of. How many mothers have died at the birth of their children? How many have suckled strange little improbabilities who caused death one way or another? Strange, red little creatures with brains that function in a scarlet darkness we can't even guess at. Elemental little brains, a-swarm with racial memory and hatred and raw cruelty. I ask you, doctor, what is there in the world more selfish than a baby? Nothing! Nothing is so self-centered, unsocial, selfish—nothing!”

Jeffers scowled and shook his head helplessly.

Leiber dropped his cigarette down, weakly. “I'm not claiming any great strength for the child. Just enough to listen all the time. Just enough to cry late at night. That's enough, more than enough.”

Jeffers tried ridicule. “Call it murder, then. And murder must have a motivation. Name a motivation for the child.”

Leiber was ready with the answer. “What is more at peace, more dreamfully happy, content, at ease, at rest, fed, comforted, unbothered than an unborn child? Nothing. It floats in a sleepy dark swirl



of timeless wonder and warm nourishment and silence. All is an enclosed dream. Then, suddenly, it is asked to give up its berth, is forced to vacate, propelled out into a noisy, uncaring, selfish, swift and merciless world to hunt, to feed from the hunting, to seek after a vanishing love that once was its unquestionable right, to meet confusion instead of inner silence and conservative slumber! And the newborn *resents* it! Resents it with all the soft, small fibres of its miniature body. Resents the raw cold air, the huge spaces, the sudden departure from familiar things. And who is responsible for this disenchantment, this rude breakage of the spell? The mother. And so the new child has someone to hate, and hate with all the tiny fabric of its mind. The mother has cast it out, rejected it. And the father is no better, kill him, too! He's responsible in *his* way!"

Jeffers interrupted. "If what you say is true, then every woman in the world would have to look on her newborn as something to dread, something to shudder at."

"And why not? Hasn't the child a perfect alibi? He has a thousand years of accepted medical belief to protect him. By all natural accounts he is helpless, not responsible. The child is born hating. And things grow worse, instead of better. At first the baby gets a certain amount of attention and mothering. But then as time passes, things change. When very new, a baby has great power. Power to make parents do silly things when it cries or sneezes, jump when it makes a noise. As the months pass, the baby feels even that little power slipping rapidly, forever away from it, never to return. Why shouldn't it grasp for all the power it can have, why shouldn't it jockey for position while it has all the advantages? In later years it would be too late to express its hatred. Now would be the time to strike."

Leiber's voice was very soft, very low.

"My little boy baby, lying in his crib nights, his face moist and red and out of breath. From crying? No. From climbing tediously, achingly slow, out of his crib, from crawling long distances through darkened hallways. My little boy baby. I want to kill him."

The doctor handed him a water glass and some pills. "You're not killing anyone. You're going to sleep for twenty-four hours. Sleep'll change your mind. Take this."

Leiber drank down the pills and let himself be led upstairs to his bedroom, crying, and felt himself being put to bed.

The next morning, Dr. Jeffers drove up to the Leiber house. It

was a good morning, and he was here to tell Leiber to get out into the country for a rest. Leiber would still be asleep upstairs. Jeffers had given him enough sedative to knock him out for at least fifteen hours.

He rang the doorbell. No answer. The servant hadn't returned; too early. Jeffers tried the front door, found it open, stepped in. He put his medical kit on the nearest chair.

Something white moved out of view at the top of the stairs. Just a suggestion of a movement. Jeffers hardly noticed it.

The odor of gas was in the house.

Jeffers ran up the stairs, crashed into Leiber's bedroom.

Leiber lay on the bed, not moving, and the room billowed with gas, which hissed from a released jet at the base of the wall near the door. Jeffers twisted it off, then forced up all the windows and ran back to Leiber's body.

The body was cold. It had been dead quite a few hours.

Coughing violently, the doctor hurried from the room, eyes watering. Leiber hadn't turned the gas on himself. He *couldn't* have. Those sedatives had knocked him out, he wouldn't have wakened until noon. It wasn't suicide. Or was there the faintest possibility?

Jeffers stood in the hall for five minutes. Then he walked to the door of the nursery. It was shut. He opened it. He walked inside and over to the crib.

The crib was empty.

He stood swaying over the crib for half a minute, then he said something to nobody in particular.

"The nursery door blew shut. You couldn't get back into your crib where it was safe. You didn't plan on the door blowing shut. A little thing like a slammed door can ruin the best of plans. I'll find you somewhere in the house, hiding, pretending to be something you are not." The doctor looked dazed. He put his hand to his head and smiled palely. "Now I'm talking like Alice and David talked. But, I can't take any chances. I'm not sure of anything, but I can't take any chances."

He walked downstairs, opened his medical bag upon the chair, took something out of it and held it in his hands.

Something rustled down the hall. Something very small and very quiet. Jeffers turned rapidly. He took half a dozen quick, sure steps forward into the hall.

"I had to operate to bring you into this world. Now I guess I can operate to . . ."

## THE STORY OF A PANIC

by *E. M. Forster*

**E**USTACE'S CAREER—if career it can be called—certainly dates from that afternoon in the chestnut woods above Ravello. I confess at once that I am a plain, simple man, with no pretensions to literary style. Still, I do flatter myself that I can tell a story without exaggerating, and I have therefore decided to give an unbiased account of the extraordinary events of eight years ago.

Ravello is a delightful place with a delightful little hotel in which we met some charming people. There were the two Miss Robinsons, who had been there for six weeks with Eustace, their nephew, then a boy of about fourteen. Mr. Sandbach had also been there some time. He had held a curacy in the north of England, which he had been compelled to resign on account of ill health, and while he was recruiting at Ravello he had taken in hand Eustace's education—which was then sadly deficient—and was endeavoring to fit him for one of our great public schools. Then there was Mr. Leyland, a would-be artist, and, finally, there was the nice landlady, Signora Scafetti, and the nice English-speaking waiter, Emmanuele—though at the time of which I am speaking Emmanuele was away, visiting a sick father.

To this little circle I, my wife, and my two daughters made, I venture to think, a not unwelcome addition. But though I liked most of the company well enough, there were two of them to whom I did not take at all. They were the artist, Leyland, and the Miss Robinsons' nephew, Eustace.

Leyland was simply conceited and odious, and as those qualities will be amply illustrated in my narrative, I need not enlarge upon them here. But Eustace was something besides: he was indescribably repellent.

I am fond of boys as a rule, and was quite disposed to be friendly. I and my daughters offered to take him out—“No, walking was such a fag.” Then I asked him to come and bathe—“No, he could not swim.”

“Every English boy should be able to swim,” I said; “I will teach you myself.”

"There, Eustace dear," said Miss Robinson; "here is a chance for you."

But he said he was afraid of the water!—a boy afraid!—and of course I said no more.

I would not have minded so much if he had been a really studious boy, but he neither played hard nor worked hard. His favorite occupations were lounging on the terrace in an easy chair and loafing along the highroad, with his feet shuffling up the dust and his shoulders stooping forward. Naturally enough, his features were pale, his chest contracted, and his muscles undeveloped. His aunts thought him delicate; what he really needed was discipline.

That memorable day we all arranged to go for a picnic up in the chestnut woods—all, that is, except Janet, who stopped behind to finish her water color of the Cathedral—not a very successful attempt, I am afraid.

I wander off into these irrelevant details because in my mind I cannot separate them from an account of the day; and it is the same with the conversation during the picnic: all is imprinted on my brain together. After a couple of hours' ascent we left the donkeys that had carried the Miss Robinsons and my wife, and all proceeded on foot to the head of the valley—Vallone Fontana Caroso is its proper name, I find.

I have visited a good deal of fine scenery before and since, but have found little that has pleased me more. The valley ended in a vast hollow, shaped like a cup, into which radiated ravines from the precipitous hills around. Both the valley and the ravines and the ribs of the hill that divided the ravines were covered with leafy chestnuts, so that the general appearance was that of a many-fingered green hand, palm upwards, which was clutching convulsively to keep us in its grasp. Far down the valley we could see Ravello and the sea, but that was the only sign of another world.

"Oh, what a perfectly lovely place!" said my daughter Rose. "What a picture it would make!"

"Yes," said Mr. Sandbach. "Many a famous European gallery would be proud to have a landscape a tithe as beautiful as this upon its walls."

"On the contrary," said Leyland, "it would make a very poor picture. Indeed, it is not paintable at all."

"And why is that?" said Rose, with far more deference than he deserved.

"Look, in the first place," he replied, "how intolerably straight

against the sky is the line of the hill. It would need breaking up and diversifying. And where we are standing the whole thing is out of perspective. Besides, all the coloring is monotonous and crude."

"I do not know anything about pictures," I put in, "and I do not pretend to know; but I know what is beautiful when I see it, and I am thoroughly content with this."

"Indeed, who could help being contented!" said the elder Miss Robinson; and Mr. Sandbach said the same.

"Ah!" said Leyland, "you all confuse the artistic view of nature with the photographic."

Poor Rose had brought her camera with her, so I thought this positively rude. I did not wish any unpleasantness; so I merely turned away and assisted my wife and Miss Mary Robinson to put out the lunch—not a very nice lunch.

"Eustace, dear," said his aunt, "come and help us here."

He was in a particularly bad temper that morning. He had, as usual, not wanted to come, and his aunts had nearly allowed him to stop at the hotel to vex Janet. But I, with their permission, spoke to him rather sharply on the subject of exercise; and the result was that he had come, but was even more taciturn and moody than usual.

Obedience was not his strong point. He invariably questioned every command, and only executed it grumbling. I should always insist on prompt and cheerful obedience, if I had a son.

"I'm—coming—Aunt—Mary," he at last replied, and dawdled to cut a piece of wood to make a whistle, taking care not to arrive till we had finished.

"Well, well, sir!" said I, "you stroll in at the end and profit by our labors." He sighed, for he could not endure being chaffed. Miss Mary, very unwisely, insisted on giving him the wing of the chicken, in spite of all my attempts to prevent her. I remember that I had a moment's vexation when I thought that, instead of enjoying the sun and the air and the woods, we were all engaged in wrangling over the diet of a spoiled boy.

But after lunch he was a little less in evidence. He withdrew to a tree trunk and began to loosen the bark for his whistle. I was thankful to see him employed, for once, in a way. We reclined and took a *dolce far niente*.

Those sweet chestnuts of the South are puny striplings compared with our robust Northerners. But they clothed the contours of the

hills and valleys in a most pleasing way, their veil being only broken by two clearings, in one of which we were sitting.

And because these few trees were cut down, Leyland burst into a petty indictment of the proprietor.

"All the poetry is going from nature," he cried; "her lakes and marshes are drained, her seas banked up, her forests cut down. Everywhere we see the vulgarity of desolation spreading."

I have had some experience of estates, and answered that cutting was very necessary for the health of the larger trees. Besides, it was unreasonable to expect the proprietor to derive no income from his lands.

"If you take the commercial side of landscape, you may feel pleasure in the owner's activity. But to me the mere thought that a tree is convertible into cash is disgusting."

"I see no reason," I observed politely, "to despise the gifts of nature because they are of value."

It did not stop him. "It is no matter," he went on, "we are all hopelessly steeped in vulgarity. I do not except myself. It is through us, and to our shame, that the Nereids have left the waters and the Oreads the mountains, that the woods no longer give shelter to Pan."

"Pan!" cried Mr. Sandbach, his mellow voice filling the valley as if it had been a great green church, "Pan is dead. That is why the woods do not shelter him." And he began to tell the striking story of the mariners who were sailing near the coast at the time of the birth of Christ, and three times heard a loud voice saying: "The great god Pan is dead."

"Yes. The great god Pan is dead," said Leyland. And he abandoned himself to that mock misery in which artistic people are so fond of indulging. His cigar went out, and he had to ask me for a match.

"How very interesting," said Rose. "I do wish I knew some ancient history."

"It is not worth your notice," said Mr. Sandbach. "Eh, Eustace?"

Eustace was finishing his whistle. He looked up, with the irritable frown in which his aunts allowed him to indulge, and made no reply.

The conversation turned to various topics and then died out. It was a cloudless afternoon in May, and the pale green of the young chestnut leaves made a pretty contrast with the dark blue of the

sky. We were all sitting at the edge of the small clearing for the sake of the view, and the shade of the chestnut saplings behind us was manifestly insufficient. All sounds died away—at least, that is my account; Miss Robinson says that the clamor of the birds was the first sign of uneasiness that she discerned. All sounds died away, except that, far in the distance, I could hear two boughs of a great chestnut grinding together as the tree swayed. The grinds grew shorter and shorter, and finally that sound stopped also. As I looked over the green fingers of the valley, everything was absolutely motionless and still; and that feeling of suspense which one so often experiences when nature is in repose began to steal over me.

Suddenly we were all electrified by the excruciating noise of Eustace's whistle. I never heard any instrument give forth so ear-splitting and discordant a sound.

"Eustace, dear," said Miss Mary Robinson, "you might have thought of your poor Aunt Julia's head."

Leyland, who had apparently been asleep, sat up.

"It is astonishing how blind a boy is to anything that is elevating or beautiful," he observed. "I should not have thought he could have found the wherewithal out here to spoil our pleasure like this."

Then the terrible silence fell upon us again. I was now standing up and watching a cat's-paw of wind that was running down one of the ridges opposite, turning the light green to dark as it traveled. A fanciful feeling of foreboding came over me; so I turned away, to find, to my amazement, that all the others were also on their feet, watching it too.

It is not possible to describe coherently what happened next; but I, for one, am not ashamed to confess that, though the fair blue sky was above me, and the green spring woods beneath me, and the kindest of friends around me, yet I became terribly frightened, more frightened than I ever wish to become again, frightened in a way I never have known either before or after. And in the eyes of the others, too, I saw blank, expressionless fear, while their mouths strove in vain to speak and their hands to gesticulate. Yet all around us were prosperity, beauty, and peace, and all was motionless, save the cat's-paw of wind, now traveling up the ridge on which we stood.

Who moved first has never been settled. It is enough to say that in one second we were tearing away along the hillside. Leyland was in front, then Mr. Sandbach, then my wife. But I only saw for a brief moment; for I ran across the little clearing and through the

woods and over the undergrowth and the rocks and down the dry torrent beds into the valley below. The sky might have been black as I ran, and the trees short grass, and the hillside a level road; for I saw nothing and heard nothing and felt nothing, since all the channels of sense and reason were blocked. It was not the spiritual fear that one has known at other times; but brutal overmastering physical fear, stopping up the ears, and dropping clouds before the eyes, and filling the mouth with foul tastes. And it was no ordinary humiliation that survived; for I had been afraid, not as a man, but as a beast.

## II

I cannot describe our finish any better than our start; for our fear passed away as it had come, without cause. Suddenly I was able to see, and hear, and cough, and clear my mouth. Looking back, I saw that the others were stopping too; and in a short time we were all together, though it was long before we could speak, and longer before we dared to.

No one was seriously injured. My poor wife had sprained her ankle, Leyland had torn one of his nails on a tree trunk, and I myself had scraped and damaged my ear. I never noticed it till I had stopped.

We were all silent, searching one another's faces. Suddenly Miss Mary Robinson gave a terrible shriek. "Oh, merciful heavens! Where is Eustace?" And then she would have fallen if Mr. Sandbach had not caught her.

"We must go back, we must go back at once," said my Rose, who was quite the most collected of the party. "But I hope—I feel he is safe."

Such was the cowardice of Leyland that he objected. But, finding himself in a minority, and being afraid of being left alone, he gave in. Rose and I supported my poor wife. Mr. Sandbach and Miss Robinson helped Miss Mary, and we returned slowly and silently, taking forty minutes to ascend the path that we had descended in ten.

Our conversation was naturally disjointed, as no one wished to offer an opinion on what had happened. Rose was the most talkative; she startled us all by saying that she had very nearly stopped where she was.

"Do you mean to say that you weren't—that you didn't feel compelled to go?" said Mr. Sandbach.



"Oh, of course, I did feel frightened"—she was the first to use the word—"but I somehow felt that if I could stop on, it would be quite different, that I shouldn't be frightened at all, so to speak." Rose never did express herself clearly; still, it is greatly to her credit that she, the youngest of us, should have held on so long at that terrible time.

"I should have stopped, I do believe," she continued, "if I had not seen Mamma go."

Rose's experience comforted us a little about Eustace. But a feeling of terrible foreboding was on us all as we painfully climbed the chestnut-covered slopes and neared the little clearing. When we reached it our tongues broke loose. There, at the further side, were the remains of our lunch, and close to them, lying motionless on his back, was Eustace.

With some presence of mind I at once cried out: "Hey, you young monkey! Jump up!" But he made no reply, nor did he answer when his poor aunts spoke to him. And, to my unspeakable horror, I saw one of those green lizards dart out from under his shirt cuff as we approached.

We stood watching him as he lay there so silently, and my ears began to tingle in expectation of the outbursts of lamentations and tears.

Miss Mary fell on her knees beside him and touched his hand, which was convulsively entwined in the long grass.

As she did so, he opened his eyes and smiled.

I have often seen that peculiar smile since, both on the possessor's face and on the photographs of him that are beginning to get into the illustrated papers. But, till then, Eustace had always worn a peevish, discontented frown; and we were all unused to this disquieting smile, which always seemed to be without adequate reason.

His aunts showered kisses on him, which he did not reciprocate, and then there was an awkward pause. Eustace seemed so natural and undisturbed; yet, if he had not had astonishing experiences himself, he ought to have been all the more astonished at our extraordinary behavior. My wife, with ready tact, endeavored to behave as if nothing had happened.

"Well, Mr. Eustace," she said, sitting down as she spoke, to ease her foot, "how have you been amusing yourself since we have been away?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Tytler, I have been very happy."

"And where have you been?"

"Here."

"And lying down all the time, you idle boy?"

"No, not all the time."

"What were you doing before?"

"Oh, standing or sitting."

"Stood and sat doing nothing! Don't you know the poem 'Satan finds some mischief still for—'"

"Oh, my dear madam, hush! hush!" Mr. Sandbach's voice broke in; and my wife, naturally mortified by the interruption, said no more and moved away. I was surprised to see Rose immediately take her place and, with more freedom than she generally displayed, run her fingers through the boy's tousled hair.

"Eustace! Eustace!" she said hurriedly, "tell me everything—every single thing."

Slowly he sat up—till then he had lain on his back.

"Oh, Rose—" he whispered, and, my curiosity being aroused. I moved nearer to hear what he was going to say. As I did so, I caught sight of some goats' footmarks in the moist earth beneath the trees.

"Apparently you have had a visit from some goats," I observed. "I had no idea they fed up here."

Eustace laboriously got onto his feet and came to see; and when he saw the footmarks he lay down and rolled on them, as a dog rolls in dirt.

After that there was a grave silence, broken at length by the solemn speech of Mr. Sandbach.

"My dear friends," he said, "it is best to confess the truth bravely. I know that what I am going to say now is what you are all now feeling. The Evil One has been very near us in bodily form. Time may yet discover some injury that he has wrought among us. But at present, for myself at all events, I wish to offer up thanks for a merciful deliverance."

With that he knelt down, and, as the others knelt, I knelt too, though I do not believe in the Devil being allowed to assail us in visible form, as I told Mr. Sandbach afterwards. Eustace came too, and knelt quietly enough between his aunts after they had beckoned to him. But when it was over he at once got up and began hunting for something.

"Why! Someone has cut my whistle in two," he said. (I had seen Leyland with an open knife in his hand—a superstitious act which I could hardly approve.)

"Well, it doesn't matter," he continued.

"And why doesn't it matter?" said Mr. Sandbach, who has ever since tried to entrap Eustace into an account of that mysterious hour.

"Because I don't want it any more."

"Why?"

At that he smiled; and, as no one seemed to have anything more to say, I set off as fast as I could through the wood and hauled up a donkey to carry my poor wife home. Nothing occurred in my absence, except that Rose had again asked Eustace to tell her what had happened; and he, this time, had turned away his head and had not answered her a single word.

As soon as I returned, we all set off. Eustace walked with difficulty, almost with pain, so that when we reached the other donkeys, his aunts wished him to mount one of them and ride all the way home. I make it a rule never to interfere between relatives, but I put my foot down at this. As it turned out, I was perfectly right, for the healthy exercise, I suppose, began to thaw Eustace's sluggish blood and loosen his stiffened muscles. He stepped out manfully, for the first time in his life, holding his head up and taking deep drafts of air into his chest. I observed with satisfaction to Miss Mary Robinson that Eustace was at last taking some pride in his personal appearance.

Mr. Sandbach sighed, and said that Eustace must be carefully watched, for we none of us understood him yet. Miss Mary Robinson being very much—over much, I think—guided by him, sighed too.

"Come, come, Miss Robinson," I said, "there's nothing wrong with Eustace. Our experiences are mysterious, not his. He was astonished at our sudden departure, that's why he was so strange when we returned. He's right enough—improved, if anything."

"And is the worship of athletics, the cult of insensate activity, to be counted as an improvement?" put in Leyland, fixing a large, sorrowful eye on Eustace, who had stopped to scramble onto a rock to pick some cyclamen. "The passionate desire to rend from nature the few beauties that have been still left her—that is to be counted as an improvement too?"

It is mere waste of time to reply to such remarks, especially when they come from an unsuccessful artist, suffering from a damaged finger. I changed the conversation by asking what we should say at the hotel. After some discussion it was agreed that we should

say nothing, either there or in our letters home. Importunate truth telling, which brings only bewilderment and discomfort to the hearers, is, in my opinion, a mistake; and, after a long discussion, I managed to make Mr. Sandbach acquiesce in my view.

Eustace did not share in our conversation. He was racing about, like a real boy, in the wood to the right. A strange feeling of shame prevented us from openly mentioning our fright to him. Indeed, it seemed almost reasonable to conclude that it had made but little impression on him. So it disconcerted us when he bounded back with an armful of flowering acanthus, calling out:

“Do you suppose Gennaro’ll be there when we get back?”

Gennaro was the stopgap waiter, a clumsy, impertinent fisher lad, who had been had up from Minori in the absence of the nice English-speaking Emmanuele. It was to him that we owed our scrappy lunch; and I could not conceive why Eustace desired to see him, unless it was to make mock with him of our behavior.

“Yes, of course he will be there,” said Miss Robinson. “Why do you ask, dear?”

“Oh, I thought I’d like to see him.”

“And why?” snapped Mr. Sandbach.

“Because, because I do, I do; because, because I do.” He danced away into the darkening wood to the rhythm of his words.

“This is very extraordinary,” said Mr. Sandbach. “Did he like Gennaro before?”

“Gennaro has only been here two days,” said Rose, “and I know that they haven’t spoken to each other a dozen times.”

Each time Eustace returned from the wood his spirits were higher. Once he came whooping down on us as a wild Indian, and another time he made believe to be a dog. The last time he came back with a poor dazed hare, too frightened to move, sitting on his arm. He was getting too uproarious, I thought; and we were all glad to leave the wood and start upon the steep staircase path that leads down into Ravello. It was late and turning dark; and we made all the speed we could, Eustace scurrying in front of us like a goat.

Just where the staircase path debouches on the white highroad, the next extraordinary incident of this extraordinary day occurred. Three old women were standing by the wayside. They, like ourselves, had come down from the woods, and they were resting their heavy bundles of fuel on the low parapet of the road. Eustace stopped in front of them and, after a moment’s deliberation,

stepped forward and—kissed the left-hand one on the cheek!

“My good fellow!” exclaimed Mr. Sandbach, “are you quite crazy?”

Eustace said nothing, but offered the old woman some of his flowers and then hurried on. I looked back; and the old woman’s companions seemed as much astonished at the proceeding as we were. But she herself had put the flowers in her bosom and was murmuring blessings.

This salutation of the old lady was the first example of Eustace’s strange behavior, and we were both surprised and alarmed. It was useless talking to him, for he either made silly replies or else bounded away without replying at all.

He made no reference to Gennaro on the way home, and I hoped that that was forgotten. But when we came to the Piazza, in front of the Cathedral, he screamed out: “Gennaro! Gennaro!” at the top of his voice, and began running up the little alley that led to the hotel. Sure enough, there was Gennaro at the end of it, with his arms and legs sticking out of the nice little English-speaking waiter’s dress suit, and a dirty fisherman’s cap on his head—for, as the poor landlady truly said, however much she superintended his toilet, he always managed to introduce something incongruous into it before he had done.

Eustace sprang to meet him, and leaped right up into his arms and put his own arms round his neck. And this in the presence, not only of us, but also of the landlady, the chambermaid, the facchino, and of two American ladies who were coming for a few days’ visit to the little hotel.

I always make a point of behaving pleasantly to Italians, however little they may deserve it; but this habit of promiscuous intimacy was perfectly intolerable and could only lead to familiarity and mortification for all. Taking Miss Robinson aside, I asked her permission to speak seriously to Eustace on the subject of intercourse with social inferiors. She granted it; but I determined to wait till the absurd boy had calmed down a little from the excitement of the day. Meanwhile Gennaro, instead of attending to the wants of the two new ladies, carried Eustace into the house, as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

“*Ho capito*,” I heard him say as he passed me. “*Ho capito*” is the Italian for “I have understood”; but, as Eustace had not spoken to him, I could not see the force of the remark. It served to increase our bewilderment, and by the time we sat down at the din-

ner table, our imaginations and our tongues were alike exhausted.

I omit from this account the various comments that were made, as few of them seem worthy of being recorded. But for three or four hours seven of us were pouring forth our bewilderment in a stream of appropriate and inappropriate exclamations. Some traced a connection between our behavior in the afternoon and the behavior of Eustace now. Others saw no connection at all. Mr. Sandbach still held to the possibility of infernal influences, and also said that he ought to have a doctor. Leyland only saw the development of "that unspeakable Philistine, the boy." Rose maintained, to my surprise, that everything was excusable; while I began to see that the young gentleman wanted a sound thrashing. The poor Miss Robinsons swayed helplessly about between these diverse opinions; inclining now to careful supervision, now to acquiescence, now to corporal chastisement, now to Eno's Fruit Salt.

Dinner passed off fairly well, though Eustace was terribly fidgety, Gennaro as usual dropping the knives and spoons, and hawking and clearing his throat. He only knew a few words of English, and we were all reduced to Italian for making known our wants. Eustace, who had picked up a little somehow, asked for some oranges. To my annoyance, Gennaro in his answer made use of the second person singular—a form only used when addressing those who are both intimates and equals. Eustace had brought it on himself; but an impertinence of this kind was an affront to us all, and I was determined to speak, and to speak at once.

When I heard him clearing the table I went in, and, summoning up my Italian, or rather Neapolitan—the Southern dialects are execrable—I said: "Gennaro! I heard you address Signor Eustace with 'Tu.'"

"It is true."

"You are not right. You must use '*Lei*' or '*Voi*'—more polite forms. And remember that, though Signor Eustace is sometimes silly and foolish—this afternoon for example—yet you must always behave respectfully to him; for he is a young English gentleman, and you are a poor Italian fisher boy."

I know that speech sounds terribly snobbish, but in Italian one can say things that one would never dream of saying in English. Besides, it is no good speaking delicately to persons of that class. Unless you put things plainly, they take a vicious pleasure in misunderstanding you.

An honest English fisherman would have landed me one in the

eye in a minute for such a remark, but the wretched downtrodden Italians have no pride. Gennaro only sighed and said: "It is true."

"Quite so," I said, and turned to go. To my indignation I heard him add: "But sometimes it is not important."

"What do you mean?" I shouted.

He came close up to me with horrid gesticulating fingers.

"Signor Tytler, I wish to say this: If Eustazio asks me to call him 'Voi,' I will call him 'Voi.' Otherwise, no."

With that he seized up a tray of dinner things and fled from the room with them; and I heard two more wineglasses go on the courtyard floor.

I was now fairly angry, and strode out to interview Eustace. But he had gone to bed, and the landlady, to whom I also wished to speak, was engaged. After more vague wonderings, obscurely expressed owing to the presence of Janet and the two American ladies, we all went to bed, too, after a harassing and most extraordinary day.

### III

But the day was nothing to the night.

I suppose I had slept for about four hours, when I woke suddenly thinking I heard a noise in the garden. And immediately, before my eyes were open, cold terrible fear seized me—not fear of something that was happening, like the fear in the wood, but fear of something that might happen.

Our room was on the first floor, looking out onto the garden—or terrace, it was rather: a wedge-shaped block of ground covered with roses and vines, and intersected with little asphalt paths. It was bounded on the small side by the house; round the two long sides ran a wall, only three feet above the terrace level, but with a good twenty-foot drop over it into the olive yards, for the ground fell very precipitously away.

Trembling all over, I stole to the window. There, pattering up and down the asphalt paths, was something white. I was too much alarmed to see clearly; and in the uncertain light of the stars the thing took all manner of curious shapes. Now it was a great dog, now an enormous white bat, now a mass of quickly traveling cloud. It would bounce like a ball, or take short flights like a bird, or glide slowly like a wraith. It gave no sound—save the pattering sound of what, after all, must be human feet. And at last the obvious explanation forced itself upon my disordered mind; and I

realized that Eustace had got out of bed, and that we were in for something more.

I hastily dressed myself and went down into the dining room, which opened upon the terrace. The door was already unfastened. My terror had almost entirely passed away, but for quite five minutes I struggled with a curious cowardly feeling, which bade me not interfere with the poor strange boy, but leave him to his ghostly patterings and merely watch him from the window, to see he took no harm.

But better impulses prevailed and, opening the door, I called out: "Eustace! What on earth are you doing? Come in at once."

He stopped his antics and said: "I hate my bedroom. I could not stop in it, it is too small."

"Come! Come! I'm tired of affectation. You've never complained of it before."

"Besides I can't see anything—no flowers, no leaves, no sky; only a stone wall." The outlook of Eustace's room certainly was limited; but, as I told him, he had never complained of it before.

"Eustace, you talk like a child. Come in! Prompt obedience, if you please."

He did not move.

"Very well; I shall carry you in by force," I added, and made a few steps towards him. But I was soon convinced of the futility of pursuing a boy through a tangle of asphalt paths, and went in instead, to call Mr. Sandbach and Leyland to my aid.

When I returned with them he was worse than ever. He would not even answer us when we spoke, but began singing and chattering to himself in a most alarming way.

"It's a case for the doctor now," said Mr. Sandbach, gravely tapping his forehead.

He had stopped his running and was singing, first low, then loud—singing five-finger exercises, scales, hymn tunes, scraps of Wagner—anything that came into his head. His voice—a very untuneful voice—grew stronger and stronger, and he ended with a tremendous shout which boomed like a gun among the mountains and awoke everyone who was still sleeping in the hotel. My poor wife and the two girls appeared at their respective windows, and the American ladies were heard violently ringing their bell.

"Eustace," we all cried, "stop! Stop, dear boy, and come into the house."

He shook his head and started off again—talking this time. Never



have I listened to such an extraordinary speech. At any other time it would have been ludicrous, for here was a boy, with no sense of beauty and a puerile command of words, attempting to tackle themes which the greatest poets have found almost beyond their power. Eustace Robinson, aged fourteen, was standing in his night-shirt saluting, praising, and blessing, the great forces and manifestations of nature.

He spoke first of night and the stars and planets above his head, of the swarms of fireflies below him, of the invisible sea below the fireflies, of the great rocks covered with anemones and shells that were slumbering in the invisible sea. He spoke of the rivers and waterfalls, of the ripening bunches of grapes, of the smoking cone of Vesuvius and the hidden fire channels that made the smoke, of the myriads of lizards who were lying curled up in the crannies of the sultry earth, of the showers of white rose leaves that were tangled in his hair. And then he spoke of the rain and the wind by which all things are changed, of the air through which all things live, and of the woods in which all things can be hidden.

Of course, it was all absurdly highfaluting: yet I could have kicked Leyland for audibly observing that it was "a diabolical caricature of all that was most holy and beautiful in life."

"And then"—Eustace was going on in the pitiable conversational doggerel which was his only mode of expression—"and then there are men, but I can't make them out so well." He knelt down by the parapet and rested his head on his arms.

"Now's the time," whispered Leyland. I hate stealth, but we darted forward and endeavored to catch hold of him from behind. He was away in a twinkling, but turned round at once to look at us. As far as I could see in the starlight, he was crying. Leyland rushed at him again, and we tried to corner him along the asphalt paths, but without the slightest approach to success.

We returned, breathless and discomfited, leaving him to his madness in the further corner of the terrace. But my Rose had an inspiration.

"Papa," she called from the window, "if you get Gennaro, he might be able to catch him for you."

I had no wish to ask a favor of Gennaro, but, as the landlady had by now appeared on the scene, I begged her to summon him from the charcoal bin in which he slept, and make him try what he could do.

She soon returned, and was shortly followed by Gennaro, attired

in a dress coat, without either waistcoat, shirt, or vest, and a ragged pair of what had been trousers, cut short above the knees for purposes of wading. The landlady, who had quite picked up English ways, rebuked him for the incongruous and even indecent appearance which he presented.

"I have a coat and I have trousers. What more do you desire?"

"Never mind, Signora Scafetti," I put in. "As there are no ladies here, it is not of the slightest consequence." Then, turning to Gennaro, I said: "The aunts of Signor Eustace wish you to fetch him into the house."

He did not answer.

"Do you hear me? He is not well. I order you to fetch him into the house."

"Fetch! Fetch!" said Signora Scafetti, and shook him roughly by the arm.

"Eustazio is well where he is."

"Fetch! Fetch!" Signora Scafetti screamed, and let loose a flood of Italian, most of which, I am glad to say, I could not follow. I glanced up nervously at the girls' window, but they hardly know as much as I do, and I am thankful to say that none of us caught one word of Gennaro's answer.

The two yelled and shouted at each other for quite ten minutes, at the end of which Gennaro rushed back to his charcoal bin and Signora Scafetti burst into tears, as well she might, for she greatly valued her English guests.

"He says," she sobbed, "that Signor Eustace is well where he is, and that he will not fetch him. I can do no more."

But I could, for, in my stupid British way, I have got some insight into the Italian character. I followed Mr. Gennaro to his place of repose and found him wriggling down onto a dirty sack.

"I wish you to fetch Signor Eustace to me," I began.

He hurled at me an unintelligible reply.

"If you fetch him, I will give you this." And out of my pocket I took a new ten-lira note.

This time he did not answer.

"This note is equal to ten lire in silver," I continued, for I knew that the poor-class Italian is unable to conceive of a single large sum.

"I know it."

"That is, two hundred soldi."

"I do not desire them. Eustazio is my friend."

I put the note into my pocket.

"Besides, you would not give it me."

"I am an Englishman. The English always do what they promise."

"That is true." It is astonishing how the most dishonest of nations trust us. Indeed, they often trust us more than we trust one another. Gennaro knelt up on his sack. It was too dark to see his face, but I could feel his warm garlicky breath coming out in gasps, and I knew that the eternal avarice of the South had laid hold upon him.

"I could not fetch Eustazio to the house. He might die there."

"You need not do that," I replied patiently. "You need only bring him to me; and I will stand outside in the garden." And to this, as if it were something quite different, the pitiable youth consented.

"But give me first the ten lire."

"No"—for I knew the kind of person with whom I had to deal. Once faithless, always faithless.

We returned to the terrace, and Gennaro, without a single word, pattered off towards the pattering that could be heard at the remoter end. Mr. Sandbach, Leyland, and myself moved away a little from the house and stood in the shadow of the white climbing roses, practically invisible.

We heard "Eustazio" called, followed by absurd cries of pleasure from the poor boy. The pattering ceased, and we heard them talking. Their voices got nearer, and presently I could discern them through the creepers, the grotesque figure of the young man, and the slim little white-robed boy. Gennaro had his arm round Eustace's neck, and Eustace was talking away in his fluent, slipshod Italian.

"I understand almost everything," I heard him say. "The trees, hills, stars, water, I can see all. But isn't it odd! I can't make out men a bit. Do you know what I mean?"

"*Ho capito*," said Gennaro gravely, and took his arm off Eustace's shoulder. But I made the new note crackle in my pocket; and he heard it. He stuck his hand out with a jerk; and the unsuspecting Eustace gripped it in his own.

"It is odd!" Eustace went on—they were quite close now—"It almost seems as if—as if—"

I darted out and caught hold of his arm, and Leyland got hold of the other arm, and Mr. Sandbach hung onto his feet. He gave

shrill, heart-piercing screams; and the white roses, which were falling early that year, descended in showers on him as we dragged him into the house.

As soon as we entered the house he stopped shrieking; but floods of tears silently burst forth and spread over his upturned face.

"Not to my room," he pleaded. "It is so small."

His infinitely dolorous look filled me with strange pity, but what could I do? Besides, his window was the only one that had bars to it.

"Never mind, dear boy," said kind Mr. Sandbach. "I will bear you company till the morning."

At this his convulsive struggles began again. "Oh, please, not that. Anything but that. I will promise to lie still and not to cry more than I can help, if I am left alone."

So we laid him on the bed and drew the sheets over him and left him sobbing bitterly, and saying: "I nearly saw everything, and now I can see nothing at all."

We informed the Miss Robinsons of all that had happened, and returned to the dining room, where we found Signora Scafetti and Gennaro whispering together. Mr. Sandbach got pen and paper and began writing to the English doctor at Naples. I at once drew out the note and flung it down on the table to Gennaro.

"Here is your pay," I said sternly, for I was thinking of the Thirty Pieces of Silver.

"Thank you very much, sir," said Gennaro, and grabbed it.

He was going off, when Leyland, whose interest and indifference were always equally misplaced, asked him what Eustace had meant by saying he could "not make out men a bit."

"I cannot say. Signor Eustazio" (I was glad to observe a little deference at last) "has a subtle brain. He understands many things."

"But I heard you say you understood," Leyland persisted.

"I understand, but I cannot explain. I am a poor Italian fisher lad. Yet, listen: I will try." I saw to my alarm that his manner was changing, and tried to stop him. But he sat down on the edge of the table and started off, with some absolutely incoherent remarks.

"It is sad," he observed at last. "What has happened is very sad. But what can I do? I am poor. It is not I."

I turned away in contempt. Leyland went on asking questions. He wanted to know who it was that Eustace had in his mind when he spoke.

"That is easy to say," Gennaro gravely answered. "It is you, it is I. It is all in this house, and many outside it. If he wishes for mirth, we discomfort him. If he asks to be alone, we disturb him. He longed for a friend, and found none for fifteen years. Then he found me, and the first night I—I who have been in the woods and understood things too—betray him to you, and send him in to die. But what could I do?"

"Gently, gently," said I.

"Oh, assuredly he will die. He will lie in the small room all night, and in the morning he will be dead. That I know for certain."

"There, that will do," said Mr. Sandbach. "I shall be sitting with him."

"Filomena Giusti sat all night with Caterina, but Caterina was dead in the morning. They would not let her out, though I begged, and prayed, and cursed, and beat the door, and climbed the wall. They were ignorant fools, and thought I wished to carry her away. And in the morning she was dead."

"What is all this?" I asked Signora Scafetti.

"All kinds of stories will get about," she replied, "and he, least of anyone, has reason to repeat them."

"And I am alive now," he went on, "because I had neither parents nor relatives nor friends, so that, when the first night came, I could run through the woods and climb the rocks and plunge into the water, until I had accomplished my desire!"

We heard a cry from Eustace's room—a faint but steady sound, like the sound of wind in a distant wood heard by one standing in tranquillity.

"That," said Gennaro, "was the last noise of Caterina. I was hanging onto her window then, and it blew out past me."

And, lifting up his hand, in which my ten-lira note was safely packed, he solemnly cursed Mr. Sandbach, and Leyland, and myself, and Fate, because Eustace was dying in the upstairs room. Such is the working of the Southern mind; and I verily believe that he would not have moved even then, had not Leyland, that unspeakable idiot, upset the lamp with his elbow. It was a patent self-extinguishing lamp, bought by Signora Scafetti, at my special request, to replace the dangerous thing that she was using. The result was that it went out; and the mere physical change from light to darkness had more power over the ignorant animal nature of Gennaro than the most obvious dictates of logic and reason.

I felt, rather than saw, that he had left the room and shouted out to Mr. Sandbach: "Have you got the key of Eustace's room in your pocket?" But Mr. Sandbach and Leyland were both on the floor, having mistaken each other for Gennaro, and some more precious time was wasted in finding a match. Mr. Sandbach had only just time to say that he had left the key in the door, in case the Miss Robinsons wished to pay Eustace a visit, when we heard a noise on the stairs, and there was Gennaro, carrying Eustace down.

We rushed out and blocked up the passage, and they lost heart and retreated to the upper landing.

"Now they are caught," cried Signora Scafetti. "There is no other way out."

We were cautiously ascending the staircase, when there was a terrific scream from my wife's room, followed by a heavy thud on the asphalt path. They had leapt out of her window.

I reached the terrace just in time to see Eustace jumping over the parapet of the garden wall. This time I knew for certain he would be killed. But he alighted in an olive tree, looking like a great white moth, and from the tree he slid onto the earth. And as soon as his bare feet touched the clods of earth he uttered a strange loud cry, such as I should not have thought the human voice could have produced, and disappeared among the trees below.

"He has understood and he is saved," cried Gennaro, who was still sitting on the asphalt path. "Now instead of dying he will live!"

"And you, instead of keeping the ten lire, will give them up," I retorted, for at this theatrical remark I could contain myself no longer.

"The ten lire are mine," he hissed back, in a scarcely audible voice. He clasped his hand over his breast to protect his ill-gotten gains, and, as he did so, he swayed forward and fell upon his face on the path. He had not broken any limbs, and a leap like that would never have killed an Englishman, for the drop was not great. But those miserable Italians have no stamina. Something had gone wrong inside him, and he was dead.

The morning was still far off, but the morning breeze had begun, and more rose leaves fell on us as we carried him in. Signora Scafetti burst into screams at the sight of the dead body, and, far down the valley towards the sea, there still resounded the shouts and the laughter of the escaping boy.

## THE PIPER'S SON

by Lewis Padgett

*The Green Man was climbing the glass mountains, and hairy, gnomish faces peered at him from crevices. This was only another step in the Green Man's endless, exciting odyssey. He'd had a great many adventures already—in the Flame Country, among the Dimension Changers, with the City Apes who sneered endlessly while their blunt, clumsy fingers fumbled at deathrays. The trolls, however, were masters of magic, and were trying to stop the Green Man with spells. Little whirlwinds of force spun underfoot, trying to trip the Green Man, a figure of marvelous muscular development, handsome as a god, and hairless from head to foot, glistening pale green. The whirlwinds formed a fascinating pattern. If you could thread a precarious path among them—avoiding the pale yellow ones especially—you could get through.*

*And the hairy gnomes watched malignantly, jealously, from their crannies in the glass crags.*

**A**L BURKHALTER, having recently achieved the mature status of eight full years, lounged under a tree and masticated a grass blade. He was so immersed in his daydreams that his father had to nudge his side gently to bring comprehension into the half-closed eyes. It was a good day for dreaming, anyway—a hot sun and a cool wind blowing down from the white Sierra peaks to the east. Timothy grass sent its faintly musty fragrance along the channels of air, and Ed Burkhalter was glad that his son was second-generation since the Blowup. He himself had been born ten years after the last bomb had been dropped, but secondhand memories can be pretty bad too.

"Hello, Al," he said, and the youth vouchsafed a half-lidded glance of tolerant acceptance.

"Hi, Dad."

"Want to come downtown with me?"

"Nope," Al said, relaxing instantly into his stupor.

Burkhalter raised a figurative eyebrow and half turned. On an

impulse, then, he did something he rarely did without the tacit permission of the other party; he used his telepathic power to reach into Al's mind. There was, he admitted to himself, a certain hesitancy, a subconscious unwillingness on his part, to do this, even though Al had pretty well outgrown the nasty, inhuman formlessness of mental babyhood. There had been a time when Al's mind had been quite shocking in its alienage. Burkhalter remembered a few abortive experiments he had made before Al's birth; few fathers-to-be could resist the temptation to experiment with embryonic brains, and that had brought back nightmares Burkhalter had not had since his youth. There had been enormous rolling masses, and an appalling vastness, and other things. Prenatal memories were ticklish, and should be left to qualified mnemonic psychologists.

But now Al was maturing, and daydreaming, as usual, in bright colors. Burkhalter, reassured, felt that he had fulfilled his duty as a monitor and left his son still eating grass and ruminating.

Just the same, there was a sudden softness inside of him, and the aching, futile pity he was apt to feel for helpless things that were as yet unqualified for conflict with that extraordinarily complicated business of living. Conflict, competition, had not died out when war abolished itself; the business of adjustment even to one's surroundings was a conflict, and conversation a duel. With Al, too, there was a double problem. Yes, language was in effect a tariff wall, and a Baldy could appreciate that thoroughly, since the wall didn't exist between Baldies.

Walking down the rubbery walk that led to town center, Burkhalter grinned wryly and ran lean fingers through his well-kept wig. Strangers were very often surprised to know that he was a Baldy, a telepath. They looked at him with wondering eyes, too courteous to ask how it felt to be a freak, but obviously avid. Burkhalter, who knew diplomacy, would be quite willing to lead the conversation.

"My folks lived near Chicago after the Blowup. That was why."

"Oh." Stare. "I'd heard that was why so many—" Startled pause.

"Freaks or mutations. There were both. I still don't know which class I belong to," he'd add disarmingly.

"You're no freak!" They didn't protest too much.

"Well, some mighty queer specimens came out of the radioactive-affected areas around the bomb targets. Funny things happened to the germ plasm. Most of 'em died out; they couldn't reproduce; but you'll still find a few creatures in sanitariums—two heads, you know. And so on."



Nevertheless they were always ill-at-ease. "You mean you can read my mind—now?"

"I could, but I'm not. It's hard work, except with another telepath. And we Baldies—well, we don't, that's all." A man with abnormal muscle development wouldn't go around knocking people down. Not unless he wanted to be mobbed. Baldies were always sneakily conscious of a hidden peril: lynch law. And wise Baldies didn't even imply that they had an . . . extra sense. They just said they were different, and let it go at that.

But one question was always implied, though not always mentioned. "If I were a telepath, I'd . . . how much do you make a year?"

They were surprised at the answer. A mindreader certainly could make a fortune, if he wanted. So why did Ed Burkhalter stay a semantics expert in Modoc Publishing Town, when a trip to one of the science towns would enable him to get hold of secrets that would get him a fortune?

There was a good reason. Self-preservation was a part of it. For which reason Burkhalter, and many like him, wore toupees. Though there were many Baldies who did not.

Modoc was a twin town with Pueblo, across the mountain barrier south of the waste that had been Denver. Pueblo held the presses, photolintypes, and the machines that turned scripts into books, after Modoc had dealt with them. There was a helicopter distribution fleet at Pueblo, and for the last week Oldfield, the manager, had been demanding the manuscript of "Psychohistory," turned out by a New Yale man who had got tremendously involved in past emotional problems, to the detriment of literary clarity. The truth was that he distrusted Burkhalter. And Burkhalter, neither a priest nor a psychologist, had to become both without admitting it to the confused author of "Psychohistory."

The sprawling buildings of the publishing house lay ahead and below, more like a resort than anything more utilitarian. That had been necessary. Authors were peculiar people, and often it was necessary to induce them to take hydrotherapeutic treatments before they were in shape to work out their books with the semantic experts. Nobody was going to bite them, but they didn't realize that, and either cowered in corners, terrified, or else blustered their way around, using language few could understand. Jem Quayle, author

of "Psychohistory," fitted into neither group; he was simply baffled by the intensity of his own research. His personal history had qualified him too well for emotional involvements with the past—and that was a serious matter when a thesis of this particular type was in progress.

Dr. Moon, who was on the Board, sat near the south entrance, eating an apple which he peeled carefully with his silver-hilted dagger. Moon was fat, short, and shapeless; he didn't have much hair, but he wasn't a telepath; Baldies were entirely hairless. He gulped and waved at Burkhalter.

"Ed . . . urp . . . want to talk to you."

"Sure," Burkhalter said, agreeably coming to a standstill and rocking on his heels. Ingrained habit made him sit down beside the Boardman; Baldies, for obvious reasons, never stood up when non-telepaths were sitting. Their eyes met now on the same level. Burkhalter said, "What's up?"

"The store got some Shasta apples flown in yesterday. Better tell Ethel to get some before they're sold out. Here." Moon watched his companion eat a chunk, and nod.

"Good. I'll have her get some. The 'copter's laid up for today, though; Ethel pulled the wrong gadget."

" Foolproof," Moon said bitterly. "Huron's turning out some sweet models these days; I'm getting my new one from Michigan. Listen, Pueblo called me this morning on Quayle's book."

"Oldfield?"

"Our boy," Moon nodded. "He says can't you send over even a few chapters."

Burkhalter shook his head. "I don't think so. There are some abstracts right in the beginning that just have to be clarified, and Quayle is—" He hesitated.

"What?"

Burkhalter thought about the Oedipus complex he'd uncovered in Quayle's mind, but that was sacrosanct, even though it kept Quayle from interpreting Darius with cold logic. "He's got muddy thinking in there. I can't pass it; I tried it on three readers yesterday, and got different reactions from all of them. So far 'Psychohistory' is all things to all men. The critics would lambaste us if we released the book as is. Can't you string Oldfield along for a while longer?"

"Maybe," Moon said doubtfully. "I've got a subjective novella I could rush over. It's light vicarious eroticism, and that's harmless; besides, it's semantically O. K.'d. We've been holding it up for an

artist, but I can put Duman on it. I'll do that, yeah. I'll shoot the script over to Pueblo and he can make the plates later. A merry life we lead, Ed."

"A little too merry sometimes," Burkhalter said. He got up, nodded, and went in search of Quayle, who was relaxing on one of the sun decks.

Quayle was a thin, tall man with a worried face and the abstract air of an unshelled tortoise. He lay on his flexiglass couch, direct sunlight toasting him from above, while the reflected rays sneaked up on him from below, through the transparent crystal. Burkhalter pulled off his shirt and dropped on a sunner beside Quayle. The author glanced at Burkhalter's hairless chest and half-formed revulsion rose in him: *A Baldy . . . no privacy . . . none of his business . . . fake eyebrows and lashes; he's still a—*

Something ugly, at that point.

Diplomatically Burkhalter touched a button, and on a screen overhead a page of "Psychohistory" appeared, enlarged and easily readable. Quayle scanned the sheet. It had code notations on it, made by the readers, recognized by Burkhalter as varied reactions to what should have been straight-line explanations. If three readers had got three different meanings out of that paragraph—well, what *did* Quayle mean? He reached delicately into the mind, conscious of useless guards erected against intrusion, mud barricades over which his mental eye stole like a searching, quiet wind. No ordinary man could guard his mind against a Baldy. But Baldies could guard their privacy against intrusion by other telepaths—adults, that is. There was a psychic selector band, a—

Here it came. But muddled a bit. *Darius*: that wasn't simply a word; it wasn't a picture, either; it was really a second *life*. But scattered, fragmentary. Scraps of scent and sound, and memories, and emotional reactions. Admiration and hatred. A burning impotence. A black tornado, smelling of pine, roaring across a map of Europe and Asia. Pine scent stronger now, and horrible humiliation, and remembered pain . . . eyes . . . *Get out!*

Burkhalter put down the dictograph mouthpiece and lay looking up through the darkened eye-shells he had donned. "I got out as soon as you wanted me to," he said. "I'm still out."

Quayle lay there, breathing hard. "Thanks," he said. "Apologies. Why you don't ask a duello—"

"I don't want to duel with you," Burkhalter said. "I've never put blood on my dagger in my life. Besides, I can see your side

of it. Remember, this is my job, Mr. Quayle, and I've learned a lot of things—that I've forgotten again."

"It's intrusion, I suppose. I tell myself that it doesn't matter, but my privacy—is important."

Burkhalter said patiently, "We can keep trying it from different angles until we find one that isn't too private. Suppose, for example, I asked you if you admired Darius."

Admiration . . . and pine scent . . . and Burkhalter said quickly, "I'm out. O. K.?"

"Thanks," Quayle muttered. He turned on his side, away from the other man. After a moment he said, "That's silly—turning over, I mean. You don't have to see my face to know what I'm thinking."

"You have to put out the welcome mat before I walk in," Burkhalter told him.

"I guess I believe that. I've met some Baldies, though, that were . . . that I didn't like."

"There's a lot on that order, sure. I know the type. The ones who don't wear wigs."

Quayle said, "They'll read your mind and embarrass you just for the fun of it. They ought to be—taught better."

Burkhalter blinked in the sunlight. "Well, Mr. Quayle, it's this way. A Baldy's got his problems, too. He's got to orient himself to a world that isn't telepathic; and I suppose a lot of Baldies rather feel that they're letting their specialization go to waste. There *are* jobs a man like me is suited for—"

"Man!" He caught the scrap of thought from Quayle. He ignored it, his face as always a mobile mask, and went on.

"Semantics have always been a problem, even in countries speaking only one tongue. A qualified Baldy is a swell interpreter. And, though there aren't any Baldies on the detective forces, they often work with the police. It's rather like being a machine that can do only a few things."

"A few things more than humans can," Quayle said.

Sure, Burkhalter thought, if we could compete on equal footing with nontelepathic humanity. But would blind men trust one who could see? Would they play poker with him? A sudden, deep bitterness put an unpleasant taste in Burkhalter's mouth. What was the answer? Reservations for Baldies? Isolation? And would a nation of blind men trust those with vision enough for that? Or would they be dusted off—the sure cure, the check-and-balance system that made war an impossibility.

He remembered when Red Bank had been dusted off, and maybe that had been justified. The town was getting too big for its boots, and personal dignity was a vital factor; you weren't willing to lose face as long as a dagger swung at your belt. Similarly, the thousands upon thousands of little towns that covered America, each with its peculiar specialty—helicopter manufacture for Huron and Michigan, vegetable farming for Conoy and Diego, textiles and education and art and machines—each little town had a wary eye on all the others. The science and research centers were a little larger; nobody objected to that, for technicians never made war except under pressure; but few of the towns held more than a few hundred families. It was check-and-balance in most efficient degree; whenever a town showed signs of wanting to become a city—thence, a capital, thence, an imperialistic empire—it was dusted off. Though that had not happened for a long while. And Red Bank might have been a mistake.

Geopolitically it was a fine setup; sociologically it was acceptable, but brought necessary changes. There was subconscious swashbuckling. The rights of the individual had become more highly regarded as decentralization took place. And men learned.

They learned a monetary system based primarily upon barter. They learned to fly; nobody drove surface cars. They learned new things, but they did not forget the Blowup, and in secret places near every town were hidden the bombs that could utterly and fantastically exterminate a town, as such bombs had exterminated the cities during the Blowup.

And everybody knew how to make those bombs. They were beautifully, terribly simple. You could find the ingredients anywhere and prepare them easily. Then you could take your helicopter over a town, drop an egg overside—and perform an erasure.

Outside of the wilderness malcontents, the maladjusted people found in every race, nobody kicked. And the roaming tribes never raided and never banded together in large groups—for fear of an erasure.

The artisans were maladjusted too, to some degree, but they weren't antisocial, so they lived where they wanted and painted, wrote, composed, and retreated into their own private worlds. The scientists, equally maladjusted in other lines, retreated to their slightly larger towns, banding together in small universes, and turned out remarkable technical achievements.

And the Baldies—found jobs where they could.

No nontelepath would have viewed the world environment quite as Burkhalter did. He was abnormally conscious of the human element, attaching a deeper, more profound significance to those human values, undoubtedly because he saw men in more than the ordinary dimensions. And also, in a way—and inevitably—he looked at humanity from outside.

Yet he was human. The barrier that telepathy had raised made men suspicious of him, more so than if he had had two heads—then they could have pitied. As it was—

As it was, he adjusted the scanner until new pages of the type-script came flickering into view above. "Say when," he told Quayle.

Quayle brushed back his gray hair. "I feel sensitive all over," he objected. "After all, I've been under a considerable strain correlating my material."

"Well, we can always postpone publication." Burkhalter threw out the suggestion casually, and was pleased when Quayle didn't nibble. He didn't like to fail, either.

"No. No, I want to get the thing done now."

"Mental catharsis—"

"Well, by a psychologist, perhaps. But not by—"

"—a Baldy. You know that a lot of psychologists have Baldy helpers. They get good results, too."

Quayle turned on the tobacco smoke, inhaling slowly. "I suppose . . . I've not had much contact with Baldies. Or too much—without selectivity. I saw some in an asylum once. I'm not being offensive, am I?"

"No," Burkhalter said. "Every mutation can run too close to the line. There were lots of failures. The hard radiations brought about one true mutation: hairless telepaths, but they didn't all hew true to the line. The mind's a queer gadget—you know that. It's a colloid balancing, figuratively, on the point of a pin. If there's any flaw, telepathy's apt to bring it out. So you'll find that the Blowup caused a hell of a lot of insanity. Not only among the Baldies, but among the other mutations that developed then. Except that the Baldies are almost always paranoidal."

"And dementia praecox," Quayle said, finding relief from his own embarrassment in turning the spotlight on Burkhalter.

"And d. p. Yeah. When a confused mind acquires the telepathic instinct—a hereditary bollixed mind—it can't handle it all. There's disorientation. The paranoia group retreat into their own private

worlds, and the d. p.'s simply don't realize that *this* world exists. There are distinctions, but I think that's a valid basis."

"In a way," Quayle said, "it's frightening. I can't think of any historical parallel."

"No."

"What do you think the end of it will be?"

"I don't know," Burkhalter said thoughtfully. "I think we'll be assimilated. There hasn't been enough time yet. We're specialized in a certain way, and we're useful in certain jobs."

"If you're satisfied to stay there. The Baldies who won't wear wigs—"

"They're so bad-tempered I expect they'll all be killed off in duels eventually," Burkhalter smiled. "No great loss. The rest of us, we're getting what we want—acceptance. We don't have horns or halos."

Quayle shook his head. "I'm glad, I think, that I'm not a telepath. The mind's mysterious enough anyway, without new doors opening. Thanks for letting me talk. I think I've got part of it talked out, anyway. Shall we try the script again?"

"Sure," Burkhalter said, and again the procession of pages flickered on the screen above them. Quayle did seem less guarded; his thoughts were more lucid, and Burkhalter was able to get at the true meanings of many of the hitherto muddy statements. They worked easily, the telepath dictating rephrasings into his dictograph, and only twice did they have to hurdle emotional tangles. At noon they knocked off, and Burkhalter, with a friendly nod, took the dropper to his office, where he found some calls listed on the visor. He ran off repeats, and a worried look crept into his blue eyes.

He talked with Dr. Moon in a booth at luncheon. The conversation lasted so long that only the induction cups kept the coffee hot, but Burkhalter had more than one problem to discuss. And he'd known Moon for a long time. The fat man was one of the few who were not, he thought, subconsciously repelled by the fact that Burkhalter was a Baldy.

"I've never fought a duel in my life, Doc. I can't afford to."

"You can't afford not to. You can't turn down the challenge, Ed. It isn't done."

"But this fellow Reilly—I don't even know him."

"I know of him," Moon said. "He's got a bad temper. Dued a lot."

Burkhalter slammed his hand down on the table. "It's ridiculous. I won't do it!"

"Well," Moon said practically, "your wife can't fight him. And if Ethel's been reading Mrs. Reilly's mind and gossiping, Reilly's got a case."

"Don't you think we know the dangers of that?" Burkhalter asked in a low voice. "Ethel doesn't go around reading minds any more than I do. It'd be fatal—for us. And for any other Baldy."

"Not the hairless ones. The ones who won't wear wigs. They—"

"They're fools. And they're giving all the Baldies a bad name. Point one, Ethel doesn't read minds; she didn't read Mrs. Reilly's. Point two, she doesn't gossip."

"La Reilly is obviously an hysterical type," Moon said. "Word got around about this scandal, whatever it was, and Mrs. Reilly remembered she'd seen Ethel lately. She's the type who needs a scapegoat anyway. I rather imagine she let word drop herself, and had to cover up so her husband wouldn't blame her."

"I'm not going to accept Reilly's challenge," Burkhalter said doggedly.

"You'll have to."

"Listen, Doc, maybe—"

"What?"

"Nothing. An idea. It might work. Forget about that; I think I've got the right answer. It's the only one, anyway. I can't afford a duel and that's flat."

"You're not a coward."

"There's one thing Baldies are afraid of," Burkhalter said, "and that's public opinion. I happen to know I'd kill Reilly. That's the reason why I've never dueled in my life."

Moon drank coffee. "Hm-m-m. I think—"

"Don't. There was something else. I'm wondering if I ought to send Al off to a special school."

"What's wrong with the kid?"

"He's turning out to be a beautiful delinquent. His teacher called me this morning. The playback was something to hear. He's talking funny and acting funny. Playing nasty little tricks on his friends—if he has any left by now."

"All kids are cruel."



"Kids don't know what cruelty means. That's why they're cruel; they lack empathy. But Al's getting—" Burkhalter gestured helplessly. "He's turning into a young tyrant. He doesn't seem to give a care about anything, according to his teacher."

"That's not too abnormal, so far."

"That's not the worst. He's become very egotistical. Too much so. I don't want him to turn into one of the wigless Baldies you were mentioning." Burkhalter didn't mention the other possibility: paranoia, insanity.

"He must pick things up somewhere. At home? Scarcely, Ed. Where else does he go?"

"The usual places. He's got a normal environment."

"I should think," Moon said, "that a Baldy would have unusual opportunities in training a youngster. The mental rapport—eh?"

"Yeah. But—I don't know. The trouble is," Burkhalter said almost inaudibly, "I wish to God I wasn't different. We didn't ask to be telepaths. Maybe it's all very wonderful in the long run, but I'm one person, and I've got my own microcosm. People who deal in long-term sociology are apt to forget that. They can figure out the answers, but it's every individual man—or Baldy—who's got to fight his own personal battle while he's alive. And it isn't as clear-cut as a battle. It's worse; it's the necessity of watching yourself every second, of fitting yourself into a world that doesn't want you."

Moon looked uncomfortable. "Are you being a little sorry for yourself, Ed?"

Burkhalter shook himself. "I am, Doc. But I'll work it out."

"We both will," Moon said, but Burkhalter didn't really expect much help from him. Moon would be willing, but it was horribly different for an ordinary man to conceive that a Baldy was—the same. It was the difference that men looked for, and found.

Anyway, he'd have to settle matters before he saw Ethel again. He could easily conceal the knowledge, but she would recognize a mental barrier and wonder. Their marriage had been the more ideal because of the additional rapport, something that compensated for an inevitable, half-sensed estrangement from the rest of the world.

"How's 'Psychohistory' going?" Moon asked after a while.

"Better than I expected. I've got a new angle on Quayle. If I talk about myself, that seems to draw him out. It gives him enough confidence to let him open his mind to me. We may have those first chapters ready for Oldfield, in spite of everything."

"Good. Just the same, he can't rush us. If we've got to shoot out books that fast, we might as well go back to the days of semantic confusion. Which we won't!"

"Well," Burkhalter said, getting up, "I'll smooch along. See you."

"About Reilly—"

"Let it lay." Burkhalter went out, heading for the address his visor had listed. He touched the dagger at his belt. Dueling wouldn't do for Baldies, but—

A greeting thought crept into his mind, and, under the arch that led into the campus, he paused to grin at Sam Shane, a New Orleans area Baldy who affected a wig of flaming red. They didn't bother to talk.

*Personal question, involving mental, moral and physical well-being.*

*A satisfied glow. And you, Burkhalter?* For an instant Burkhalter half-saw what the symbol of his name meant to Shane.

*Shadow of trouble.*

*A warm, willing anxiousness to help.* There was a bond between Baldies.

Burkhalter thought: But everywhere I'd go there'd be the same suspicion. We're freaks.

More so elsewhere, Shane thought. There are a lot of us in Modoc Town. People are invariably more suspicious where they're not in daily contact with—Us.

The boy—

I've trouble too, Shane thought. It's worried me. My two girls—  
Delinquency?

Yes.

Common denominators?

Don't know. More than one of Us have had the same trouble with our kids.

Secondary characteristic of the mutation? Second generation emergence?

Doubtful, Shane thought, scowling in his mind, shading his concept with a wavering question. We'll think it over later. Must go.

Burkhalter sighed and went on his way. The houses were strung out around the central industry of Modoc, and he cut through a park toward his destination. It was a sprawling curved building, but it wasn't inhabited, so Burkhalter filed Reilly for future refer-

ence, and, with a glance at his timer, angled over a hillside toward the school. As he expected, it was recreation time, and he spotted Al lounging under a tree, some distance from his companions, who were involved in a pleasantly murderous game of Blowup.

He sent his thought ahead.

*The Green Man had almost reached the top of the mountain. The hairy gnomes were pelting on his trail, most unfairly shooting sizzling light-streaks at their quarry, but the Green Man was agile enough to dodge. The rocks were leaning—*

“Al.”

*—inward, pushed by the gnomes, ready to—*

“Al!” Burkhalter sent his thought with the word, jolting into the boy’s mind, a trick he very seldom employed, since youth was practically defenseless against such invasion.

“Hello, Dad,” Al said, undisturbed. “What’s up?”

“A report from your teacher.”

“I didn’t do anything.”

“She told me what it was. Listen, kid. Don’t start getting any funny ideas in your head.”

“I’m not.”

“Do you think a Baldy is better or worse than a non-Baldy?”

Al moved his feet uncomfortably. He didn’t answer.

“Well,” Burkhalter said, “the answer is both and neither. And here’s why. A Baldy can communicate mentally, but he lives in a world where most people can’t.”

“They’re dumb,” Al opined.

“Not so dumb, if they’re better suited to their world than you are. You might as well say a frog’s better than a fish because he’s an amphibian.” Burkhalter briefly amplified and explained the terms telepathically.

“Well . . . oh, I get it, all right.”

“Maybe,” Burkhalter said slowly, “what you need is a swift kick in the pants. That thought wasn’t so hot. What was it again?”

Al tried to hide it, blanking out. Burkhalter began to lift the barrier, an easy matter for him, but stopped. Al regarded his father in a most unfilial way—in fact, as a sort of boneless fish. That had been clear.

“if you’re so egotistical,” Burkhalter pointed out, “maybe you can see it this way. Do you know why there aren’t any Baldies in key positions?”

"Sure I do," Al said unexpectedly. "They're afraid."

"Of what, then?"

"The—" That picture had been very curious, a commingling of something vaguely familiar to Burkhalter. "The non-Baldies."

"Well, if we took positions where we could take advantage of our telepathic function, non-Baldies would be plenty envious—especially if we were successes. If a Baldy even invented a better mousetrap, plenty of people would say he'd stolen the idea from some non-Baldy's mind. You get the point?"

"Yes, Dad." But he hadn't. Burkhalter sighed and looked up. He recognized one of Shane's girls on a nearby hillside, sitting alone against a boulder. There were other isolated figures here and there. Far to the east the snowy rampart of the Rockies made an irregular pattern against blue sky.

"Al," Burkhalter said, "I don't want you to get a chip on your shoulder. This is a pretty swell world, and the people in it are, on the whole, nice people. There's a law of averages. It isn't sensible for us to get too much wealth or power, because that'd militate against us—and we don't need it anyway. Nobody's poor. We find our work, we do it, and we're reasonably happy. We have some advantages non-Baldies don't have; in marriage, for example. Mental intimacy is quite as important as physical. But I don't want you to feel that being a Baldy makes you a god. It doesn't. I can still," he added thoughtfully, "spank it out of you, in case you care to follow out that concept in your mind at the moment."

Al gulped and beat a hasty retreat. "I'm sorry. I won't do it again."

"And keep your hair on, too. Don't take your wig off in class. Use the stickum stuff in the bathroom closet."

"Yes, but . . . Mr. Venner doesn't wear a wig."

"Remind me to do some historical research with you on zoot-suiters," Burkhalter said. "Mr. Venner's wiglessness is probably his only virtue, if you consider it one."

"He makes money."

"Anybody would, in that general store of his. But people don't buy from him if they can help it, you'll notice. That's what I mean by a chip on your shoulder. He's got one. There are Baldies like Venner, Al, but you might, sometime, ask the guy if he's happy. For your information, I am. More than Venner, anyway. Catch?"

"Yes, Dad." Al seemed submissive, but it was merely that. Burkhalter, still troubled, nodded and walked away. As he passed near

the Shane girl's boulder he caught a scrap: —*at the summit of the Glass Mountains, rolling rocks back at the gnomes until—*

He withdrew; it was an unconscious habit, touching minds that were sensitive, but with children it was definitely unfair. With adult Baldies it was simply the instinctive gesture of tipping your hat; one answered or one didn't. The barrier could be erected; there could be a blank-out; or there could be the direct snub of concentration on a single thought, private and not to be intruded on.

A 'copter with a string of gliders was coming in from the south: a freighter laden with frozen foods from South America, to judge by the markings. Burkhalter made a note to pick up an Argentine steak. He'd got a new recipe he wanted to try out, a charcoal broil with barbecue sauce, a welcome change from the short-wave cooked meats they'd been having for a week. Tomatoes, chile, mm-m—what else? Oh, yes. The duel with Reilly. Burkhalter absently touched his dagger's hilt and made a small, mocking sound in his throat. Perhaps he was innately a pacifist. It was rather difficult to think of a duel seriously, even though everyone else did, when the details of a barbecue dinner were prosaic in his mind.

So it went. The tides of civilization rolled in century-long waves across the continents, and each particular wave, though conscious of its participation in the tide, nevertheless was more preoccupied with dinner. And, unless you happened to be a thousand feet tall, had the brain of a god and a god's life-span, what was the difference? People missed a lot—people like Venner, who was certainly a crank, not batty enough to qualify for the asylum, but certainly a potential paranoid type. The man's refusal to wear a wig labeled him as an individualist, but as an exhibitionist, too. If he didn't feel ashamed of his hairlessness, why should he bother to flaunt it? Besides, the man had a bad temper, and if people kicked him around, he asked for it by starting the kicking himself.

But as for Al, the kid was heading for something approaching delinquency. It couldn't be the normal development of childhood, Burkhalter thought. He didn't pretend to be an expert, but he was still young enough to remember his own formative years, and he had had more handicaps than Al had now; in those days, Baldies had been very new and very freakish. There'd been more than one movement to isolate, sterilize, or even exterminate the mutations.

Burkhalter sighed. If he had been born before the Blowup, it might have been different. Impossible to say. One could read his-

tory, but one couldn't live it. In the future, perhaps, there might be telepathic libraries in which that would be possible. So many opportunities, in fact—and so few that the world was ready to accept as yet. Eventually Baldies would not be regarded as freaks, and by that time real progress would be possible.

But people don't make history—Burkhalter thought. Peoples do that. Not the individual.

He stopped by Reilly's house again, and this time the man answered, a burly, freckled, squint-eyed fellow with immense hands and, Burkhalter noted, fine muscular co-ordination. He rested those hands on the Dutch door and nodded.

"Who're you, mister?"

"My name's Burkhalter."

Comprehension and wariness leaped into Reilly's eyes. "Oh. I see. You got my call?"

"I did," Burkhalter said. "I want to talk to you about it. May I come in?"

"O. K." He stepped back, opening the way through a hall and into a spacious living room, where diffused light filtered through glassy mosaic walls. "Want to set the time?"

"I want to tell you you're wrong."

"Now wait a minute," Reilly said, patting the air. "My wife's out now, but she gave me the straight of it. I don't like this business of sneaking into a man's mind; it's crooked. You should have told your wife to mind her business—or keep her tongue quiet."

Burkhalter said patiently, "I give you my word, Reilly, that Ethel didn't read your wife's mind."

"Does she say so?"

"I . . . well, I haven't asked her."

"Yeah," Reilly said with an air of triumph.

"I don't need to. I know her well enough. And . . . well, I'm a Baldy myself."

"I know you are," Reilly said. "For all I know, you may be reading my mind now." He hesitated. "Get out of my house. I like my privacy. We'll meet at dawn tomorrow, if that's satisfactory with you. Now get out." He seemed to have something on his mind, some ancient memory, perhaps, that he didn't wish exposed.

Burkhalter nobly resisted the temptation. "No Baldy would read—"

"Go on, get out!"

"Listen! You wouldn't have a chance in a duel with me!"

"Do you know how many notches I've got?" Reilly asked.

"Ever dueled a Baldy?"

"I'll cut the notch deeper tomorrow. Get out, d'you hear?"

Burkhalter, biting his lips, said, "Man, don't you realize that in a duel I could read your mind?"

"I don't care . . . what?"

"I'd be half a jump ahead of you. No matter how instinctive your actions would be, you'd know them a split second ahead of time in your mind. And I'd know all your tricks and weaknesses, too. Your technique would be an open book to me. Whatever you thought of—"

"No." Reilly shook his head. "Oh, no. You're smart, but it's a phony set-up."

Burkhalter hesitated, decided, and swung about, pushing a chair out of the way. "Take out your dagger," he said. "Leave the sheath snapped on; I'll show you what I mean."

Reilly's eyes widened. "If you want it now—"

"I don't." Burkhalter shoved another chair away. He unclipped his dagger, sheath and all, from his belt, and made sure the little safety clip was in place. "We've room enough here. Come on."

Scowling, Reilly took out his own dagger, held it awkwardly, baffled by the sheath, and then suddenly fainted forward. But Burkhalter wasn't there; he had anticipated, and his own leather sheath slid up Reilly's belly.

"That," Burkhalter said, "would have ended the fight."

For answer Reilly smashed a hard dagger-blow down, curving at the last moment into a throat-cutting slash. Burkhalter's free hand was already at his throat; his other hand, with the sheathed dagger, tapped Reilly twice over the heart. The freckles stood out boldly against the pallor of the larger man's face. But he was not yet ready to concede. He tried a few more passes, clever, well-trained cuts, and they failed, because Burkhalter had anticipated them. His left hand invariably covered the spot where Reilly had aimed, and which he never struck.

Slowly Reilly let his arm fall. He moistened his lips and swallowed. Burkhalter busied himself reclipping his dagger in place.

"Burkhalter," Reilly said, "you're a devil."

"Far from it. I'm just afraid to take a chance. Do you really think being a Baldy is a snap?"

"But, if you can read minds—"

"How long do you think I'd last if I did any dueling? It would be too much of a set-up. Nobody would stand for it, and I'd end up dead. I can't duel, because it'd be murder, and people would know it was murder. I've taken a lot of cracks, swallowed a lot of insults, for just that reason. Now, if you like, I'll swallow another and apologize. I'll admit anything you say. But I can't duel with you, Reilly."

"No, I can see that. And—I'm glad you came over." Reilly was still white. "I'd have walked right into a set-up."

"Not my set-up," Burkhalter said. "I wouldn't have dueled. Baldies aren't so lucky, you know. They've got handicaps—like this. That's why they can't afford to take chances and antagonize people, and why we never read minds, unless we're asked to do so."

"It makes sense. More or less." Reilly hesitated. "Look, I withdraw that challenge. O. K.?"

"Thanks," Burkhalter said, putting out his hand. It was taken rather reluctantly. "We'll leave it at that, eh?"

"Right." But Reilly was still anxious to get his guest out of the house.

Burkhalter walked back to the Publishing Center and whistled tunelessly. He could tell Ethel now; in fact, he had to, for secrets between them would have broken up the completeness of their telepathic intimacy. It was not that their minds lay bare to each other, it was, rather, that any barrier could be sensed by the other, and the perfect *rapport* wouldn't have been so perfect. Curiously, despite this utter intimacy, husband and wife managed to respect one another's privacy.

Ethel might be somewhat distressed, but the trouble had blown over, and, besides, she was a Baldy too. Not that she looked it, with her wig of fluffy chestnut hair and those long, curving lashes. But her parents had lived east of Seattle during the Blowup, and afterward, too, before the hard radiation's effects had been thoroughly studied.

The snow-wind blew down over Modoc and fled southward along the Utah Valley. Burkhalter wished he was in his 'copter, alone in the blue emptiness of the sky. There was a quiet, strange peace up there that no Baldy ever quite achieved on the earth's surface, except in the depths of a wilderness. Stray fragments of thoughts were always flying about, subsensory, but like the almost-unheard whisper



of a needle on a phonograph record, never ceasing. That, certainly, was why almost all Baldies loved to fly and were expert pilots. The high waste deserts of the air were their blue hermitages.

Still, he was in Modoc now, and overdue for his interview with Quayle. Burkhalter hastened his steps. In the main hall he met Moon, said briefly and cryptically that he'd taken care of the duel, and passed on, leaving the fat man to stare a question after him. The only visor call was from Ethel; the playback said she was worried about Al, and would Burkhalter check with the school. Well, he had already done so—unless the boy had managed to get into more trouble since then. Burkhalter put in a call and reassured himself. Al was as yet unchanged.

He found Quayle in the same private solarium, and thirsty. Burkhalter ordered a couple of dramzowies sent up, since he had no objection to loosening Quayle's inhibitions. The gray-haired author was immersed in a sectional historical globe-map, illuminating each epochal layer in turn as he searched back through time.

"Watch this," he said, running his hand along the row of buttons. "See how the German border fluctuates?" It fluctuated, finally vanishing entirely as semimodern times were reached. "And Portugal. Notice its zone of influence? Now—" The zone shrank steadily from 1600 on, while other countries shot out radiating lines and assumed sea power.

Burkhalter sipped his dramzowie. "Not much of that now."

"No, since . . . what's the matter?"

"How do you mean?"

"You look shot."

"I didn't know I showed it," Burkhalter said wryly. "I just finagled my way out of a duel."

"That's one custom I never saw much sense to," Quayle said. "What happened? Since when can you finagle out?"

Burkhalter explained, and the writer took a drink and snorted. "What a spot for you. Being a Baldy isn't such an advantage after all, I guess."

"It has distinct disadvantages at times." On impulse Burkhalter mentioned his son. "You see my point, eh? I don't *know*, really, what standards to apply to a young Baldy. He is a mutation, after all. And the telepathic mutation hasn't had time to work out yet. We can't rig up controls, because guinea pigs and rabbits won't breed telepaths. That's been tried, you know. And—well, the child

of a Baldy needs very special training so he can cope with his ultimate maturity."

"You seem to have adjusted well enough."

"I've—learned. As most sensible Baldies have. That's why I'm not a wealthy man, or in politics. We're really buying safety for our species by foregoing certain individual advantages. Hostages to destiny—and destiny spares us. But we get paid too, in a way. In the coinage of future benefits—negative benefits, really, for we ask only to be spared and accepted—and so we have to deny ourselves a lot of present, positive benefits. An appeasement to fate."

"Paying the piper," Quayle nodded.

"We are the pipers. The Baldies as a group, I mean. And our children. So it balances; we're really paying ourselves. If I wanted to take unfair advantage of my telepathic power—my son wouldn't live very long. The Baldies would be wiped out. Al's got to learn that, and he's getting pretty antisocial."

"All children are antisocial," Quayle pointed out. "They're utter individualists. I should think the only reason for worrying would be if the boy's deviation from the norm were connected with his telepathic sense."

"There's something in that." Burkhalter reached out left-handedly and probed delicately at Quayle's mind, noting that the antagonism was considerably lessened. He grinned to himself and went on talking about his own troubles. "Just the same, the boy's father to the man. And an adult Baldy has got to be pretty well adjusted, or he's sunk."

"Environment is as important as heredity. One complements the other. If a child's reared correctly, he won't have much trouble—unless heredity is involved."

"As it may be. There's so little known about the telepathic mutation. If baldness is one secondary characteristic, maybe—something else—emerges in the third or fourth generations. I'm wondering if telepathy is really good for the mind."

Quayle said, "Humph. Speaking personally, it makes me nervous—"

"Like Reilly."

"Yes," Quayle said, but he didn't care much for the comparison. "Well—anyhow, if a mutation's a failure, it'll die out. It won't breed true."

"What about hemophilia?"

"How many people have hemophilia?" Quayle asked. "I'm trying to look at it from the angle of psychohistorian. If there'd been telepaths in the past, things might have been different."

"How do you know there weren't?" Burkhalter asked.

Quayle blinked. "Oh. Well. That's true, too. In medieval times they'd have been called wizards—or saints. The Duke-Rhine experiments—but such accidents would have been abortive. Nature fools around trying to hit the . . . ah . . . the jackpot, and she doesn't always do it on the first try."

"She may not have done it now." That was habit speaking, the ingrained caution of modesty. "Telepathy may be merely a semi-successful try at something pretty unimaginable. A sort of four-dimensional sensory concept, maybe."

"That's too abstract for me." Quayle was interested, and his own hesitations had almost vanished; by accepting Burkhalter as a telepath, he had tacitly wiped away his objections to telepathy *per se*. "The old-time Germans always had an idea they were different; so did that Oriental race that had the islands off the China coast—the Japanese. They knew, very definitely, that they were a superior race because they were directly descended from gods. They were short in stature; heredity made them self-conscious when dealing with larger races. But the Chinese aren't tall, the Southern Chinese, and they weren't handicapped in that way."

"Environment, then?"

"Environment, which caused propaganda. The . . . ah . . . the Japanese took Buddhism, and altered it completely into Shinto, to suit their own needs. The samurai, warrior-knights, were the ideals, the code of honor was fascinatingly cockeyed. The principle of Shinto was to worship your superiors and subjugate your inferiors. Ever seen the Japanese jewel-trees?"

"I don't remember them. What are they?"

"Miniature replicas of espaliered trees, made of jewels, with trinkets hanging on the branches. Including a mirror—always. The first jewel-tree was made to lure the Moon-goddess out of a cave where she was sulking. It seems the lady was so intrigued by the trinkets and by her face reflected in the mirror that she came out of her hideout. All the Japanese morals were dressed up in pretty clothes; that was the bait. The old-time Germans did much the same thing. The last German dictator, Hitler, revived the old Siegfried legend. It was racial paranoia. The Germans worshiped the house-

tyrant, not the mother, and they had extremely strong family ties. That extended to the state. They symbolized Hitler as their All-Father, and that led to a whole series of complicated events, and eventually we got the Blowup. And, finally, mutations."

"After the deluge, me," Burkhalter murmured, finishing his dram-zowie. Quayle was staring at nothing.

"Funny," he said after a while. "This All-Father business—"

"Yes?"

"I wonder if you know how powerfully it can affect a man?"

Burkhalter didn't say anything. Quayle gave him a sharp glance.

"Yes," the writer said quietly. "You're a man, after all. I owe you an apology, you know."

Burkhalter smiled. "You can forget that."

"I'd rather not," Quayle said. "I've just realized, pretty suddenly, that the telepathic sense isn't so important. I mean—it doesn't make you *different*. I've been talking to you—"

"Sometimes it takes people years before they realize what you're finding out," Burkhalter remarked. "Years of living and working with something they think of as a Baldy."

"Do you know what I've been concealing in my mind?" Quayle asked.

"No. I don't."

"You lie like a gentleman. Thanks. Well, here it is, and I'm telling you by choice, because I want to. I don't care if you got the information out of my mind already; I just want to tell you of my own free will. My father . . . I imagine I hated him . . . was a tyrant, and I remember one time, when I was just a kid and we were in the mountains, he beat me and a lot of people were looking on. I've tried to forget that for a long time. Now"—Quayle shrugged—"it doesn't seem quite so important."

"I'm not a psychologist," Burkhalter said. "If you want my personal reaction, I'll just say that it doesn't matter. You're not a little boy any more, and the guy I'm talking to and working with is the adult Quayle."

"Hm-m-m. Ye-es. I suppose I knew that all along—how unimportant it was, really. It was simply having my privacy violated. . . . I think I know you better now, Burkhalter. You can—walk in."

"We'll work better," Burkhalter said, grinning. "Especially with Darius."

Quayle said, "I'll try not to keep any reservation in my mind."

Frankly, I won't mind telling you—the answers. Even when they're personal."

"Check on that. D'you want to tackle Darius now?"

"O. K.," Quayle said, and his eyes no longer held suspicious wariness. "Darius I identify with my father—"

It was smooth and successful. That afternoon they accomplished more than they had during the entire previous fortnight. Warm with satisfaction on more than one point, Burkhalter stopped off to tell Dr. Moon that matters were looking up, and then set out toward home, exchanging thoughts with a couple of Baldies, his co-workers, who were knocking off for the day. The Rockies were bloody with the western light, and the coolness of the wind was pleasant on Burkhalter's cheeks, as he hiked homeward.

It was fine to be accepted. It proved that it could be done. And a Baldy often needed reassurance, in a world peopled by suspicious strangers. Quayle had been a hard nut to crack, but—Burkhalter smiled.

Ethel would be pleased. In a way, she'd had a harder time than he'd ever had. A woman would, naturally. Men were desperately anxious to keep their privacy unviolated by a woman, and as for non-Baldy women—well, it spoke highly for Ethel's glowing personal charm that she had finally been accepted by the clubs and feminine groups of Modoc. Only Burkhalter knew Ethel's desperate hurt at being bald, and not even her husband had ever seen her unwigged.

His thought reached out before him into the low, double-winged house on the hillside, and interlocked with hers in a warm intimacy. It was something more than a kiss. And, as always, there was the exciting sense of expectancy, mounting and mounting till the last door swung open and they touched physically. *This*, he thought, *is why I was born a Baldy; this is worth losing worlds for.*

At dinner that rapport spread out to embrace Al, an intangible, deeply-rooted something that made the food taste better and the water like wine. The word *home*, to telepaths, had a meaning that non-Baldies could not entirely comprehend, for it embraced a bond they could not know. There were small, intangible caresses.

*Green Man going down the Great Red Slide; the Shaggy Dwarfs trying to harpoon him as he goes.*

"Al," Ethel said, "are you still working on your Green Man?"

Then something utterly hateful and cold and deadly quivered si-

lently in the air, like an icicle jaggedly smashing through golden, fragile glass. Burkhalter dropped his napkin and looked up, profoundly shocked. He felt Ethel's thought shrink back, and swiftly reached out to touch and reassure her with mental contact. But across the table the little boy, his cheeks still round with the fat of babyhood, sat silent and wary, realizing he had blundered, and seeking safety in complete immobility. His mind was too weak to resist probing, he knew, and he remained perfectly still, waiting, while the echoes of a thought hung poisonously in silence.

Burkhalter said, "Come on, Al." He stood up. Ethel started to speak.

"Wait, darling. Put up a barrier. Don't listen in." He touched her mind gently and tenderly, and then he took Al's hand and drew the boy after him out into the yard. Al watched his father out of wide, alert eyes.

Burkhalter sat on a bench and put Al beside him. He talked audibly at first, for clarity's sake, and for another reason. It was distinctly unpleasant to trick the boy's feeble guards down, but it was necessary.

"That's a very queer way to think of your mother," he said. "It's a queer way to think of me." Obscenity is more obscene, profanity more profane, to a telepathic mind, but this had been neither one. It had been—cold and malignant.

*And this is flesh of my flesh,* Burkhalter thought, looking at the boy and remembering the eight years of his growth. *Is the mutation to turn into something devilish?*

Al was silent.

Burkhalter reached into the young mind. Al tried to twist free and escape, but his father's strong hands gripped him. Instinct, not reasoning, on the boy's part, for minds can touch over long distances.

He did not like to do this, for increased sensibility had gone with sensitivity, and violations are always violations. But ruthlessness was required. Burkhalter searched. Sometimes he threw key words violently at Al, and surges of memory pulsed up in response.

In the end, sick and nauseated, Burkhalter let Al go and sat alone on the bench, watching the red light die on the snowy peaks. The whiteness was red-stained. But it was not too late. The man was a fool, had been a fool from the beginning, or he would have known the impossibility of attempting such a thing as this.

The conditioning had only begun. Al could be reconditioned. Burkhalter's eyes hardened. And would be. *And would be*. But not yet, not until the immediate furious anger had given place to sympathy and understanding.

Not yet.

He went into the house, spoke briefly to Ethel, and televised the dozen Baldies who worked with him in the Publishing Center. Not all of them had families, but none was missing when, half an hour later, they met in the back room of the Pagan Tavern downtown. Sam Shane had caught a fragment of Burkhalter's knowledge, and all of them read his emotions. Welded into a sympathetic unit by their telepathic sense, they waited till Burkhalter was ready.

Then he told them. It didn't take long, via thought. He told them about the Japanese jewel-tree with its glittering gadgets, a shining lure. He told them of racial paranoia and propaganda. And that the most effective propaganda was sugar-coated, disguised so that the motive was hidden.

A Green Man, hairless, heroic—symbolic of a Baldy.

And wild, exciting adventures, the lure to catch the young fish whose plastic minds were impressionable enough to be led along the roads of dangerous madness. Adult Baldies could listen, but they did not; young telepaths had a higher threshold of mental receptivity, and adults do not read the books of their children except to reassure themselves that there is nothing harmful in the pages. And no adult would bother to listen to the Green Man mindcast. Most of them had accepted it as the original daydream of their own children.

"I did," Shane put in. "My girls—"

"Trace it back," Burkhalter said. "I did."

The dozen minds reached out on the higher frequency, the children's wave length, and something jerked away from them, startled and apprehensive.

"He's the one," Shane nodded.

They did not need to speak. They went out of the Pagan Tavern in a compact, ominous group, and crossed the street to the general store. The door was locked. Two of the men burst it open with their shoulders.

They went through the dark store and into a back room where a man was standing beside an overturned chair. His bald skull gleamed in an overhead light. His mouth worked impotently.

His thought pleaded with them—was driven back by an implacable deadly wall.

Burkhalter took out his dagger. Other slivers of steel glittered for a little while—

And were quenched.

Venner's scream had long since stopped, but his dying thought of agony lingered within Burkhalter's mind as he walked homeward. The wigless Baldy had not been insane, no. But he had been paranoid.

What he had tried to conceal, at the last, was quite shocking. A tremendous, tyrannical egotism, and a furious hatred of nontelepaths. A feeling of self-justification that was, perhaps, insane. *And—we are the Future! The Baldies! God made us to rule lesser men!*

Burkhalter sucked in his breath, shivering. The mutation had not been entirely successful. One group had adjusted, the Baldies who wore wigs and had become fitted to their environment. One group had been insane, and could be discounted; they were in asylums.

But the middle group were merely paranoid. They were not insane, and they were not sane. They wore no wigs.

Like Venner.

And Venner had sought disciples. His attempt had been doomed to failure, but he had been one man.

One Baldy—paranoid.

There were others, many others.

Ahead, nestled into the dark hillside, was the pale blotch that marked Burkhalter's home. He sent his thought ahead, and it touched Ethel's and paused very briefly to reassure her.

Then it thrust on, and went into the sleeping mind of a little boy who, confused and miserable, had finally cried himself to sleep. There were only dreams in that mind now, a little discolored, a little stained, but they could be cleansed. And would be.





## PART

# 3

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## THE STUFF OF DREAMS

A warning: nothing in this section is as it seems.

TRUMAN CAPOTE gives us a little girl who *perhaps isn't there*. A. E. Coppard tells of a little boy who *might be there—if things work out that way*. Mary-Alice Schnirring offers some children who are concerned with an entire world that, of course, *can't be there, despite certain evidence to the contrary*.

Finally, in *The Open Window*, Saki exposes us to a little girl who *undoubtedly shouldn't be there—and certainly wouldn't be in any decent kind of world*. Pedantic definitions notwithstanding, we insist on calling this a fantasy story: *fantasy, we hasten to add, impure and simple*.



## MIRIAM

by Truman Capote

**F**OR SEVERAL YEARS, Mrs. H. T. Miller had lived alone in a pleasant apartment (two rooms with kitchenette) in a remodeled brownstone near the East River. She was a widow: Mr. H. T. Miller had left a reasonable amount of insurance. Her interests were narrow, she had no friends to speak of, and she rarely journeyed farther than the corner grocery. The other people in the house never seemed to notice her: her clothes were matter-of-fact, her hair iron-gray, clipped and casually waved; she did not use cosmetics, her features were plain and inconspicuous, and on her last birthday she was sixty-one. Her activities were seldom spontaneous: she kept the two rooms immaculate, smoked an occasional cigarette, prepared her own meals and tended a canary.

Then she met Miriam. It was snowing that night. Mrs. Miller had finished drying the supper dishes and was thumbing through an afternoon paper when she saw an advertisement of a picture playing at a neighborhood theater. The title sounded good, so she struggled into her beaver coat, laced her galoshes and left the apartment, leaving one light burning in the foyer: she found nothing more disturbing than a sensation of darkness.

The snow was fine, falling gently, not yet making an impression on the pavement. The wind from the river cut only at street crossings. Mrs. Miller hurried, her head bowed, oblivious as a mole burrowing a blind path. She stopped at a drugstore and bought a package of peppermints.

A long line stretched in front of the box office; she took her place at the end. There would be (a tired voice groaned) a short wait for all seats. Mrs. Miller rummaged in her leather handbag till she collected exactly the correct change for admission. The line seemed to be taking its own time and, looking around for some distraction, she suddenly became conscious of a little girl standing under the edge of the marquee.

Her hair was the longest and strangest Mrs. Miller had ever seen: absolutely silver-white, like an albino's. It flowed waist-length in

smooth, loose lines. She was thin and fragilely constructed. There was a simple, special elegance in the way she stood with her thumbs in the pockets of a tailored plum-velvet coat.

Mrs. Miller felt oddly excited, and when the little girl glanced toward her, she smiled warmly. The little girl walked over and said, "Would you care to do me a favor?"

"I'd be glad to, if I can," said Mrs. Miller.

"Oh, it's quite easy. I merely want you to buy a ticket for me; they won't let me in otherwise. Here, I have the money." And gracefully she handed Mrs. Miller two dimes and a nickel.

They went into the theater together. An usherette directed them to a lounge; in twenty minutes the picture would be over.

"I feel just like a genuine criminal," said Mrs. Miller gaily, as she sat down. "I mean that sort of thing's against the law, isn't it? I do hope I haven't done the wrong thing. Your mother knows where you are, dear? I mean she does, doesn't she?"

The little girl said nothing. She unbuttoned her coat and folded it across her lap. Her dress underneath was prim and dark blue. A gold chain dangled about her neck, and her fingers, sensitive and musical-looking, toyed with it. Examining her more attentively, Mrs. Miller decided the truly distinctive feature was not her hair, but her eyes; they were hazel, steady, lacking any childlike quality whatsoever and, because of their size, seemed to consume her small face.

Mrs. Miller offered a peppermint. "What's your name, dear?"

"Miriam," she said, as though, in some curious way, it were information already familiar.

"Why, isn't that funny—my name's Miriam, too. And it's not a terribly common name either. Now, don't tell me your last name's Miller!"

"Just Miriam."

"But isn't that funny?"

"Moderately," said Miriam, and rolled the peppermint on her tongue.

Mrs. Miller flushed and shifted uncomfortably. "You have such a large vocabulary for such a little girl."

"Do I?"

"Well, yes," said Mrs. Miller, hastily changing the topic to: "Do you like the movies?"

"I really wouldn't know," said Miriam. "I've never been before."

Women began filling the lounge; the rumble of the newsreel bombs exploded in the distance. Mrs. Miller rose, tucking her purse

under her arm. "I guess I'd better be running now if I want to get a seat," she said. "It was nice to have met you."

Miriam nodded ever so slightly.

It snowed all week. Wheels and footsteps moved soundlessly on the street, as if the business of living continued secretly behind a pale but impenetrable curtain. In the falling quiet there was no sky or earth, only snow lifting in the wind, frosting the window glass, chilling the rooms, deadening and hushing the city. At all hours it was necessary to keep a lamp lighted, and Mrs. Miller lost track of the days: Friday was no different from Saturday and on Sunday she went to the grocery: closed, of course.

That evening she scrambled eggs and fixed a bowl of tomato soup. Then, after putting on a flannel robe and cold-creaming her face, she propped herself up in bed with a hot-water bottle under her feet. She was reading the *Times* when the doorbell rang. At first she thought it must be a mistake and whoever it was would go away. But it rang and rang and settled to a persistent buzz. She looked at the clock: a little after eleven; it did not seem possible, she was always asleep by ten.

Climbing out of bed, she trotted barefoot across the living room. "I'm coming, please be patient." The latch was caught; she turned it this way and that way and the bell never paused an instant. "Stop it," she cried. The bolt gave way and she opened the door an inch. "What in heaven's name?"

"Hello," said Miriam.

"Oh . . . why, hello," said Mrs. Miller, stepping hesitantly into the hall. "You're that little girl."

"I thought you'd never answer, but I kept my finger on the button; I knew you were home. Aren't you glad to see me?"

Mrs. Miller did not know what to say. Miriam, she saw, wore the same plum-velvet coat and now she had also a beret to match; her white hair was braided in two shining plaits and looped at the ends with enormous white ribbons.

"Since I've waited so long, you could at least let me in," she said.

"It's awfully late. . . ."

Miriam regarded her blankly. "What difference does that make? Let me in. It's cold out here and I have on a silk dress." Then, with a gentle gesture, she urged Mrs. Miller aside and passed into the apartment.

She dropped her coat and beret on a chair. She was indeed wear-

ing a silk dress. White silk. White silk in February. The skirt was beautifully pleated and the sleeves long; it made a faint rustle as she strolled about the room. "I like your place," she said. "I like the rug, blue's my favorite color." She touched a paper rose in a vase on the coffee table. "Imitation," she commented wanly. "How sad. Aren't imitations sad?" She seated herself on the sofa, daintily spreading her skirt.

"What do you want?" asked Mrs. Miller.

"Sit down," said Miriam. "It makes me nervous to see people stand."

Mrs. Miller sank to a hassock. "What do you want?" she repeated.

"You know, I don't think you're glad I came."

For a second time Mrs. Miller was without an answer; her hand motioned vaguely. Miriam giggled and pressed back on a mount of chintz pillows. Mrs. Miller observed that the girl was less pale than she remembered; her cheeks were flushed.

"How did you know where I lived?"

Miriam frowned. "That's no question at all. What's your name? What's mine?"

"But I'm not listed in the phone book."

"Oh, let's talk about something else."

Mrs. Miller said, "Your mother must be insane to let a child like you wander around at all hours of the night—and in such ridiculous clothes. She must be out of her mind."

Miriam got up and moved to a corner where a covered bird cage hung from a ceiling chain. She peeked beneath the cover. "It's a canary," she said. "Would you mind if I woke him? I'd like to hear him sing."

"Leave Tommy alone," said Mrs. Miller, anxiously. "Don't you dare wake him."

"Certainly," said Miriam. "But I don't see why I can't hear him sing." And then, "Have you anything to eat? I'm starving! Even milk and a jam sandwich would be fine."

"Look," said Mrs. Miller, arising from the hassock, "look—if I make some nice sandwiches will you be a good child and run along home? It's past midnight, I'm sure."

"It's snowing," reproached Miriam. "And cold and dark."

"Well, you shouldn't have come here to begin with," said Mrs. Miller, struggling to control her voice. "I can't help the weather. If you want anything to eat you'll have to promise to leave."

Miriam brushed a braid against her cheek. Her eyes were thoughtful, as if weighing the proposition. She turned toward the bird cage. "Very well," she said, "I promise."

*How old is she? Ten? Eleven?* Mrs. Miller, in the kitchen, unsealed a jar of strawberry preserves and cut four slices of bread. She poured a glass of milk and paused to light a cigarette. *And why has she come?* Her hand shook as she held the match, fascinated, till it burned her finger. The canary was singing; singing as he did in the morning and at no other time. "Miriam," she called, "Miriam, I told you not to disturb Tommy." There was no answer. She called again; all she heard was the canary. She inhaled the cigarette and discovered she had lighted the cork-tip end and—oh, really, she mustn't lose her temper.

She carried the food in on a tray and set it on the coffee table. She saw first that the bird cage still wore its night cover. And Tommy was singing. It gave her a queer sensation. And no one was in the room. Mrs. Miller went through an alcove leading to her bedroom; at the door she caught her breath.

"What are you doing?" she asked.

Miriam glanced up and in her eyes there was a look that was not ordinary. She was standing by the bureau, a jewel case opened before her. For a minute she studied Mrs. Miller, forcing their eyes to meet, and she smiled. "There's nothing good here," she said. "But I like this." Her hand held a cameo brooch. "It's charming."

"Suppose—perhaps you'd better put it back," said Mrs. Miller, feeling suddenly the need of some support. She leaned against the door frame; her head was unbearably heavy; a pressure weighted the rhythm of her heartbeat. The light seemed to flutter defectively. "Please, child—a gift from my husband . . ."

"But it's beautiful and I want it," said Miriam. "Give it to me."

As she stood, striving to shape a sentence which would somehow save the brooch, it came to Mrs. Miller there was no one to whom she might turn; she was alone; a fact that had not been among her thoughts for a long time. Its sheer emphasis was stunning. But here in her own room in the hushed snow-city were evidences she could not ignore or, she knew with startling clarity, resist.

Miriam ate ravenously, and when the sandwiches and milk were gone, her fingers made cobweb movements over the plate, gathering crumbs. The cameo gleamed on her blouse, the blonde profile like a trick reflection of its wearer. "That was very nice," she sighed,



"though now an almond cake or a cherry would be ideal. Sweets are lovely, don't you think?"

Mrs. Miller was perched precariously on the hassock, smoking a cigarette. Her hair net had slipped lopsided and loose strands straggled down her face. Her eyes were stupidly concentrated on nothing and her cheeks were mottled in red patches, as though a fierce slap had left permanent marks.

"Is there a candy—a cake?"

Mrs. Miller tapped ash on the rug. Her head swayed slightly as she tried to focus her eyes. "You promised to leave if I made the sandwiches," she said.

"Dear me, did I?"

"It was a promise and I'm tired and I don't feel well at all."

"Mustn't fret," said Miriam. "I'm only teasing."

She picked up her coat, slung it over her arm, and arranged her beret in front of a mirror. Presently she bent close to Mrs. Miller and whispered, "Kiss me good night."

"Please—I'd rather not," said Mrs. Miller.

Miriam lifted a shoulder, arched an eyebrow. "As you like," she said, and went directly to the coffee table, seized the vase containing the paper roses, carried it to where the hard surface of the floor lay bare, and hurled it downward. Glass sprayed in all directions and she stamped her foot on the bouquet.

Then slowly she walked to the door, but before closing it she looked back at Mrs. Miller with a slyly innocent curiosity.

Mrs. Miller spent the next day in bed, rising once to feed the canary and drink a cup of tea; she took her temperature and had none, yet her dreams were feverishly agitated; their unbalanced mood lingered even as she lay staring wide-eyed at the ceiling. One dream threaded through the others like an elusively mysterious theme in a complicated symphony, and the scenes it depicted were sharply outlined, as though sketched by a hand of gifted intensity: a small girl, wearing a bridal gown and a wreath of leaves, led a gay procession down a mountain path, and among them there was unusual silence till a woman at the rear asked, "Where is she taking us?" "No one knows," said an old man marching in front. "But isn't she pretty?" volunteered a third voice. "Isn't she like a frost flower . . . so shining and white?"

Tuesday morning she woke up feeling better; harsh slats of sunlight, slanting through Venetian blinds, shed a disrupting light on

her unwholesome fancies. She opened the window to discover a thawed, mild-as-spring day; a sweep of clean new clouds crumpled against a vastly blue, out-of-season sky; and across the low line of rooftops she could see the river and smoke curving from tugboat stacks in a warm wind. A great silver truck plowed the snow-banked street, its machine sound humming in the air.

After straightening the apartment, she went to the grocer's, cashed a check and continued to Schraff's where she ate breakfast and chatted happily with the waitress. Oh, it was a wonderful day—more like a holiday—and it would be foolish to go home.

She boarded a Lexington Avenue bus and rode up to Eighty-sixth Street; it was here that she had decided to do a little shopping.

She had no idea what she wanted or needed, but she idled along, intent only upon the passers-by, brisk and preoccupied, who gave her a disturbing sense of separateness.

It was while waiting at the corner of Third Avenue that she saw the man: an old man, bowlegged and stooped under an armload of bulging packages; he wore a shabby brown coat and a checkered cap. Suddenly she realized they were exchanging a smile: there was nothing friendly about this smile, it was merely two cold flickers of recognition. But she was certain she had never seen him before.

He was standing next to an El pillar, and as she crossed the street he turned and followed. He kept quite close; from the corner of her eye she watched his reflection wavering on the shopwindows.

Then in the middle of the block she stopped and faced him. He stopped also and cocked his head, grinning. But what could she say? Do? Here, in broad daylight, on Eighty-sixth Street? It was useless and, despising her own helplessness, she quickened her steps.

Now Second Avenue is a dismal street, made from scraps and ends; part of cobblestone, part asphalt, part cement; and its atmosphere of desertion is permanent. Mrs. Miller walked five blocks without meeting anyone, and all the while the steady crunch of his footfalls in the snow stayed near. And when she came to a florist's shop, the sound was still with her. She hurried inside and watched through the glass door as the old man passed; he kept his eyes straight ahead and didn't slow his pace, but he did one strange, telling thing: he tipped his cap.

"Six white ones, did you say?" asked the florist. "Yes," she told him, "white roses." From there she went to a glassware store and selected a vase, presumably a replacement for the one Miriam had

broken, though the price was intolerable and the vase itself (she thought) grotesquely vulgar. But a series of unaccountable purchases had begun, as if by prearranged plan: a plan of which she had not the least knowledge or control.

She bought a bag of glazed cherries, and at a place called the Knickerbocker Bakery she paid forty cents for six almond cakes.

Within the last hour the weather had turned cold again; like blurred lenses, winter clouds cast a shade over the sun, and the skeleton of an early dusk colored the sky; a damp mist mixed with the wind and the voices of a few children who romped high on mountains of gutter snow seemed lonely and cheerless. Soon the first flake fell, and when Mrs. Miller reached the brownstone house, snow was falling in a swift screen and foot tracks vanished as they were printed.

The white roses were arranged decoratively in the vase. The glazed cherries shone on a ceramic plate. The almond cakes, dusted with sugar, awaited a hand. The canary fluttered on its swing and picked at a bar of seed.

At precisely five the doorbell rang. Mrs. Miller *knew* who it was. The hem of her housecoat trailed as she crossed the floor. "Is that you?" she called.

"Naturally," said Miriam, the word resounding shrilly from the hall. "Open this door."

"Go away," said Mrs. Miller.

"Please hurry . . . I have a heavy package."

"Go away," said Mrs. Miller. She returned to the living room, lighted a cigarette, sat down and calmly listened to the buzzer; on and on and on. "You might as well leave. I have no intention of letting you in."

Shortly the bell stopped. For possibly ten minutes Mrs. Miller did not move. Then, hearing no sound, she concluded Miriam had gone. She tiptoed to the door and opened it a sliver; Miriam was half-reclining atop a cardboard box with a beautiful French doll cradled in her arms.

"Really, I thought you were never coming," she said peevishly. "Here, help me get this in, it's awfully heavy."

It was not spell-like compulsion that Mrs. Miller felt, but rather a curious passivity; she brought in the box, Miriam the doll. Miriam curled up on the sofa, not troubling to remove her coat or beret, and

watched disinterestedly as Mrs. Miller dropped the box and stood trembling, trying to catch her breath.

"Thank you," she said. In the daylight she looked pinched and drawn, her hair less luminous. The French doll she was loving wore an exquisite powdered wig and its idiot glass eyes sought solace in Miriam's. "I have a surprise," she continued. "Look into my box."

Kneeling, Mrs. Miller parted the flaps and lifted out another doll; then a blue dress which she recalled as the one Miriam had worn that first night at the theater; and of the remainder she said, "It's all clothes. Why?"

"Because I've come to live with you," said Miriam, twisting a cherry stem. "Wasn't it nice of you to buy me the cherries . . . ?"

"But you can't! For God's sake go away—go away and leave me alone!"

". . . and the roses and the almond cakes? How really wonderfully generous. You know, these cherries are delicious. The last place I lived was with an old man; he was terribly poor and we never had good things to eat. But I think I'll be happy here." She paused to snuggle her doll closer. "Now, if you'll just show me where to put my things . . ."

Mrs. Miller's face dissolved into a mask of ugly red lines; she began to cry, and it was an unnatural, tearless sort of weeping, as though, not having wept for a long time, she had forgotten how. Carefully she edged backward till she touched the door.

She fumbled through the hall and down the stairs to a landing below. She pounded frantically on the door of the first apartment she came to; a short, red-headed man answered and she pushed past him. "Say, what the hell is this?" he said. "Anything wrong, lover?" asked a young woman who appeared from the kitchen, drying her hands. And it was to her that Mrs. Miller turned.

"Listen," she cried, "I'm ashamed behaving this way but—well, I'm Mrs. H. T. Miller and I live upstairs and . . ." She pressed her hands over her face. "It sounds so absurd. . . ."

The woman guided her to a chair, while the man excitedly rattled pocket change. "Yeah?"

"I live upstairs and there's a little girl visiting me, and I suppose that I'm afraid of her. She won't leave and I can't make her and—she's going to do something terrible. She's already stolen my cameo, but she's about to do something worse—something terrible!"

The man asked, "Is she a relative, huh?"

Mrs. Miller shook her head. "I don't know who she is. Her name's Miriam, but I don't know for certain who she is."

"You gotta calm down, honey," said the woman, stroking Mrs. Miller's arm. "Harry here'll tend to this kid. Go on, lover." And Mrs. Miller said, "The door's open—5A."

After the man left, the woman brought a towel and bathed Mrs. Miller's face. "You're very kind," Mrs. Miller said. "I'm sorry to act like such a fool, only this wicked child. . . ."

"Sure, honey," consoled the woman. "Now, you better take it easy."

Mrs. Miller rested her head in the crook of her arm; she was quiet enough to be asleep. The woman turned a radio dial; a piano and a husky voice filled the silence and the woman, tapping her foot, kept excellent time. "Maybe we oughta go up too," she said.

"I don't want to see her again. I don't want to be anywhere near her."

"Uh huh, but what you shoulda done, you shoulda called a cop."

Presently they heard the man on the stairs. He strode into the room frowning and scratching the back of his neck, "Nobody there," he said, honestly embarrassed. "She musta beat it."

"Harry, you're a jerk," announced the woman. "We been sitting here the whole time and we woulda seen . . ." she stopped abruptly, for the man's glance was sharp.

"I looked all over," he said, "and there just ain't nobody there. Nobody, understand?"

"Tell me," said Mrs. Miller, rising, "tell me, did you see a large box? Or a doll?"

"No, ma'am, I didn't."

And the woman, as if delivering a verdict, said, "Well, for cryin'-outloud. . . ."

Mrs. Miller entered her apartment softly; she walked to the center of the room and stood quite still. No, in a sense it had not changed: the roses, the cakes, and the cherries were in place. But this was an empty room, emptier than if the furnishings and familiars were not present, lifeless and petrified as a funeral parlor. The sofa loomed before her with a new strangeness: its vacancy had a meaning that would have been less penetrating and terrible had Miriam been curled on it. She gazed fixedly at the space where she remembered setting the box and, for a moment, the hassock spun desperately.

And she looked through the window; surely the river was real, surely snow was falling—but then, one could not be certain witness to anything: Miriam, so vividly there—and yet, where was she? Where, where?

As though moving in a dream, she sank to a chair. The room was losing shape; it was dark and getting darker and there was nothing to be done about it; she could not lift her hand to light a lamp.

Suddenly, closing her eyes, she felt an upward surge, like a diver emerging from some deeper, greener depth. In times of terror or immense distress, there are moments when the mind waits, as though for a revelation, while a skein of calm is woven over thought; it is like a sleep, or a supernatural trance; and during this lull one is aware of a force of quiet reasoning: well, what if she had never really known a girl named Miriam? that she had been foolishly frightened on the street? In the end, like everything else, it was of no importance. For the only thing she had lost to Miriam was her identity, but now she knew she had found again the person who lived in this room, who cooked her own meals, who owned a canary, who was someone she could trust and believe in: Mrs. H. T. Miller.

Listening in contentment, she became aware of a double sound: a bureau drawer opening and closing; she seemed to hear it long after completion—opening and closing. Then gradually, the harshness of it was replaced by the murmur of a silk dress and this, delicately faint, was moving nearer and swelling in intensity till the walls trembled with the vibration and the room was caving under a wave of whispers. Mrs. Miller stiffened and opened her eyes to a dull, direct stare.

“Hello,” said Miriam.

## ADAM AND EVE AND PINCH ME

by A. E. Coppard

**A**ND in the whole of his days, vividly at the end of the afternoon—he repeated it again and again to himself—the kind country spaces had *never* absorbed *quite* so rich a glamour of light, so miraculous a bloom of clarity. He could feel streaming in his own mind, in his

bones, the same crystalline brightness that lay upon the land. Thoughts and images went flowing through him as easily and amiably as fish swim in their pools; and as idly, too, for one of his speculations took up the theme of his family name. There was such an agreeable oddness about it, just as there was about all the luminous sky today, that it touched him as just a little remarkable. What *did* such a name connote, signify, or symbolize? It was a rann of a name, but it had euphony! Then again, like the fish, his ambulating fancy flashed into other shallows, and he giggled as he paused, peering at the buds in the brake. Turning back towards his house again he could see, beyond its roofs, the spire of the Church tintured richly as the vane: all round him was a new grandeur upon the grass of the fields, and the spare trees had shadows below that seemed to support them in the manner of a plinth, more real than themselves, and the dikes and any chance heave of the level fields were underlined, as if for special emphasis, with long shades of mysterious blackness.

With a little drift of emotion that had at other times assailed him in the wonder and ecstasy of pure light, Jaffa Codling pushed through the slit in the black hedge and stood within his own garden. The gardener was at work. He could hear the voices of the children about the lawn at the other side of the house. He was very happy, and the place was beautiful, a fine white many-windowed house rising from a lawn bowered with plots of mold, turreted with shrubs, and overset with a vast walnut tree. This house had deep clean eaves, a roof of faint-colored slates that, after rain, glowed dully, like onyx or jade, under the red chimneys, and a halfway up at one end was a balcony set with black balusters. He went to a French window that stood open and stepped into the dining room. There was no one within, and, on that lonely instant, a strange feeling of emptiness dropped upon him. The clock ticked almost as if it had been caught in some indecent act; the air was dim and troubled after that glory outside. Well, now, he would go up at once to the study and write down for his new book the ideas and images he had accumulated—beautiful rich thoughts they were—during that wonderful afternoon. He went to mount the stairs and he was passed by one of the maids; humming a silly song she brushed past him rudely, but he was an easygoing man—maids were unteachably tiresome—and reaching the landing he sauntered towards his room. The door stood slightly open and he could hear voices within. He put his hand upon the door . . . it would not open any further. What the devil . . . he pushed—like the bear in the tale—and he pushed, and he pushed—was there

something against it on the other side? He put his shoulder to it . . . some wedge must be there, and *that* was extraordinary. Then his whole apprehension was swept up and whirled as by an avalanche—Mildred, his wife, was in there; he could hear her speaking to a man in fair soft tones and the rich phrases that could be used only by a woman yielding a deep affection for him. Codling kept still. Her words burned on his mind and thrilled him as if spoken to himself. There was a movement in the room, then utter silence. He again thrust savagely at the partly open door, but he could not stir it. The silence within continued. He beat upon the door with his fists, crying: "Mildred, Mildred!" There was no response, but he could hear the rocking armchair commence to swing to and fro. Pushing his hand round the edge of the door he tried to thrust his head between the opening. There was not space for this, but he could just peer into the corner of a mirror hung near, and this is what he saw: the chair at one end of its swing, a man sitting in it, and upon one arm of it Mildred, the beloved woman, with her lips upon the man's face, caressing him with her hands. Codling made another effort to get into the room—as vain as it was violent. "Do you hear me, Mildred?" he shouted. Apparently neither of them heard him; they rocked to and fro while he gazed stupefied. What, in the name of God . . . What was this . . . was she bewitched . . . were there such things after all as magic, devilry!

He drew back and held himself quite steadily. The chair stopped swaying, and the room grew awfully still. The sharp ticking of the clock in the hall rose upon the house like the tongue of some perfunctory mocker. Couldn't they hear the clock? . . . Couldn't they hear his heart? He had to put his hand upon his heart, for, surely, in that great silence inside there, they would hear its beat, growing so loud now that it seemed almost to stun him! Then in a queer way he found himself reflecting, observing, analyzing his own actions and intentions. He found some of them to be just a little spurious, counterfeit. He felt it would be easy, so perfectly easy to flash in one blast of anger and annihilate the two. He would do nothing of the kind. There was no occasion for it. People didn't really do that sort of thing, or, at least, not with a genuine passion. There was no need for anger. His curiosity was satisfied, quite satisfied, he was certain, he had not the remotest interest in the man. A welter of unexpected thoughts swept upon his mind as he stood there. As a writer of books he was often stimulated by the emotions and impulses of other people, and now his own surprise was beginning to intrigue him, leaving



him, O, quite unstirred emotionally, but interesting him profoundly.

He heard the maid come stepping up the stairway again, humming her silly song. He did not want a scene, or to be caught eavesdropping, and so turned quickly to another door. It was locked. He sprang to one beyond it; the handle would not turn. "Bah! what's *up* with 'em?" But the girl was now upon him, carrying a tray of coffee things. "Oh, Mary!" he exclaimed casually, "I . . ." To his astonishment the girl stepped past him as if she did not hear or see him, tapped open the door of his study, entered, and closed the door behind her. Jaffa Codling then got really angry. "Hell! were the blasted servants in it!" He dashed to the door again and tore at the handle. It would not even turn, and, though he wrenched with fury at it, the room was utterly sealed against him. He went away for a chair with which to smash the effrontery of that door. No, he wasn't angry, either with his wife or this fellow—Gilbert, she had called him—who had a strangely familiar aspect as far as he had been able to take it in; but when one's servants . . . faugh!

The door opened and Mary came forth smiling demurely. He was a few yards further along the corridor at that moment. "Mary!" he shouted, "leave the door open!" Mary carefully closed it and turned her back on him. He sprang after her with bad words bursting from him as she went towards the stairs and flitted lightly down, humming all the way as if in derision. He leaped downwards after her three steps at a time, but she trotted with amazing swiftness into the kitchen and slammed the door in his face. Codling stood, but kept his hands carefully away from the door, kept them behind him. "No, no," he whispered cunningly, "there's something fiendish about door handles today, I'll go and get a bar, or a butt of timber," and, jumping out into the garden for some such thing, the miracle happened to him. For it was nothing else than a miracle, the unbelievable, the impossible, simple and laughable if you will, but having as much validity as any miracle can ever invoke. It was simple and laughable because by all the known physical laws he should have collided with his gardener, who happened to pass the window with his wheelbarrow as Codling jumped out on to the path. And it was unbelievable that they should not, and impossible that they *did* not collide; and it was miraculous, because Codling stood for a brief moment in the garden path and the wheelbarrow of Bond, its contents, and Bond himself passed apparently through the figure of Codling as if he were so much air, as if he were not a living breathing man but just a common ghost. There was no impact, just a momentary breathlessness.

Codling stood and looked at the retreating figure going on utterly unaware of him. It is interesting to record that Codling's first feelings were mirthful. He giggled. He was jocular. He ran along in front of the gardener, and let him pass through him once more; then after him again; he scrambled into the man's barrow, and was wheeled about by this incomprehensible thickheaded gardener who was dead to all his master's efforts to engage his attention. Presently he dropped the wheelbarrow and went away, leaving Codling to cogitate upon the occurrence. There was no room for doubt, some essential part of him had become detached from the obviously not less vital part. He felt he was essential because he was responding to the experience, he was reacting in the normal way to normal stimuli, although he happened for the time being to be invisible to his fellows and unable to communicate with them. How had it come about—this queer thing? How could he discover what part of him had cut loose, as it were? There was no question of this being death; death wasn't funny, it wasn't a joke; he had still all his human instincts. You didn't get angry with a faithless wife or joke with a fool of a gardener if you were dead, certainly not! He had realized enough of himself to know he was the usual man of instincts, desires, and prohibitions, complex and contradictory; his family history for a million or two years would have denoted that, not explicitly—obviously impossible—but suggestively. He had found himself doing things he had no desire to do, doing things he had a desire *not* to do, thinking thoughts that had no contiguous meaning, no meanings that could be related to his general experience. At odd times he had been chilled—aye, and even agreeably surprised—at the immense potential evil in himself. But still, this was no mere Jekyll and Hyde affair, that a man and his own ghost should separately inhabit the same world was a horse of quite another color. The other part of him was alive and active somewhere . . . as alive . . . as alive . . . yes, as *he* was, but dashed if he knew where! What a lark when they got back to each other and compared notes! In his tales he had brooded over so many imagined personalities, followed in the track of so many psychological enigmas that he *had* felt at times a stranger to himself. What if, after all, that brooding had given him the faculty of projecting this figment of himself into the world of men. Or was he some unrealized latent element of being without its natural integument, doomed now to drift over the ridge of the world forever. Was it his personality, his spirit? Then how was the dashed thing working? Here was he with the most wonderful happening in human experi-

ence, and he couldn't differentiate or disinter things. He was like a new Adam flung into some old Eden.

There was Bond tinkering about with some plants a dozen yards in front of him. Suddenly his three children came round from the other side of the house, the youngest boy leading them, carrying in his hand a small sword which was made, not of steel, but of some more brightly shining material; indeed it seemed at one moment to be of gold, and then again of flame, transmuting everything in its neighborhood into the likeness of flame, the hair of the little girl Eve, a part of Adam's tunic; and the fingers of the boy Gabriel as he held the sword were like pale tongues of fire. Gabriel, the youngest boy, went up to the gardener and gave the sword into his hands, saying: "Bond, is this sword any good?" Codling saw the gardener take the weapon and examine it with a careful sort of smile; his great gnarled hands became immediately transparent, the blood could be seen moving diligently about the veins. Codling was so interested in the sight that he did not gather in the gardener's reply. The little boy was dissatisfied and repeated his question, "No, but Bond, is this sword any good?" Codling rose, and stood by invisible. The three beautiful children were grouped about the great angular figure of the gardener in his soiled clothes, looking up now into his face, and now at the sword, with anxiety in all their puckered eyes. "Well, Marse Gabriel," Codling could hear him reply, "as far as a sword goes, it may be a good un, or it may be a bad un, but, good as it is, it can never be anything but a bad thing." He then gave it back to them; the boy Adam held the haft of it, and the girl Eve rubbed the blade with curious fingers. The younger boy stood looking up at the gardener with unsatisfied gaze. "But, Bond, *can't* you say if this sword's any good?" Bond turned to his spade and trowels. "Mebbe the shape of it's wrong, Marse Gabriel, though it seems a pretty handy size." Saying this he moved off across the lawn. Gabriel turned to his brother and sister and took the sword from them: they all followed after the gardener and once more Gabriel made enquiry: "Bond, is this sword any good?" The gardener again took it and made a few passes in the air like a valiant soldier at exercise. Turning then, he lifted a bright curl from the head of Eve and cut it off with a sweep of the weapon. He held it up to look at it critically and then let it fall to the ground. Codling sneaked behind him and, picking it up, stood stupidly looking at it. "Mebbe, Marse Gabriel," the gardener was saying, "it ud be better made of steel, but it has a smartish edge on it." He went to pick up the barrow, but Gabriel seized it with a spasm of

anger, and cried out: "No, no, Bond, will you say, just yes or no, Bond, is this sword any *good*?" The gardener stood still, and looked down at the little boy, who repeated his question—"just yes or no, Bond!" "No, Marse Gabriel!" "Thank you, Bond!" replied the child with dignity, "that's all we wanted to know," and calling to his mates to follow him, he ran away to the other side of the house.

Codling stared again at the beautiful lock of hair in his hand, and felt himself grow so angry that he picked up a strange-looking flowerpot at his feet and hurled it at the retreating gardener. It struck Bond in the middle of the back and, passing clean through him, broke on the wheel of his barrow, but Bond seemed to be quite unaware of this catastrophe. Codling rushed after, and, taking the gardener by the throat, he yelled, "Damn you, will you tell me what all this means?" But Bond proceeded calmly about his work unnoticed, carrying his master about as if he were a clinging vapor, or a scarf hung upon his neck. In a few moments, Codling dropped exhausted to the ground. "What . . . O hell . . . what, what am I to do?" he groaned. "What has happened to me? What shall I *do*? What *can* I do?" He looked at the broken flowerpot. "Did I invent that?" He pulled out his watch. "That's a real watch, I hear it ticking, and it's six o'clock." Was he dead or disembodied or mad? What was this infernal lapse of identity? And who the devil, yes, who was it upstairs with Mildred? He jumped to his feet and hurried to the window; it was shut; to the door, it was fastened; he was powerless to open either. Well! well! this was experimental psychology with a vengeance, and he began to chuckle again. He'd have to write to McDougall about it. Then he turned and saw Bond wheeling across the lawn towards him again. "Why is that fellow always shoving that infernal green barrow around?" he asked, and, the fit of fury seizing him again, he rushed towards Bond, but, before he reached him, the three children danced into the garden again, crying, with great excitement, "Bond, O Bond!" The gardener stopped and set down the terrifying barrow; the children crowded about him, and Gabriel held out another shining thing, asking: "Bond, is this box any good?" The gardener took the box and at once his eyes lit up with interest and delight. "O, Marse Gabriel, where'd ye get it? Where'd ye get it?" "Bond," said the boy impatiently, "is the box any *good*?" "Any good?" echoed the man. "Why, Marse Gabriel, Marse Adam, Miss Eve, look yere!" Holding it down in front of them, he lifted the lid from the box and a bright-colored bird flashed out and flew around and round above their heads. "Oh," screamed Gabriel with

delight, "it's a kingfisher!" "That's what it is," said Bond, "a kingfisher!" "Where?" asked Adam. "Where?" asked Eve. "There it flies—round the fountain—see it? see it!" "No," said Adam. "No," said Eve.

"O, do, do, see it," cried Gabriel, "here it comes, it's coming!" and, holding his hands on high, and standing on his toes, the child cried out as happy as the bird which Codling saw flying above them.

"I can't see it," said Adam.

"Where is it, Gaby?" asked Eve.

"Oh, you stupid," cried the boy. "*There* it goes. *There* it goes . . . there . . . it's gone!"

He stood looking brightly at Bond, who replaced the lid.

"What shall we do now?" he exclaimed eagerly. For reply, the gardener gave the box into his hand, and walked off with the barrow. Gabriel took the box over to the fountain. Codling, unseen, went after him, almost as excited as the boy; Eve and her brother followed. They sat upon the stone tank that held the falling water. It was difficult for the child to unfasten the lid; Codling attempted to help him, but he was powerless. Gabriel looked up into his father's face and smiled. Then he stood up and said to the others:

"Now, *do* watch it this time."

They all knelt carefully beside the water. He lifted the lid and, behold, a fish like a gold carp, but made wholly of fire, leaped from the box into the fountain. The man saw it dart down into the water, he saw the water bubble up behind it, he heard the hiss that the junction of fire and water produced, and saw a little track of steam follow the bubbles about the tank until the figure of the fish was consumed and disappeared. Gabriel, in ecstasies, turned to his sister with blazing happy eyes, exclaiming:

"There! Evey!"

"What was it?" asked Eve, nonchalantly, "I didn't see anything."

"More didn't I," said Adam.

"Didn't you see that lovely fish?"

"No," said Adam.

"No," said Eve.

"Oh, stupid," cried Gabriel, "it went right past the bottom of the water."

"Let's get a fishin' hook," said Adam.

"No, no, no," said Gabriel, replacing the lid of the box. "O no."

Jaffa Codling had remained on his knees staring at the water so long that, when he looked around him again, the children had gone

away. He got up and went to the door, and that was closed; the windows, fastened. He went moodily to a garden bench and sat on it with folded arms. Dusk had begun to fall into the shrubs and trees, the grass to grow dull, the air chill, the sky to muster its gloom. Bond had overturned his barrow, stalled his tools in the lodge, and gone to his home in the village. A curious cat came round the house and surveyed the man who sat chained to his seven-horned dilemma. It grew dark and fearfully silent. Was the world empty now? Some small thing, a snail, perhaps, crept among the dead leaves in the hedge, with a sharp, irritating noise. A strange flood of mixed thoughts poured through his mind until at last one idea disentangled itself, and he began thinking with tremendous fixity of little Gabriel. He wondered if he could brood or meditate, or "will" with sufficient power to bring him into the garden again. The child had just vaguely recognized him for a moment at the waterside. He'd try that dodge, telepathy was a mild kind of a trick after so much of the miraculous. If he'd lost his blessed body, at least the part that ate and smoked and talked to Mildred . . . He stopped as his mind stumbled on a strange recognition. . . . What a joke, of course . . . idiot . . . not to have seen *that*. He stood up in the garden with joy . . . of course, *he* was upstairs with Mildred, it was himself, the other bit of him, that Mildred had been talking to. What a howling fool he'd been.

He found himself concentrating his mind on the purpose of getting the child Gabriel into the garden once more, but it was with a curious mood that he endeavored to establish this relationship. He could not fix his will into any calm intensity of power, or fixity of purpose, or pleasurable mental ecstasy. The utmost force seemed to come with a malicious threatening splenetic "entreaty." That damned snail in the hedge broke the thread of his meditation; a dog began to bark sturdily from a distant farm; the faculties of his mind became joggled up like a child's picture puzzle, and he brooded unintelligibly upon such things as skating and steam engines, and Elizabethan drama so lapped about with themes like jealousy and chastity. Really now, Shakespeare's Isabella was the most consummate snob in . . . He looked up quickly to his wife's room and saw Gabriel step from the window to the balcony as if he were fearful of being seen. The boy lifted up his hands and placed the bright box on the rail of the balcony. He looked up at the faint stars for a moment or two, and then carefully released the lid of the box. What came out of it and rose into the air appeared to Codling to be just a piece of floating

light, but as it soared above the roof he saw it grow to be a little ancient ship, with its hull and fully set sails and its three masts all of faint primrose flame color. It cleaved through the air, rolling slightly as a ship through the wave, in widening circles above the house, making a curving ascent until it lost the shape of a vessel and became only a moving light hurrying to some sidereal shrine. Codling glanced at the boy on the balcony, but in that brief instant something had happened, the ship had burst like a rocket and released three colored drops of fire which came falling slowly, leaving beautiful gray furrows of smoke in their track. Gabriel leaned over the rail with outstretched palms, and, catching the green star and the blue one as they drifted down to him, he ran with a rill of laughter back into the house. Codling sprang forward just in time to catch the red star; it lay vividly blasting his own palm for a monstrous second, and then, slipping through, was gone. He stared at the ground, at the balcony, the sky, and then heard an exclamation . . . his wife stood at his side.

“Gilbert! How you frightened me!” she cried. “I thought you were in your room; come along in to dinner.” She took his arm and they walked up the steps into the dining room together. “Just a moment,” said her husband, turning to the door of the room. His hand was upon the handle, which turned easily in his grasp, and he ran upstairs to his own room. He opened the door. The light was on, the fire was burning brightly, a smell of cigarette smoke about, pen and paper upon his desk, the Japanese book knife, the gilt matchbox, everything all right, no one there. He picked up a book from his desk. . . . *Monna Vanna*. His bookplate was in it—*Ex Libris—Gilbert Cannister*. He put it down beside the green dish; two yellow oranges were in the green dish, and two most deliberately green Canadian apples rested by their side. He went to the door and swung it backwards and forwards quite easily. He sat on his desk trying to piece the thing together, glaring at the print and the bookknife and the smart matchbox, until his wife came up behind him exclaiming: “Come along, Gilbert!”

“Where are the kids, old man?” he asked her, and, before she replied, he had gone along to the nursery. He saw the two cots, his boy in one, his girl in the other. He turned whimsically to Mildred, saying, “There *are* only two, *are* there?” Such a question did not call for reply, but he confronted her as if expecting some assuring answer. She was staring at him with her bright beautiful eyes.

“Are there?” he repeated.

"How strange you should ask me that now!" she said. . . . "If you're a very good man . . . perhaps . . ."

"Mildred!"

She nodded brightly.

He sat down in the rocking chair, but got up again saying to her gently—"We'll call him Gabriel."

"But, suppose—"

"No, no," he said, stopping her lovely lips, "I know all about him." And he told her a pleasant little tale.

## CHILD'S PLAY

by *Mary-Alice Schnirring*

**H**ENRY bent lower over the drawing-board as the twilight deepened. With a dark-red crayon, he filled in the outlines of another city; then, with a pen dipped in India ink, drew—rapidly and with remarkable delicacy and skill for a twelve-year-old—a temple, a palace, and a barracks; and sketched in hastily some ambiguous dwelling places. He muttered to himself as he worked.

"This'll keep old Charley Anderson in his place, I bet," was the tenor of his mumblings. "His barracks only have room for about two hundred warriors, and my Royal Guards can clean them up with one hand tied behind their backs. Anyway, the Thorvians are a bunch of sissies." In large letters, he labeled the city "THORVIA," and sat back with a little smile on his face, wiggling his fingers to uncramp them.

A voice called from somewhere downstairs. "Hen-reeee. Hen-reee! Your dinner is ready! Why aren't you ever around to help me set the table or anything, instead of sulking up in your room all the time? Why—" the voice trailed off into peevish, whining incoherencies. The boy stood up, scowling; but prepared, laggingly, to go downstairs. He paused, however, for one more look at the map.

It was drawn with remarkable precision. It appeared to be a map of a mountainous country, dominated by one large city, built on the top and upper slopes of the highest of the mountains. This city, marked "DRACO," was elaborately and painstakingly developed with



the little India ink symbols. A truly magnificent palace was at its very heart; and around the palace, cunningly enough, were strong barracks, each with a watch-tower. Beyond these, again, was a very wide, bare, circular road, completely surrounding barracks, palace, gardens and all. Apparently the ruler of this kingdom had a healthy distrust of his subjects, or else expected, but was prepared for, an invasion.

The remainder of the map bore out the second theory; for Draco was the heart of a whole system of smaller cities, or states. Since each city had a palace (though none as impressive as the one in Draco); the effect was that of a feudal overlord, surrounded by lesser rulers. So, in fact, was the case. Henry, who dragged out a dreary existence with his aunt and uncle—an existence complicated by the limp which he would always have, as a souvenir of the accident in which his mother and father had been killed—had found that in order to make life with the other boys of his age bearable, he would have to make himself superior to them. Since any physical superiority was out of the question, his quick mind had found the way out.

As Kirwan, ruler of Draco and its subject states, Henry held a position of unquestioned authority among his fellows. More—the game had captured their imaginations to such an extent that former, and possibly healthier, pastimes were neglected. Billy Daniels (Fiero, Prince of Maglar); Donny Clark (Andrus of Ghuria); Joe Domenico (Horvath of Balcur); and Robin Johnson (Duke Shira, of Friya), lived only for the campaigns against the Dog-Men of the Outer Mountains, the internecine wars that trouble Draconia with scarcely a let-up, and, of course, the political strife that was one of its chief *raison-d'être*. In turn, each one had tried to out-manuever Henry; but Kirwan, King of Draconia, had maintained his power against each of them, and his ascendancy over their minds at the same time. "The game," however, held even more sway over Henry than over the others. More and more, his life as Henry Booth seemed the game, and a very unpleasant and dull game, at that; while, as Kirwan, he lived in a dangerously brilliant world, of which every corner was twice as familiar to him as the drab surroundings of his Aunt Martha's and Uncle Joe's house.

Aunt Martha and Uncle Joe were not fond of Henry, to start with. He didn't act nicely at *all* to their dear little Charley (about to become ruler of Thorvia); and Charley such a bright little fellow—and so healthy! Imagine—100 pounds, and only eleven years old!

That, of course, was one way of looking at it—the Anderson's way. Henry's way was, quite simply, that Charley was a big overgrown slob of a boy, and a nasty little sneak and bully besides. Henry's views were actually far less biased than those of his aunt and uncle. In fact, the only reason for the creation of "Thorvia" was that Charley had prowled, and sneaked, and opened bureau drawers, and listened in corners to too good effect. Briefly, Charley knew too much, and, in his inimitable way, could break up the game with dreadful ease—but even his calculating, disagreeable little mind recognized its pull, and a Dukedom was the price of his cooperation.

All this passed vaguely and hastily through Kirwan's mind, as he lingered in the doorway, still under the spell of his own creation. It was Kirwan who frowned standing there, foreseeing trouble with his latest vassal-lord; it was Kirwan who suddenly went back to the drawing-board, took up the India ink again, and quickly sketched something in the southeastern corner of Thorvia. But it was Henry who dropped pen and ink nervously and ran to the door and down the stairs, at a repetition of the whining cry, "Hen-reeeee!" from downstairs.

He sat through an unattractive meal of boiled potatoes, cabbage, and a very poor grade of chopped beef, topped off by a bread pudding that was mostly bread. What raisins there were, went to Charley, who had also engulfed the lion's share of the chopped beef. Quantity, not quality, was his motto; and glands alone were not responsible for the hundred pounds that were Charley.

The meal was enlivened by Aunt Martha's monologue, mostly based on Henry, and never complimentary to him; with variations on Charley's virtues and good, healthy appetite—so different from Henry, picking at his food, as if he shouldn't be grateful to his dear auntie and uncle who provided his food, at what expense no one knew; and look how Charley likes to play outdoors—not always frowsting in his room, when he wasn't in corners with those other boys—and just what was it they did, anyway? Aunt Martha thought that she and Mrs. Daniels and Mrs. Clark and Mrs. Domenico (though Mrs. Domenico was not really a lady, to Aunt Martha's way of thinking, though doubtless a good-hearted woman), and Mrs. Johnson ought to get together and find out just what was going on. You didn't see Aunt Martha's Charley—

Panic, that had been growing in Henry as this speech rose to its crisis, flowered into speech.

"It's—it's just a club, Aunt Martha," he stammered, rashly.

"Just a club!" she sniffed. "And what kind of a club is it that is too good for my Charley?"

Henry's panic subsided. This emergency had already been faced, and dealt with. He even smiled.

"Why, we elected Charley a member at the last meeting, Aunt Martha," he said, looking at Charley. Charley's face, which had worn a greasy, knowing smile, suddenly took on a look of surprise, mingled with disbelief. He stared at Henry.

"Ya did?" Astonishment and—yes, pleasure—even normal, little-boy pleasure, characterized his tone.

"Yes, Charley. You're a full-fledged member of—the club now. Tell you about it after dinner."

Aunt Martha was not going to give up quite so easily, although it was easy to see that she was mollified.

"Well, I want to know more about it before I let Charley join, anyway," she said firmly. But Uncle Joe for once stood up to her.

"Now, Martha—boys' clubs are secret. Can't expect 'em to tell you about what goes on. Leave the kids alone."

"Well, I can trust Charley," said Aunt Martha, fondly, giving in at last.

"I know Mother's little man wouldn't belong to any club that wasn't nice."

Charley smiled, as unpleasant a smile as Henry ever remembered seeing, even on Charley's face, and replied in a sick-sweet voice, "Yes, Mamma dear."

They rose from the table, and Charley grabbed Henry by the arm and pulled him outdoors, into the spring night.

"Hurry up!" he said, feverishly. "If ya didn't mean it, I'm gonna tell everybody the whole thing. Didja mean it, really? Have I got a kingdom of my own in Draconia? What's its name? Where is it? How big—"

Henry was Kirwan. "Quiet!" he said. "My lords and I meet in conference tonight. You will be inducted into our company as Duke of Thorvia. As is our custom, you may choose your own name by which you will henceforth be known to us in Draconia. Be ready at midnight." Shaking his arm loose from the fat, wet grasp of his newest Duke, King Kirwan limped away down the street.

At a quarter to twelve, Kirwan, King of Draconia, sat in the palace in the heart of Draco, his principal city, surrounded by his liege lords, the Prince Fiero of Maglar, Prince Andrus of Ghuria, Prince

Horvath of Balcur, and Duke Shira of Friya. All of them looked troubled; Fiero and Shira downright furious.

"Kirwan," spoke up Fiero. "I crave leave to speak."

"Speak," said Kirwan, not looking up.

"I like not this new dukedom. It bounds Maglar all along my northeastern border, and this new Duke is a trouble-maker."

"And a slimy louse," said Duke Shira, fervently. "As the only other Duke of this company, one who has not yet attained his Prince-ship, I respectfully plead, O Kirwan, that you make him less than a Duke. I would not be akin to him even in title."

Kirwan looked up, finally. It was noticeable that his eyes blazed with excitement, mingled with a look of uncertainty. "Am I not your liege lord," he said, though not angrily. "And do you not trust me?"

"We trust you, Kirwan," said dark-eyed Horvath, who had not spoken before.

"But we know thisa new Duke is trouble-maker. We can control heem in Draconia, yes—but outside?"

For a moment, Kirwan hesitated; then he spoke slowly and hesitantly. "I think—I think I can control him outside, as well. I have a plan—"

The new Duke of Thorvia, Edric by name, was proving a trouble-maker. And Kirwan's liege lords, who had expected this, but believed that Kirwan could handle it, were becoming mutinous. First, Edric had shown a tendency to ridicule the whole secret life of Draconia; but after a couple of weeks, he had become as absorbed by it as the rest. Then, however, the greed that was the cornerstone of his whole character, had begun to come to the fore. The marvelously intricate details of the whole country—the peasants' huts, the different uniforms of the fighting men in the service of each ruler; their number and character—even their names; the strange flowers in the garden of the palace at Draco; the unpleasant call of a certain bird found only in the unexplored woods of Ghuria and the revolting characteristics of the pale fawn-colored mink-like animal that the Friyans had tried, unsuccessfully, to exterminate; Edric, with a surprising quickness, had learned them all, and even added to his fellow-lords' knowledge.

What puzzled Edric sometimes (or, rather, it puzzled Charley Anderson) was the fact that it did not seem to him that he invented the things. It seemed rather as if they had always been there, in the

back of his mind, and had just come casually to the fore. Even more strange—and when Charley thought of it, he was uneasy; although to Edric it was more a sullen annoyance than a surprise—was that Kirwan knew still more than Edric and, once or twice, had corroborated Edric's descriptions with certain emendations—*which Edric somehow realized were correct.*

There was the night when Horvath had entertained them in his palace at Balcur. The Dog-Men had been quiescent for some weeks, and conversation was idly turning on the swamp-lands in the south-eastern corner of Thorvia, unfamiliar territory, except for such features as Edric's palace, the barracks, and the peasants' huts, to most of the group. Edric was saying, "There must be mineral springs underground in the swamp. It—it sort of churns around, sometimes; but not always in the same place."

Kirwan had a small, secret smile on his face. "Not always the same place, no," he agreed. "But I think you will find always the same *sort* of place."

"Whatta you mean, the same sort of place?" Edric demanded, puzzled. "The whole swamp is the same sort of place. And I don't know why I should have to have a swamp in Thorvia—nobody else has. And this one has a nasty smell, somehow." He stopped short, realizing with an unexplained thrill of fear that it *did* have a nasty smell. But how could it have? And—how did he know it, and know that he wasn't "making it up"? His mind was so absorbed by this rather frightening problem that he almost missed Kirwan's answer.

"It only—er—churns around near those dark-purple waterlilies, doesn't it?" said Kirwan, mildly; yet with a gleam of almost uncontrollable excitement in his eyes. "What?" said Edric, and thought. "Yes," he said, and then with more conviction. "Yes. Only by the purple flowers." Then, jumping up, and with his voice shrill, "Why? What is it? You know what it is. How do you know?"

Kirwan cast down his eyes to the map, which he always took with him to the meetings. "Why, mineral springs, as you suggested," he answered. "That's what makes the swamp smell, probably, too. As for its only being near the flowers, why, it's the other way around. The flowers grow there because there's some quality in the springs that feeds them."

Edric was almost satisfied with this explanation. But back in his bed, later that night, Charley Anderson still lay awake, and thought, and thought. And his thoughts came to fruition a week later.

It was in the middle of a discussion at the dinner-table—the usual discussion of why Henry wasn't eating his lambstew, but this time flavored with the unusual spice of the fact that Charley was only picking at his.

"It's that dratted club of yours," pronounced Aunt Martha. "It's got to stop. You, Charley, you've been mooning around the house now almost as bad as Henry, for goodness knows how long. Just what is this club, anyway?"

Charley cast a sidelong look at Henry, who was looking at him with a strange expression—a waiting sort of look. Charley squirmed in his chair, uneasily. "Oh—it's just a club," he answered, sullenly. "Ya can't tell about it while you're in it. But they haven't been treating me right, and I think I'll resign—and then, Mamma, I'll tell you all about it." As he spoke the last words, he looked straight at Henry, with a sly, triumphant expression, that said even more plainly than words, "See? I have you in a cleft stick. Either you knuckle under to me, or—"

Henry looked back at him, with an unreadable gleam in his eyes. Or was it Kirwan who looked back at him? Charley—Edric—found himself unable to decide, but something made him say, quickly, "Of course, if they're nicer to me, I won't resign—and then I couldn't tell."

"There, Henry," said Aunt Martha. "I *knew* you were being mean to poor little Charley. You're jealous of him, that's what it is; because you're a cripple and he's a big strong, clever boy. Either you treat him right, or I'll break up that club of yours—and I mean it!"

Henry looked at his plate. His nostrils flared, but he said absolutely nothing for a minute. Then he looked up, his expression imitating perfectly that of a twelve-year-old boy who, while still sullen, has been forced into following a course of action repugnant to him. "Oh, all right!" he said. "We'll fix Charley up so he won't kick." And under his breath, he added, "Ever again."

That night Kirwan worked late with his fine-pointed drawing pen and the India ink. And when he had finished, the false dawn was just breaking; and showed, as he switched off his light, the addition he had made to his map in the southeastern corner of Thorvia. It was beautifully executed; a sluggish, somehow oily-looking creature. Drawn to the scale of the map, it was very large—in fact, almost half the size of the swamp itself. It had a disgusting appearance, and was so clearly limned that one could almost see it move. Henry had

a distinct talent. He slept, then, with the little smile that had become almost a fixture, on his face.

"King Kirwan," said Duke Shira, "I crave the help of some Draconian fighting men."

Kirwan's eyebrows shot up. "So? Are not the Friyans content? Surely you do not expect trouble with your people?"

"No," said Shira. "The people are content, except for one thing—the woods are becoming increasingly full of khalders, and—you know why we must keep them down."

Kirwan nodded. Andrus of Ghuria, who had a tendency toward squeamishness, gulped a little, and looked unhappy, since the khalders, those pale fawn-colored animals that looked something like weasels, had habits that were better not thought of.

"The only thing is," said Kirwan, slowly, "that I have reason to believe I will need all my fighting men shortly. Why not ask Duke Edric for some of his forces?"

All eyes turned toward Edric, who sat, fatly, in his chair, with a smug smile. "Sure," he said, pleasantly, "I'll let you have half of them. But—I need more land, an' more influence. In fact, I think Kirwan ought to take over Thorvia, and I'll take Draco—and, of course, whatever goes with it."

The only one apparently unmoved in the middle of the resulting turmoil was Kirwan. "Quiet!" he said, loudly. And under the influence of his voice, they actually did quiet down.

"I have been expecting this," he said, unconcernedly. "But I am prepared for it. Edric—" he turned toward him suddenly. "Have you been down to the marsh lately?"

The fat Duke of Thorvia stirred uneasily. "What's that got to do with it?" he demanded. "Anyway, it's your headache now—Draco has no marsh," and he giggled. "And either I get Draco, and rule the whole bunch, or—you know."

"Know what?" demanded Fiero truculently. But Kirwan held up his hand.

"He means he'll destroy Draconia by—well, exposing it to the light," he said, indifferently; almost with amusement at his own joke. "But—Edric, have you noticed that the dark purple waterlilies have all withered?"

A peculiar look came over Edric's face. "What of it?" he asked, shrilly. "What's that got to do with it?"

Kirwan smiled. "Why, I would suggest that after we disband to—

night, you go down to the swamp and—maybe you'll find out why it churns. It might not be mineral springs, you know; and it would be interesting to find out what else it could be—wouldn't it?"

Edric's face looked ghastly. "I won't! You can't make me!" he cried. "I won't go near it!"

"You have to sleep," suggested Kirwan, still smiling. The others looked puzzled and frightened, but Edric looked dreadful. "I won't sleep!" he screamed. "I won't sleep!"

When they broke up, he was still muttering it.

At five o'clock in the morning, Kirwan sat up in bed. A look of anticipation, a listening look, was on his face, making it strangely unpleasant. His attic room was directly above Charley's large, airy bedroom; and sounds traveled upwards fairly plainly. An anomalous sound was reaching his ears now—a wet, squelchy, crawling sound. Suddenly, he heard a terrible cry.

As the sound of running feet, crying voices, and finally a dreadful scream from Auntie Martha, reached his ears, Kirwan turned over and went to sleep, smiling.

## THE OPEN WINDOW

by "Saki" (H. H. Munro)

**M**Y AUNT will be down presently, Mr. Nuttel," said a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen; "in the meantime you must try and put up with me."

Framton Nuttel endeavored to say the correct something which should duly flatter the niece of the moment without unduly discounting the aunt that was to come. Privately he doubted more than ever whether these formal visits on a succession of total strangers would do much towards helping the nerve cure which he was supposed to be undergoing.

"I know how it will be," his sister had said when he was preparing to migrate to this rural retreat; "you will bury yourself down there and not speak to a living soul, and your nerves will be worse than ever from moping. I shall just give you letters of introduction to all



the people I know there. Some of them, as far as I can remember, were quite nice."

Framton wondered whether Mrs. Sappleton, the lady to whom he was presenting one of the letters of introduction, came into the nice division.

"Do you know many of the people round here?" asked the niece, when she judged that they had had sufficient silent communion.

"Hardly a soul," said Framton. "My sister was staying here, at the rectory, you know, some four years ago, and she gave me letters of introduction to some of the people here."

He made the last statement in a tone of distinct regret.

"Then you know practically nothing about my aunt?" pursued the self-possessed young lady.

"Only her name and address," admitted the caller. He was wondering whether Mrs. Sappleton was in the married or widowed state. An undefinable something about the room seemed to suggest masculine habitation.

"Her great tragedy happened just three years ago," said the child; "that would be since your sister's time."

"Her tragedy?" asked Framton; somehow in this restful country spot tragedies seemed out of place.

"You may wonder why we keep that window wide open on an October afternoon," said the niece, indicating a large French window that opened on to a lawn.

"It is quite warm for the time of the year," said Framton; "but has that window got anything to do with the tragedy?"

"Out through that window, three years ago to a day, her husband and her two young brothers went off for their day's shooting. They never came back. In crossing the moor to their favorite snipe-shooting ground they were all three engulfed in a treacherous piece of bog. It had been that dreadful wet summer, you know, and places that were safe in other years gave way suddenly without warning. Their bodies were never recovered. That was the dreadful part of it." Here the child's voice lost its self-possessed note and became falteringly human. "Poor aunt always thinks that they will come back someday, they and the little brown spaniel that was lost with them, and walk in at that window just as they used to do. That is why the window is kept open every evening till it is quite dusk. Poor dear aunt, she has often told me how they went out, her husband with his white water-proof coat over his arm, and Ronnie, her youngest brother, singing 'Bertie, why do you bound?' as he always did to

tease her, because she said it got on her nerves. Do you know, sometimes on still, quiet evenings like this, I almost get a creepy feeling that they will all walk in through that window——”

She broke off with a little shudder. It was a relief to Framton when the aunt bustled into the room with a whirl of apologies for being late in making her appearance.

“I hope Vera has been amusing you?” she said.

“She has been very interesting,” said Framton.

“I hope you don’t mind the open window,” said Mrs. Sappleton briskly; “my husband and brothers will be home directly from shooting, and they always come in this way. They’ve been out for snipe in the marshes today, so they’ll make a fine mess over my poor carpets. So like you menfolk, isn’t it?”

She rattled on cheerfully about the shooting and the scarcity of birds, and the prospects for duck in the winter. To Framton it was all purely horrible. He made a desperate but only partially successful effort to turn the talk on to a less ghastly topic; he was conscious that his hostess was giving him only a fragment of her attention, and her eyes were constantly straying past him to the open window and the lawn beyond. It was certainly an unfortunate coincidence that he should have paid his visit on this tragic anniversary.

“The doctors agree in ordering me complete rest, an absence of mental excitement, and avoidance of anything in the nature of violent physical exercise,” announced Framton, who labored under the tolerably widespread delusion that total strangers and chance acquaintances are hungry for the least detail of one’s ailments and infirmities, their cause and cure. “On the matter of diet they are not so much in agreement,” he continued.

“No?” said Mrs. Sappleton, in a voice which only replaced a yawn at the last moment. Then she suddenly brightened into alert attention—but not to what Framton was saying.

“Here they are at last!” she cried. “Just in time for tea, and don’t they look as if they were muddy up to the eyes!”

Framton shivered slightly and turned towards the niece with a look intended to convey sympathetic comprehension. The child was staring out through the open window with a dazed horror in her eyes. In a chill shock of nameless fear Framton swung round in his seat and looked in the same direction.

In the deepening twilight three figures were walking across the lawn towards the windows; they all carried guns under their arms, and one of them was additionally burdened with a white coat hung

over his shoulders. A tired brown spaniel kept close at their heels. Noiselessly they neared the house, and then a hoarse young voice chanted out of the dusk: "I said, Bertie, why do you bound?"

Framton grabbed wildly at his stick and hat; the hall door, the gravel drive, and the front gate were dimly noted stages in his headlong retreat. A cyclist coming along the road had to run into the hedge to avoid imminent collision.

"Here we are, my dear," said the bearer of the white mackintosh, coming in through the window; "fairly muddy, but most of it's dry. Who was that who bolted out as we came up?"

"A most extraordinary man, a Mr. Nuttel," said Mrs. Sappleton; "could only talk about his illnesses, and dashed off without a word of good-by or apology when you arrived. One would think he had seen a ghost."

"I expect it was the spaniel," said the niece calmly; "he told me he had a horror of dogs. He was once hunted into a cemetery somewhere on the banks of the Ganges by a pack of pariah dogs, and had to spend the night in a newly dug grave with the creatures snarling and grinning and foaming just above him. Enough to make anyone lose their nerve."

Romance at short notice was her speciality.

## PART

# 4

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## TERROR IN THE NURSERY

ACCORDING to that long-ago Neapolitan, Publius Papinius Statius: "It was fear that first made gods in the world." Fear, as the clammy handmaiden of inspiration, has given our race such things as fortresses and standing armies, street lights and police forces, and whatever consolations we may find in philosophy.

But if adults—protected to some extent by education, convention, and the like—consider the universe a place of uncertainties and lurking terror, what capacities for both receiving and inflicting terror lie within the reach of children? This is the theme of Graham Greene's *The End of the Party*, in which overwhelming fear underlines the remarkably close relationship between a pair of twins. The boy in Jane Rice's *The Idol of the Flies*, on the other hand, is completely fearless: his forte is producing fear in others. Indeed, this is literally a story of a god being made, under the conditions noted above by Publius.

That *Only a Mother* is Judith Merrill's celebrated story of the maternal terror that tomorrow's warfare may bring. It is a child-tale that is thoroughly—alas, too thoroughly—adult.



## THE END OF THE PARTY

by *Graham Greene*

PETER MORTON woke with a start to face the first light. Through the window he could see a bare bough dropping across a frame of silver. Rain tapped against the glass. It was January the fifth.

He looked across a table, on which a night-light had guttered into a pool of water, at the other bed. Francis Morton was still asleep, and Peter lay down again with his eyes on his brother. It amused him to imagine that it was himself whom he watched, the same hair, the same eyes, the same lips and line of cheek. But the thought soon palled, and the mind went back to the fact which lent the day importance. It was the fifth of January. He could hardly believe that a year had passed since Mrs. Henne-Falcon had given her last children's party.

Francis turned suddenly upon his back and threw an arm across his face, blocking his mouth. Peter's heart began to beat fast, not with pleasure now but with uneasiness. He sat up and called across the table, "Wake up." Francis's shoulders shook and he waved a clenched fist in the air, but his eyes remained closed. To Peter Morton the whole room seemed suddenly to darken, and he had the impression of a great bird swooping. He cried again, "Wake up," and once more there was silver light and the touch of rain on the windows.

Francis rubbed his eyes. "Did you call out?" he asked.

"You are having a bad dream," Peter said with confidence. Already experience had taught him how far their minds reflected each other. But he was the elder, by a matter of minutes, and that brief extra interval of light, while his brother still struggled in pain and darkness, had given him self-reliance and an instinct of protection towards the other who was afraid of so many things.

"I dreamed that I was dead," Francis said.

"What was it like?" Peter asked with curiosity.

"I can't remember," Francis said, and his eyes turned with relief to the silver of day, as he allowed the fragmentary memories to fade.

"You dreamed of a big bird."

"Did I?" Francis accepted his brother's knowledge without question, and for a little the two lay silent in bed facing each other, the same green eyes, the same nose tilting at the tip, the same firm lips parted, and the same premature modeling of the chin. The fifth of January, Peter thought again, his mind drifting idly from the image of cakes to the prizes which might be won. Egg-and-spoon races, spearing apples in basins of water, blindman's buff.

"I don't want to go," Francis said suddenly. "I suppose Joyce will be there . . . Mabel Warren." Hatred to him, the thought of a party shared with those two. They were older than he. Joyce was eleven and Mabel Warren thirteen. Their long pigtailed swung superciliously to a masculine stride. Their sex humiliated him, as they watched him fumble with his egg, from under lowered scornful lids. And last year . . . he turned his face away from Peter, his cheeks scarlet.

"What's the matter?" Peter asked.

"Oh, nothing. I don't think I'm well. I've got a cold. I oughtn't to go to the party."

Peter was puzzled. "But, Francis, is it a bad cold?"

"It will be a bad cold if I go to the party. Perhaps I shall die."

"Then you mustn't go," Peter said with decision, prepared to solve all difficulties with one plain sentence, and Francis let his nerves relax in a delicious relief, ready to leave everything to Peter. But though he was grateful he did not turn his face towards his brother. His cheeks still bore the badge of a shameful memory, of the game of hide-and-seek last year in the darkened house, and of how he had screamed when Mabel Warren put her hand suddenly upon his arm. He had not heard her coming. Girls were like that. Their shoes never squeaked. No boards whined under their tread. They slunk like cats on padded claws. When the nurse came in with hot water Francis lay tranquil, leaving everything to Peter. Peter said, "Nurse, Francis has got a cold."

The tall starched woman laid the towels across the cans and said, without turning, "The washing won't be back till tomorrow. You must lend him some of your handkerchiefs."

"But, Nurse," Peter asked, "hadn't he better stay in bed?"

"We'll take him for a good walk this morning," the nurse said. "Wind'll blow away the germs. Get up now, both of you," and she closed the door behind her.

"I'm sorry," Peter said, and then, worried at the sight of a face creased again by misery and foreboding, "Why don't you just stay in bed? I'll tell mother you felt too ill to get up." But such a rebellion

against destiny was not in Francis's power. Besides, if he stayed in bed they would come up and tap his chest and put a thermometer in his mouth and look at his tongue, and they would discover that he was malingering. It was true that he felt ill, a sick empty sensation in his stomach and a rapidly beating heart, but he knew that the cause was only fear, fear of the party, fear of being made to hide by himself in the dark, unaccompanied by Peter and with no night-light to make a blessed breach.

"No, I'll get up," he said, and then with sudden desperation, "But I won't go to Mrs. Henne-Falcon's party. I swear on the Bible I won't." Now surely all would be well, he thought. God would not allow him to break so solemn an oath. He would show him a way. There was all the morning before him and all the afternoon until four o'clock. No need to worry now when the grass was still crisp with the early frost. Anything might happen. He might cut himself or break his leg or really catch a bad cold. God would manage somehow.

He had such confidence in God that when at breakfast his mother said, "I hear you have a cold, Francis," he made light of it. "We should have heard more about it," his mother said with irony, "if there was not a party this evening," and Francis smiled uneasily, amazed and daunted by her ignorance of him. His happiness would have lasted longer if, out for a walk that morning, he had not met Joyce. He was alone with his nurse, for Peter had leave to finish a rabbit-hutch in the woodshed. If Peter had been there he would have cared less; the nurse was Peter's nurse also, but now it was as though she were employed only for his sake, because he could not be trusted to go for a walk alone. Joyce was only two years older and she was by herself.

She came striding towards them, pigtails flapping. She glanced scornfully at Francis and spoke with ostentation to the nurse. "Hello, Nurse. Are you bringing Francis to the party this evening? Mabel and I are coming." And she was off again down the street in the direction of Mabel Warren's home, consciously alone and self-sufficient in the long empty road. "Such a nice girl," the nurse said. But Francis was silent, feeling again the jump-jump of his heart, realizing how soon the hour of the party would arrive. God had done nothing for him, and the minutes flew.

They flew too quickly to plan any evasion, or even to prepare his heart for the coming ordeal. Panic nearly overcame him when, all unready, he found himself standing on the doorstep, with coat-collar



turned up against a cold wind, and the nurse's electric torch making a short luminous trail through the darkness. Behind him were the lights of the hall and the sound of a servant laying the table for dinner, which his mother and father would eat alone. He was nearly overcome by a desire to run back into the house and call out to his mother that he would not go to the party, that he dared not go. They could not make him go. He could almost hear himself saying those final words, breaking down for ever, as he knew instinctively, the barrier of ignorance that saved his mind from his parents' knowledge. "I'm afraid of going. I won't go. I daren't go. They'll make me hide in the dark, and I'm afraid of the dark. I'll scream and scream and scream." He could see the expression of amazement on his mother's face, and then the cold confidence of a grown-up's retort. "Don't be silly. You must go. We've accepted Mrs. Henne-Falcon's invitation."

But they couldn't make him go; hesitating on the doorstep while the nurse's feet crunched across the frost-covered grass to the gate, he knew that. He would answer, "You can say I'm ill. I won't go. I'm afraid of the dark." And his mother, "Don't be silly. You know there's nothing to be afraid of in the dark." But he knew the falsity of that reasoning; he knew how they taught also that there was nothing to fear in death, and how fearfully they avoided the idea of it. But they couldn't make him go to the party. "I'll scream. I'll scream."

"Francis, come along." He heard the nurse's voice across the dimly phosphorescent lawn and saw the small yellow circle of her torch wheel from tree to shrub and back to tree again. "I'm coming," he called with despair, leaving the lighted doorway of the house; he couldn't bring himself to lay bare his last secrets and end reserve between his mother and himself, for there was still in the last resort a further appeal possible to Mrs. Henne-Falcon. He comforted himself with that, as he advanced steadily across the hall, very small, towards her enormous bulk. His heart beat unevenly, but he had control now over his voice, as he said with meticulous accent, "Good evening, Mrs. Henne-Falcon. It was very good of you to ask me to your party." With his strained face lifted towards the curve of her breasts, and his polite set speech, he was like an old withered man. For Francis mixed very little with other children. As a twin he was in many ways an only child. To address Peter was to speak to his own image in a mirror, an image a little altered by a flaw in the glass, so as to throw back less a likeness of what he was

than of what he wished to be, what he would be without his unreasoning fear of darkness, footsteps of strangers, the flight of bats in dusk-filled gardens.

"Sweet child," said Mrs. Henne-Falcon absent-mindedly, before, with a wave of her arms, as though the children were a flock of chickens, she whirled them into her set programme of entertainments: egg-and-spoon races, three-legged races, the spearing of apples, games which held for Francis nothing worse than humiliation. And in the frequent intervals when nothing was required of him and he could stand alone in corners as far removed as possible from Mabel Warren's scornful gaze, he was able to plan how he might avoid the approaching terror of the dark. He knew there was nothing to fear until after tea, and not until he was sitting down in a pool of yellow radiance cast by the ten candles on Colin Henne-Falcon's birthday cake did he become fully conscious of the imminence of what he feared. Through the confusion of his brain, now assailed suddenly by a dozen contradictory plans, he heard Joyce's high voice down the table. "After tea we are going to play hide-and-seek in the dark."

"Oh, no," Peter said, watching Francis's troubled face with pity and an imperfect understanding, "don't let's. We play that every year."

"But it's on the programme," cried Mabel Warren. "I saw it myself. I looked over Mrs. Henne-Falcon's shoulder. Five o'clock, tea. A quarter to six to half-past, hide-and-seek in the dark. It's all written down in the programme."

Peter did not argue, for if hide-and-seek had been inserted in Mrs. Henne-Falcon's programme, nothing which he could say could avert it. He asked for another piece of birthday cake and sipped his tea slowly. Perhaps it might be possible to delay the game for a quarter of an hour, allow Francis at least a few extra minutes to form a plan, but even in that Peter failed, for children were already leaving the table in twos and threes. It was his third failure, and again, the reflection of an image in another's mind, he saw a great bird darken his brother's face with its wings. But he upbraided himself silently for his folly, and finished his cake encouraged by the memory of that adult refrain, "There's nothing to fear in the dark." The last to leave the table, the brothers came together to the hall to meet the mustering and impatient eyes of Mrs. Henne-Falcon.

"And now," she said, "we will play hide-and-seek in the dark."

Peter watched his brother and saw, as he had expected, the lips

tighten. Francis, he knew, had feared this moment from the beginning of the party, had tried to meet it with courage and had abandoned the attempt. He must have prayed desperately for cunning to evade the game, which was now welcomed with cries of excitement by all the other children. "Oh, do let's." "We must pick sides." "Is any of the house out of bounds?" "Where shall home be?"

"I think," said Francis Morton, approaching Mrs. Henne-Falcon, his eyes unwaveringly on her exuberant breasts, "it will be no use my playing. My nurse will be calling for me very soon."

"Oh, but your nurse can wait, Francis," said Mrs. Henne-Falcon absent-mindedly, while she clapped her hands together to summon to her side a few children who were already straying up the wide staircase to upper floors. "Your mother will never mind."

That had been the limit of Francis's cunning. He had refused to believe that so well prepared an excuse could fail. All that he could say now, still in the precise tone which other children hated, thinking it a symbol of conceit, was, "I think I had better not play." He stood motionless, retaining, though afraid, unmoved features. But the knowledge of his terror, or the reflection of the terror itself, reached his brother's brain. For the moment, Peter Morton could have cried aloud with the fear of bright lights going out, leaving him alone in an island of dark surrounded by the gentle lapping of strange footsteps. Then he remembered that the fear was not his own, but his brother's. He said impulsively to Mrs. Henne-Falcon, "Please. I don't think Francis should play. The dark makes him jump so." They were the wrong words. Six children began to sing, "Cowardly, cowardly custard," turning torturing faces with the vacancy of wide sunflowers towards Francis Morton.

Without looking at his brother, Francis said, "Of course I will play. I am not afraid. I only thought . . ." But he was already forgotten by his human tormentors and was able in loneliness to contemplate the approach of the spiritual, the more unbounded, torture. The children scrambled round Mrs. Henne-Falcon, their shrill voices pecking at her with questions and suggestions. "Yes, anywhere in the house. We will turn out all the lights. Yes, you can hide in the cupboards. You must stay hidden as long as you can. There will be no home."

Peter, too, stood apart, ashamed of the clumsy manner in which he had tried to help his brother. Now he could feel, creeping in at the corners of his brain, all Francis's resentment of his championing.

Several children ran upstairs, and the lights on the top floor went out. Then darkness came down like the wings of a bat and settled on the landing. Others began to put out the lights at the edge of the hall, till the children were all gathered in the central radiance of the chandelier, while the bats squatted round on hooded wings and waited for that, too, to be extinguished.

"You and Francis are on the hiding side," a tall girl said, and then the light was gone, and the carpet wavered under his feet with the sibilance of footfalls, like small cold draughts, creeping away into corners.

"Where's Francis?" he wondered. "If I join him he'll be less frightened of all these sounds." "These sounds" were the casing of silence. The squeak of a loose board, the cautious closing of a cupboard door, the whine of a finger drawn along polished wood.

Peter stood in the center of the dark deserted floor, not listening but waiting for the idea of his brother's whereabouts to enter his brain. But Francis crouched with fingers on his ears, eyes uselessly closed, mind numbed against impressions, and only a sense of strain could cross the gap of dark. Then a voice called "Coming," and as though his brother's self-possession had been shattered by the sudden cry, Peter Morton jumped with fear. But it was not his own fear. What in his brother was a burning panic, admitting no ideas except those which added to the flame, was in him an altruistic emotion that left the reason unimpaired. "Where, if I were Francis, should I hide?" Such, roughly, was his thought. And because he was, if not Francis himself, at least a mirror to him, the answer was immediate. "Between the oak bookcase on the left of the study door and the leather settee." Peter Morton was unsurprised by the swiftness of the response. Between the twins there could be no jargon of telepathy. They had been together in the womb, and they could not be parted.

Peter Morton tiptoed towards Francis's hiding place. Occasionally a board rattled, and because he feared to be caught by one of the soft questers through the dark, he bent and untied his laces. A tag struck the floor and the metallic sound set a host of cautious feet moving in his direction. But by that time he was in his stockings and would have laughed inwardly at the pursuit had not the noise of someone stumbling on his abandoned shoes made his heart trip in the reflection of another's surprise. No more boards revealed Peter Morton's progress. On stockinged feet he moved silently and unerringly

towards his object. Instinct told him that he was near the wall, and, extending a hand, he laid the fingers across his brother's face.

Francis did not cry out, but the leap of his own heart revealed to Peter a proportion of Francis's terror. "It's all right," he whispered, feeling down the squatting figure until he captured a clenched hand. "It's only me. I'll stay with you." And grasping the other tightly, he listened to the cascade of whispers his utterance had caused to fall. A hand touched the bookcase close to Peter's head and he was aware of how Francis's fear continued in spite of his presence. It was less intense, more bearable, he hoped, but it remained. He knew that it was his brother's fear and not his own that he experienced. The dark to him was only an absence of light; the groping hand that of a familiar child. Patiently he waited to be found.

He did not speak again, for between Francis and himself touch was the most intimate communion. By way of joined hands thought could flow more swiftly than lips could shape themselves round words. He could experience the whole progress of his brother's emotion, from the leap of panic at the unexpected contact to the steady pulse of fear, which now went on and on with the regularity of a heart-beat. Peter Morton thought with intensity, "I am here. You needn't be afraid. The lights will go on again soon. That rustle, that movement is nothing to fear. Only Joyce, only Mabel Warren." He bombarded the drooping form with thoughts of safety, but he was conscious that the fear continued. "They are beginning to whisper together. They are tired of looking for us. The lights will go on soon. We shall have won. Don't be afraid. That was only someone on the stairs. I believe it's Mrs. Henne-Falcon. Listen. They are feeling for the lights." Feet moving on a carpet, hands brushing a wall, a curtain pulled apart, a clicking handle, the opening of a cupboard door. In the case above their heads a loose book shifted under a touch. "Only Joyce, only Mabel Warren, only Mrs. Henne-Falcon," a crescendo of reassuring thought before the chandelier burst, like a fruit tree, into bloom.

The voices of the children rose shrilly into the radiance. "Where's Peter?" "Have you looked upstairs?" "Where's Francis?" but they were silenced again by Mrs. Henne-Falcon's scream. But she was not the first to notice Francis Morton's stillness, where he had collapsed against the wall at the touch of his brother's hand. Peter continued to hold the clenched fingers in an arid and puzzled grief. It was not merely that his brother was dead. His brain, too young to realize the full paradox, yet wondered with an obscure self-pity why it was

that the pulse of his brother's fear went on and on, when Francis was now where he had been always told there was no more terror and no more darkness.

## **THE IDOL OF THE FLIES**

*by Jane Rice*

**P**RUITT watched a fly on the corner of the table. He held himself very still. The fly cleaned its wings with short, back-stroke motions of its legs. It looked, Pruitt thought, like Crippled Harry. He hated him almost as much as he hated Aunt Mona. But he hated Miss Bittner most of all.

He lifted his head and bared his teeth at the nape of Miss Bittner's neck. He hated the way she stood there erasing the blackboard in great, sweeping circles. He hated the way her shoulder blades poked out. He hated the big horn comb thrust into her thin hair—thrust not quite far enough—so that some of the hair flapped. And he hated the way she arranged it around her sallow face and low on her neck, to conceal the little button that nestled in one large-lobed ear. The button and the narrow black cord that ran down the back of her dress under her starched collar.

He liked the button and the cord. He liked them because Miss Bittner hated them. She pretended she didn't care about being deaf. But she did. And she pretended she liked him. But she didn't.

He made her nervous. It was easy. All he had to do was open his eyes wide and stare at her without batting. It was delightfully simple. Too simple. It wasn't fun any more. He was glad he had found out about the flies.

Miss Bittner placed the eraser precisely in the center of the blackboard runnel, dusted her hands and turned toward Pruitt. Pruitt opened his eyes quite wide and gimleted her with an unblinking stare.

Miss Bittner cleared her throat nervously. "That will be all, Pruitt. Tomorrow we will begin on derivatives."

"Yes, Miss Bittner," Pruitt said loudly, meticulously forming the words with his lips.

Miss Bittner flushed. She straightened the collar of her dress. "Your aunt said you might take a swim."

"Yes, Miss Bittner."

"Good afternoon, Pruitt. Tea at five."

"Yes, Miss Bittner. Good afternoon, Miss Bittner." Pruitt lowered his gaze to a point three inches below Miss Bittner's knees. He allowed a faint expression of controlled surprise to wrinkle his forehead.

Involuntarily, Miss Bittner glanced down. Quick as a flash, Pruitt swept his hand across the table and scooped up the fly. When Miss Bittner again raised her head, Pruitt was regarding her blandly. He arose.

"There's some lemonade on top of the back porch icebox. Can I have some?"

"May I have some, Pruitt."

"May I have some?"

"Yes, Pruitt, you may."

Pruitt crossed the room to the door.

"Pruitt—"

Pruitt stopped, swiveled slowly on his heel and stared unwinkingly at his tutor. "Yes, Miss Bittner?"

"Let's remember not to slam the screen door, shall we? It disturbs your auntie, you know." Miss Bittner twitched her pale lips into what she mistakenly believed was the smile of a friendly conspirator.

Pruitt gazed at her steadily. "Yes, Miss Bittner."

"That's fine," said Clara Bittner with false heartiness.

"Is that all, Miss Bittner?"

"Yes, Pruitt."

Pruitt, without relaxing his basilisk-like contemplation of his unfortunate tutor, counted up to twelve, then he turned and quitted the room.

Clara Bittner looked at the empty doorway a long while and then she shuddered. Had she been pressed for an explanation of that shudder she couldn't have given a satisfactory answer. In all probability, she would have said, with a vague conciliatory gesture, "I don't know. I think, perhaps, it's a bit difficult for a child to warm up to a teacher." And, no doubt, she would have added brightly, "The psychology of the thing, you know."

Miss Bittner was a stanch defender of psychology. She had taken a summer course in it—ten years ago—and had, as she was fond of repeating, received the highest grades in the class. It never occurred

to Miss Bittner that this was due to her aptitude at memorizing whole paragraphs and being able to transpose these onto her test papers without ever having digested the kernels of thought contained therein.

Miss Bittner stooped and unlaced one Oxford. She breathed a sigh of relief. She sat erect, pulled down her dress in back and then felt with her fingertips the rubbery, black cord dangling against her neck. Miss Bittner sighed again. A buzzing at one of the windows claimed her attention.

She went to a cupboard which yielded up a wire fly swatter. Grasping this militantly, she strode to the window, drew back, closed her eyes, and swatted. The fly, badly battered, dropped to the sill, lay on its wings, its legs curled.

She unhooked the screen and with the end of the swatter delicately urged the corpse outside.

"Ugh," said Miss Bittner. And had Miss Bittner been pressed for an explanation of that ugh she, likewise, would have been at a loss for a satisfactory answer. It was strange how she felt about flies. They affected her much as rattlesnakes would have. It wasn't that they were germy, or that their eyes were a reddish orange and, so she had heard, reflected everything in the manner of prisms; it wasn't that they had the odious custom of regurgitating a drop of their last meal before beginning on a new one; it wasn't the crooked hairy legs, nor the probing proboscis; it was—well, it was just the creatures themselves. Possibly, Miss Bittner might have said, simpering to show that she really didn't mean it, "I have flyophobia."

The truth was, she did. She was afraid of them. Deathly afraid. As some people are afraid of inclosed areas, as others are afraid of height, so Miss Bittner was afraid of flies. Childishly, senselessly, but horribly, afraid.

She returned the swatter to the cupboard and forthwith scrubbed her hands thoroughly at the sink. It was odd, she thought, how many flies she had encountered lately. It almost seemed as if someone were purposely diverting a channel of flies her way. She smiled to herself at this foolish whimsy, wiped her hands and tidied her hair. Now, for some of that lemonade. She was pleased that Pruitt had mentioned it. If he hadn't, she might not have known it was there and she did so love lemonade.

Pruitt stood at the head of the stairwell. He worked his jaws compulsively, then he pursed his mouth, leaned far over the polished



banister and spat. The globule of spittle elongated into a pear-shaped tear and flattened with a wet smack on the floor below.

Pruitt went on down the stairs. He could feel the fly bumbling angrily in its hot, moist prison. He put his tightly curled hand to his lips and blew into the tunnel made by his thumb and forefinger. The fly clung for dear life to his creased palm.

At the foot of the stairs Pruitt paused long enough to squeeze each one of the tiny green balls on the ends of the fern that was potted in an intricate and artistic copper holder.

Then he went through a hallway into the kitchen.

"Give me a glass," he said to the ample-bosomed woman who sat on a stool picking nut meats and putting them into a glass bowl.

The woman heaved herself to her feet.

"'Please' won't hurt you," the woman said.

"I don't have to say 'please' to you. You're the help."

The cook put her hands on her hips. "What you need is a thrashing," she said grimly. "A good, sound thrashing."

By way of reply, Pruitt snatched the paper sack of cracked hulls and deliberately up-ended the bag into the bowl of nut meats.

The woman made a futile grab. Her heavy face grew suffused with a wave of rich color. She opened her hand and brought it up in a swinging arc.

Pruitt planted his feet firmly on the linoleum and said low, "I'll scream. You know what that'll do to Aunt."

The woman held her hand poised so for a second and then let it fall to her aproned side. "You brat," she hissed; "you sneaking, pink-eyed brat!"

"Give me a glass."

The woman reached up on a shelf of the cabinet, took down a glass and wordlessly handed it to the boy.

"I don't want that one," Pruitt said, "I want that one." He pointed to the glass' identical twin on the topmost shelf.

Silently, the woman padded across the floor and pushed a short kitchen ladder over to the cabinet. Silently, she climbed it. Silently, she handed down the designated glass.

Pruitt accepted it. "I'm going to tell Aunt Mona you took your shoes off."

The woman climbed down the ladder, put it away and returned to the bowl.

"Harry is a dirty you-know-what," Pruitt said.

The woman went on lifting out the nut hulls.

"He stinks."

The woman went on lifting out the nut hulls.

"So do you," finished Pruitt. He waited.

The woman went on lifting out the nut hulls.

The boy took his glass and repaired to the back porch. It spoiled the fun when they didn't talk back. Cook was "on to" him. But she wouldn't complain. Aunt Mona let them stay through the winter rent free with nobody but themselves to see to and Harry was a cripple and couldn't make a living. She wouldn't dast complain.

Pruitt lifted the pitcher of lemonade from the lid of the icebox and poured himself a glassful. He drank half of it and let the rest dribble along a crack, holding the glass close to the floor so it wouldn't make a trickling noise. When it dried it would be sweet and sticky. Lots of flies.

He relaxed his hand ever so slightly and dexterously extricated his shopworn captive. It hummed furiously. Pruitt pulled off one of its wings and dropped the mutilated insect into the lemonade. It kicked ineffectually, was quiet, kicked again, and was quiet—drifting on the surface of the liquid, sagging to one side, its remaining wing outstretched like a useless sail.

The boy caught it and pushed it under. "I christen you Miss Bittner," he said. He released his hold and the fly popped to the top—a piece of lemon pulp on its back. It kicked again—feebly—and was quiet.

Pruitt replaced the lemonade and opened the screen door. He pulled it so that the spring twanged protestingly. He let go and leaped down the steps. The door came to with a mighty bang behind him. That was the finish of Aunt Mona's nap.

He crouched on his haunches and listened. A cloud shadow floated across the grass. A butterfly teetered uncertainly on a waxy leaf, and fluttered away following an erratic air trail of its own. A June bug drummed through the warm afternoon, its armored belly a shiny bottle-green streak in the sunlight. Pruitt crumbled the cone of an ant hill and watched the excited maneuvers of its inhabitants.

There was the slow drag of footsteps somewhere above—the opening of a shutter. Pruitt grinned. His ears went up and back with the broadness of it. Cook would puff up two flights of stairs "out of the goodness of her heart," Aunt Mona said—"out of dumbness," if you asked him. Whyn't she let "Miss Mona" fill her own bloody icebag? There'd be time to go in and mix the nut shells up again. But no, he might run into Miss Bittner beating a thirsty course to

the lemonade. She might guess about the fly. Besides he'd dallied too long as it was. He had business to attend to. Serious business.

He got up, stretched, scrunched his heel on the ant hill and walked away in the direction of the bathhouse.

Twice he halted to shy stones at a plump robin and once he froze into a statue as there was a movement in the path before him. His quick eyes fastened on a toad squatted in the dust, its bulgy sides going in and out, in and out, like a miniature bellows. Stealthily, Pruitt broke off a twig. In and out, in and out, in and out. Pruitt eased forward. In and out, in and out, in and out. He could see its toes spread far apart, the dappling of spots on its cool, froggy skin. In and out, in and out, the leg muscles tensed as the toad prepared to make another hop. Pantherlike, Pruitt leaped, his hand descending. The toad emitted an agonized, squeaking scream.

Pruitt stood up and looked at the toad with amusement. The twig protruded from its sloping back. In and out, in and out went the toad's sides. In—and out, in—and out. It essayed an unstable hop, leaving a darkish stain in its wake. Again it hopped. The twig remained stanchly upright. The third hop was shorter. Barely its own length. Pruitt nosed it over into the grass with his shoe. In—and—out went the toad's sides, in—and—out, in—and—out, in—

Pruitt walked on.

The crippled man mending his fishing net on the wooden pier sensed his approaching footsteps. With as much haste as his wracked spine would permit, the man got to his feet. Pruitt heard the scrambling and quickened his pace.

"Hello," he said innocently.

The man bobbed his head. "Do, Mr. Pruitt."

"Mending your nets?"

"Yes, Mr. Pruitt."

"I guess the dock is a good place to do it."

"Yes, Mr. Pruitt." The man licked his tongue across his lips and his eyes made rapid sortees to the right and left, as if seeking a means of escape.

Pruitt scraped his shoe across the wooden planking. "Excepting that it gets fish scales all over everything," he said softly, "and I don't like fish scales."

The man's Adam's apple jerked up and down as he swallowed thrice in rapid succession. He wiped his hands on his pants.

"I said I don't like fish scales."

"Yes, Mr. Pruitt, I didn't mean to—"

"So I guess maybe I better fix it so there won't be any fish scales any more."

"Mr. Pruitt, please, I didn't—" His voice petered out as the boy picked up a corner of the net.

"Not ever any more fish scales," said Pruitt.

"Don't pull it," the man begged, "it'll snag on the dock."

"I won't snag it," Pruitt said; "I wouldn't snag it for anything." He smiled at Harry. "Because if I just snagged it, you'd just mend it again and then there'd be more fish scales, and I don't like fish scales." Bunching the net in his fists, he dragged it to the edge of the dock. "So I'll just throw it in the water and then I guess there won't ever be any more fish scales."

Harry's jaw went slack with shocked disbelief. "Mr. Pruitt—" he began.

"Like this," said Pruitt. He held the net out at arm's length over the pier and relinquished his clasp.

With an inarticulate cry the man threw himself awkwardly on the planking in a vain attempt to retrieve his slowly vanishing property.

"Now there won't ever be any more fish scales," Pruitt said. "Not ever any more."

Harry hefted himself to his knees. His face was white. For one dull, weighted minute he looked at his tormentor. Then he struggled to his feet and limped away without a word.

Pruitt considered his deformed posture with the eye of a connoisseur. "Harry is a hunchback," he sang after him in a lilting childish treble. "Harry is a hunchback, Harry is a hunchback."

The man limped on, one shoulder dipping sharply with each successive step, his coarse shirt stretched over his misshapen back. A bend in the path hid him from view.

Pruitt pushed open the door of the bathhouse and went inside. He closed the door behind him and bolted it. He waited until his eyes had become accustomed to the semigloom, whereupon he went over to a cot against the wall, lifted up its faded chintz spread, felt underneath and pulled out two boxes. He sat down and delved into their contents.

From the first he produced a section of a bread board, four pegs, and six half-burned birthday candles screwed into nibbled-looking

pink candy rosettes. The bread board he placed on top the pegs, the candles he arranged in a semicircle. He surveyed the result with squint-eyed approval.

From the second box he removed a grotesque object composed of coal tar. It perched shakily on pipestem legs, two strips of Cellophane were pasted to its flanks and a black rubber band dangled downward from its head in which was embedded—one on each side—red cinnamon drops.

The casual observer would have seen in this sculpture a child's crude efforts to emulate the characteristics of the common housefly. The casual observer—if he had been inclined to go on with his observing—also would have seen that Pruitt was in a "mood." He might even have observed aloud, "That child looks positively feverish and he shouldn't be allowed to play with matches."

But at the moment there was no casual observer. Only Pruitt absorbed in lighting the birthday candles. The image of the fly he deposited square in the middle of the bread board.

Cross-legged he sat, chin down, arms folded. He rocked himself back and forth. He began to chant. Singsong. Through his nose. Once in a while he rolled his eyes around in their sockets, but merely once in a while. He had found, if he did that too often, it made him dizzy.

"O Idol of the Flies," intoned Pruitt, "hahneemahneemo." He scratched his ankle ruminatively. "Hahneeweemahneemo," he improved, "make the lemonade dry in the crack on the back porch, and make Miss Bittner find the scrooched-up fly after she's already drunk some, and make cook go down in the cellar for some marmalade and make her not turn on the light and make her fall over the string I've got tied between the posts, and make aunt get a piece of nutshell in her bread and cough like hell." Pruitt thought this over. "Hell," he said, "hell, hell, hell, HELL."

He meditated in silence. "I guess that's all," he said finally, "except maybe you'd better fill up my fly catcher in case we have currant cookies for tea. Hahneeweemahneemo, O Idol of the Flies, you are free to GO!"

Pruitt fixed his gaze in the middle distance and riveted it there. Motionless, scarcely breathing, his lips parted, he huddled on the bare boards—a small sphinx in khaki shorts.

This was what Pruitt called "not-thinking-time." Pretty soon, entirely without volition on his part, queer, half-formed dream things

would float through his mind. Like dark polliwogs. Propelling themselves along with their tails, hinting at secrets that nobody knew, not even grown-ups. Some day he would be able to catch one, quickly, before it wriggled off into the inner hidden chamber where They had a nest and, then, he would know. He would catch it in a net of thought, like Harry's net caught fishes, and no matter how it squirmed and thrashed about he would pin it flat against his skull until he knew. Once, he had almost caught one. He had been on the very rim of knowing and Miss Bittner had come down to bring him some peanut butter sandwiches and it had escaped back into that deep, strange place in his mind where They lived. He had only had it for a split second but he remembered it had blind, weepy eyes and was smooth.

If Miss Bittner hadn't come— He had vomited on her stockings. Here came one of Them now—fast, it was coming fast, too fast to catch. It was gone, leaving behind it a heady exhilaration. Here came another, revolving, writhing like a sea snake, indistinct, shadowy. Let it go, the next one might be lured into the net. Here it came, two of them, roiling in the sleep hollows. Easily now, easily, easily, close in, easily, so there wouldn't be any warning ripples, closer, they weren't watching, murmuring to each other—there! He had them!

"Pruitt. Oh, Pruitt."

The things veered away, their tails whipping his intellect into a spinning mass of chaotic frenzy.

"Pru-itt. Where are you? Pru-itt."

The boy blinked.

"Pru-itt. Oh, Pru-itt."

His mouth distorted like that of an enraged animal. He stuck out his tongue and hissed at the locked door. The handle turned.

"Pruitt, are you in there?"

"Yes, Miss Bittner." The words were thick and meaty in his mouth. If he bit down, Pruitt thought, he could bite one in two and chew it up and it would squish out between his teeth like an éclair.

"Unlock the door."

"Yes, Miss Bittner."

Pruitt blew out the candles and swept his treasures under the cot. He reconsidered this action, shoved his hand under the chintz skirt, snaffled the coal-tar fly and stuffed it into his shirt.

"Do you hear me, Pruitt? Unlock this door." The knob rattled.

"I'm coming fast as I can," he said. He rose, stalked over to the door, shot back the bolt and stood, squinting, in the brilliant daylight before Miss Bittner.

"What on earth are you doing in there?"

"I guess I must've fallen asleep."

Miss Bittner peered into the murky confines of the bathhouse. She sniffed inquisitively.

"Pruitt," she said, "have you been smoking?"

"No, Miss Bittner."

"We mustn't tell a falsehood, Pruitt. It is far better to tell the truth and accept the consequences."

"I haven't been smoking." Pruitt could feel his stomach moving inside him. He was going to be sick again. Like he was the last time. Miss Bittner was wavering in front of him. Her outside edges were all blurry. His stomach gave a violent lurch. Pruitt looked at Miss Bittner's stockings. They were messy. Awfully messy. Miss Bittner looked at them, too.

"Run along up to the house, Pruitt," she said kindly. "I'll be up presently."

"Yes, Miss Bittner."

"And we won't say anything about smoking to your auntie. I think you've been sufficiently punished."

"Yes, Miss Bittner."

"Run along, now."

Pruitt went languidly up the path, conscious of Miss Bittner's eyes boring into him. When he turned the bend, he stopped and crept slyly into the bushes. He made his way back toward the boathouse, pressing the branches away from him and easing them cautiously to prevent them from snapping.

Miss Bittner sat on the steps taking off her stockings. She rinsed her legs in the water and dried them with her handkerchief. Pruitt could see an oval corn plaster on her little toe. She put her bony feet into her patent-leather Health Eases, got up, brushed her dress and disappeared into the bathhouse.

Pruitt inched nearer.

Miss Bittner came to the doorway and examined something she held in her hands. She looked puzzled. From his vantage point, Pruitt glimpsed the pink of the candy rosettes, the stubby candle wicks.

"I hate you," Pruitt whispered venomously, "I hate you, I hate you." Tenderly, he withdrew the coal-tar image from his shirt. He cuddled it against his cheek. "Break her ear thing," he muttered.

"Break it all to pieces so's she'll have to act deaf. Break it, break it, hahneeweemahneemo, break it good." Warily he crawled backward until he regained the path.

He trudged onward, pausing only twice. Once, at a break in the hedge where he reached into the aperture and drew forth a cone-shaped contraption smeared with sirup. Five flies clung to this, their wings sticky, their legs gluey. These he disengaged, ignoring the lesser fry of gnats and midges that had met a similar fate, and returned the flycatcher to its lair. The second interruption along his line of march was a sort of interlude during which he cracked the two-inch spine of a garden lizard and hung it on a bramble where it performed incredibly tortuous convolutions with the lower half of its body.

Mona Eagleston came out of her bedroom and closed the door gently behind her. Everything about Mona was gentle from the top of her wren-brown head threaded with gray to the slippers on her ridiculously tiny feet. She was rather like a fawn. An aging fawn with liquid eyes that, despite the encroaching years, had failed to lose their tiptoe look of expectancy.

One knew instinctively that Mona Eagleston was that rare phenomenon—a lady to the manor born. If, occasionally, when in close proximity with her nephew, a perplexed look overshadowed that delicate face, it was no more than a passing cloud. Children were inherently good. If they appeared otherwise, it was simply because their actions were misunderstood. They—he—Pruitt didn't mean to do things. He couldn't know that—well, that slamming the screen door, for instance, could send a sickening stab of pain through a head racked with migraine. He couldn't be expected to know, the poor orphan lamb. The poor, dear, orphan lamb.

If only she didn't have to pour at teatime. If only she could lie quiet and still with a cold compress on her head and the shutters pulled to. How selfish she was. Teatimes to a child were lovely, restful periods. Moments to be forever cherished in the pattern of memory. Like colorful loops of embroidery floss embellishing the whole. A skein of golden, shining teatimes with the sunset staining the windows and high-lighting the fat-sided Delft milk jug. The taste of jam, the brown crumbs left on the cookie plate, the teacups—egg-shell frail—with handles like wedding rings. All of these were precious to a child. Deep down inside, without quite knowing why, they absorbed such things as sponges absorbed water—and, like



sponges, they could wring these memories out when they were growing old. As she did, sometimes. What a wretched person she was to begrudge a teatime to Pruitt, dear, little Pruitt, her own dead brother's child.

She went on down the stairs, one white hand trailing the banister. The fern, she noticed, was dying. This was the third fern. She'd always had so much luck with ferns, until lately. Her goldfish, too. They had died. It was almost an omen. And Pruitt's turtles. She had bought them at the village. So cunning they were with enameled pictures on their hard, tree-barky shells. They had died. She mustn't think about dying. The doctor had said it was bad for her.

She crossed the great hall and entered the drawing room.

"Dear Pruitt," she said to the boy swinging his legs from the edge of a brocaded chair. She kissed him. She had intended to kiss his sunwarm cheek but he had moved, suddenly, and the kiss had met an unresponsive ear. Children were jumpy little things.

"Did you have a nice day?"

"Yes, Aunt."

"And you, Miss Bittner? Did you have a nice day? And how did the conjugations go this morning? Did our young man . . . why, my dear, whatever is the matter?"

"She broke her ear thing," Pruitt said. He turned toward his tutor and enunciated in an exaggerated fashion, "Didn't you, Miss Bittner?"

Miss Bittner reddened. She spoke in the unnaturally loud, toneless voice of the deaf. "I dropped my hearing-aid," she explained. "On the bathroom floor. I'm afraid, until I get it fixed, that you'll have to bear with me." She smiled a tight strained smile to show that it was really quite a joke on her.

"What a shame," said Mona Eagleston, "but I daresay it can be repaired in the village. Harry can take it in tomorrow."

Miss Bittner followed the movement of Mona Eagleston's lips almost desperately.

"No," she said hesitantly, "Harry didn't do it. I did it. The bathroom tile, you know. It was frightfully clumsy of me."

"And she drank some lemonade that had a fly in it. Didn't you, Miss Bittner? I said you drank some lemonade that had a fly in it, didn't you?"

Miss Bittner nodded politely. Her eyes focused on Pruitt's mouth. "Cry?" she ventured. "No, I didn't cry."

\* \* \*

Mona Eagleston seated herself behind the tea-caddy and prepared to pour. She must warn cook, hereafter, to put an oiled cover over the lemonade. One couldn't be too particular where children were concerned. They were susceptible to all sorts of diseases and flies were notorious carriers. If Pruitt were taken ill because of her lack of forethought, she would never forgive herself. Never.

"Could I have some marmalade?" Pruitt asked.

"We have currant cookies, dear, and nut bread. Do you think we need marmalade?"

"I do so love marmalade, aunt. Miss Bittner does too. Don't you, Miss Bittner?"

Miss Bittner smiled stoically on and accepted her cup with a pleasant noncommittal murmur that she devoutly hoped would serve as an appropriate answer to whatever Pruitt was asking.

"Very well, dear." Mona tinkled a bell.

"I'll pass the cookies, aunt."

"Thank you, Pruitt. You are very thoughtful."

The boy took the plate and carried it over to Miss Bittner and an expression of acute suffering swam across the Bittner countenance as the boy trod heavily on her foot.

"Have some cookies," Pruitt thrust the plate at her.

"That's quite all right," Miss Bittner said, thinking he had apologized and congratulating herself on the fact that she hadn't moaned aloud. If he had known she had a corn, he couldn't have selected the location with more exactitude. She looked at the cookies. After that lemonade episode, she had felt she couldn't eat again—but they were tempting. Gracious, how that corn ached.

"Here's a nice curranty one." Pruitt popped a cookie on her plate.

"Thank you, Pruitt."

Cook waddled into the room. "Did you ring, Miss Mona?"

"Yes, Bertha. Would you get Pruitt some marmalade, please?"

Bertha shot a poisonous glance at Pruitt. "There's none up, ma'am. Will the jam do?"

Pruitt managed a sorrowful sigh. "I do so love marmalade, Aunt," and then happily, as if it were an afterthought, "Isn't there some in the basement cubby?"

Mona Eagleston made a helpless *moue* at cook. "Would you mind terribly, Bertha? You know how children are."

"Yes, ma'am, I know how children are," cook said in a flat voice.

"Thank you, Bertha. The pineapple will do."

"Yes, ma'am." Bertha plodded away.

"She was walking around in her bare feet again today," Pruitt said.

His aunt shook her head sadly. "I don't know what to do," she said to Miss Bittner. "I dislike being cross, but ever since she stepped on that nail"—Mona Eagleston smiled quickly at her nephew—"not that you meant to leave it there, darling, but . . . well . . . will you have a slice of nutbread, Miss Bittner?"

Pruitt licked back a grin. "Aunt said would you like a slice of nutbread, Miss Bittner," he repeated ringingly.

Miss Bittner paid no heed. She seemed to be in a frozen trance sitting as she did rigidly upright staring at her plate with horror. She arose.

"I . . . I don't feel well," she said, "I think . . . I think I'd better go lie down."

Pruitt hopped off his chair and took her plate. Mona Eagleston made a distressed tching sound. "Is there anything I can do—" She half rose but Miss Bittner waved her back.

"It's nothing," Miss Bittner said hoarsely. "I . . . I think it's just something I . . . I ate. Don't let me disturb your t-t-teatime." She put her napkin over her mouth and hastily hobbled from the room.

"I should see that she—" began Mona Eagleston worriedly.

"Oh, don't let's ruin teatime," Pruitt interposed hurriedly. "Here, have some nutbread. It looks dreadfully good."

"Well—"

"Please, Aunt Mona. Not teatime."

"Very well, Pruitt." Mona chose a slice of bread. "Does teatime mean a great deal to you? It did to me when I was a little girl."

"Yes, Aunt." He watched her break a morsel of bread, butter it and put it in her mouth.

"I used to live for teatime. It was such a cozy—" Mona Eagleston lifted a pale hand to her throat. She began to cough. Her eyes filled with tears. She looked wildly around for water. She tried to say "water" but she couldn't get the word past the choking in her lungs. If Pruitt would only—but he was just a child. He couldn't be expected to know what to do for a coughing spell. Poor, dear Pruitt, he looked so . . . so perturbed. Handing her the tea like that, his face all puckery. She gulped down a great draught of the scalding liquid. Her slight frame was siezed with a paroxysm of coughing. Mercy! She must have mistakenly put salt in it instead of sugar.

She wiped her brimming eyes. "Nutshell," she wheezed, gaining

her feet. "Back . . . presently—" Coughing violently, she too, quitted the room.

From somewhere beneath Pruitt's feet, deep in the bowels of the house, came a faint, faraway thud.

Pruitt picked the flies off of Miss Bittner's cookie. Where there had been five, there were now four and a half. He put the remains in his pocket. They might come in handy.

Dimly he heard cook calling for help. It was a smothered hysterical calling. If Aunt Mona didn't return, it could go on quite a while before it was heeded. Cook could yell herself blue around the gills by then.

"Hahneeweemahneemo," he crooned. "Oh, Idol of the Flies, you have served me true, yea, yea, double yea, forty-five, thirty-two."

Pruitt helped himself to a heaping spoonful of sugar.

The pinkish sky was filled with cawing rooks. They pivoted and wheeled, they planed their wings into black fans and settled in the great old beeches to shout gossip at one another.

Pruitt scuffed his shoe on the stone steps and wished he had an air rifle. He would ask for one on his birthday. He would ask for a lot of impossible things first and then—pitifully—say, "Well, then, could I just have a little old air rifle?" Aunt would fall for that. She was as dumb as his mother had been. Dumber. His mother had been "simple" dumb, which was pretty bad—going in, as she had, for treacly bedtime stories and lap sitting. Aunt was "sick" dumb, which was very dumb indeed. "Sick" dumb people always looked at the "bright side." They were the dumbest of all. They were push-overs, "sick" dumb people were. Easy, little old push-overs.

Pruitt shifted his position as there came to his ears the scrape of footsteps in the hall.

That dragging sound would be cook. He wondered if she really had pulled the muscles loose in her back. Here came Harry with the car. They must be going to the doctor. Harry's hunch made him look like he had a pillow behind him.

"We mustn't let Pruitt know about the string," he heard his aunt say. "It would make him feel badly to learn that he had been the cause."

Cook made a low, unintelligible reply.

"Purposely!" his aunt exclaimed aghast. "Why, Bertha, I'm ashamed of you. He's only a child."

Pruitt drew his lips into a thin line. If she told about the nut hulls, he'd fix her. He scrambled up the steps and held open the screen door.

But cook didn't tell about the nut hulls. She was too busy gritting her teeth against the tearing pull in her back.

"Can I help?" Pruitt let a troubled catch into his voice.

His aunt patted his cheek. "We can manage, dear, thank you."

Miss Bittner smiled on him benevolently. "You can take care of me while they're gone," she said. "We'll have a picnic supper. Won't that be fun?"

"Yes, Miss Bittner. Oodles of fun."

He watched the two women assist their injured companion down the steps with Harry collaborating. He kissed his fingers to his aunt as the car drove away and linked his arm through Miss Bittner's. He gazed cherubically up at her.

"You are a filthy mess," he said caressingly, "and I hate your guts."

Miss Bittner beamed on him. It wasn't often that Pruitt was openly loving to her. "I'm sorry, Pruitt, but I can't hear very well now, you know. Perhaps you'd like me to read to you for a while."

Pruitt shook his head. "I'll just play," he said loudly and distinctly and then, softly, "you liverless old hyena."

"Play?" said Miss Bittner.

Pruitt nodded.

"All right, darling. But don't go far. It'll be supper time soon."

"Yes, Miss Bittner." He ran lightly down the steps. "Good-bye," he called, "you homely, dear, old hag, you."

"Good-bye," said Miss Bittner, nodding and smiling.

Pruitt placed the bread board on the pegs and arranged the candles in a semicircle. One of them refused to stay vertical. It had been stepped on.

Pruitt examined it angrily. You'd think she'd be particular with other people's property. The sniveling fool. He'd fix her. He ate the candy rosette with relish and, after it was completely devoured, chewed up the candle, spitting out the wick when it had reached a sufficiently malleable state. He delved into his shirt front and extracted the coal-tar fly which had developed a decided list to starboard. He compressed it into shape, reanchored a wobbly pipestem leg, and established the figure in the center of the bread board.

He folded his arms and began to rock back and forth, the swelling candles spreading his shadow behind him like a thick, dark cloak.

"Hahneeweemahneemo. O Idol of the Flies, hear, hear, O hear, come close and hear. Miss Bittner scrooched one of your candles. So send me lots of flies, lots and lots of flies, millions, trillions, skillions of flies. Quadrillions and skintillions. Make them also no-color so's I can mix them up in soup and things without them showing much. Black ones show. Send me pale ones that don't buzz and have feelers. Hear me, hear me, hear me, O Idol of the Flies, come close and hear!"

Pruitt chewed his candle and contemplated. His face lighted, as he was struck with a brilliant thought. "And make a thinking-time-dream-thing hold still so's I can get it. So's I'll know. I guess that's all. Hahneeweemahneemo, O Idol of the Flies, you are free to GO!"

As he had done earlier in the afternoon, Pruitt became quiescent. His eyes, catlike, were set and staring, staring, staring, staring fixedly at nothing at all.

He didn't look excited. He looked like a small boy engaged in some innocuous small-boyish pursuit. But he was excited. Excitement coursed through his veins and rang in his ears. The pit of his stomach was cold with it and the palms of his hands were as moist as the inside of his mouth was dry.

This was the way he felt when he knew his father and mother were going to die. He had known it with a sort of clear, glittering lucidity—standing there in the white Bermuda sunlight, waving good-bye to them. He had seen the plummy feather on his mother's hat, the sprigged organdy dress, his father's pointed mustache and his slender, artist's hands grasping the driving reins. He had seen the gleaming harness, the high-spirited shake of the horse's head, its stamping foot. His father wouldn't have a horse that wasn't high-spirited. Ginger had been its name. He had seen the bobbing fringe on the carriage top and the pin in the right rear wheel—the pin that he had diligently and with patient perseverance worked loose with the screwdriver out of his toy toolchest. He had seen them roll away, down the drive, out through the wrought-iron gates. He had wondered if they would turn over when they rounded the bend and what sort of a crash they would make. They had turned over but he hadn't heard the crash. He had been in the house eating the icing off the cake.

But he had known they were going to die. The knowledge had

been almost more than he could control, as even now it was hard to govern the knowledge, the certainty, that he was going to snare a dream-thing.

He knew it. He knew it. He knew it. With every wire-taut nerve in his body he knew it.

Here came one. Streaking through his mind, leaving a string of phosphorescent bubbles in its wake and the bubbles rose and burst and there were dark, bloody smears where they had been. Another—shooting itself along with its tail—its greasy sides ashine. Another—and another—and another—and then a seething whirlpool of them. There had never been so many. Spiny, pulpy, slick and eel-like, some with feelers like catfish, some with white gaping mouths and fore-shortened embryo arms. The contortions clogged his thoughts with weeping. But there was one down in the black, not-able-to-get-to part of his mind that watched him. It knew what he wanted. And it was blind. But it was watching him through its blindness. It was coming. Wriggling closer, bringing the black, not-able-to-get-to part with it and where it passed the others sank away and his mind was wild with depraved weeping. Its nose holes went in and out, in and out, in and out, like something he had known long ago in some past, mysterious, other life, and it whimpered as it came and whispered things to him. Disconnected things that swelled his heart and ran like juice along the cracks in his skull. In a moment it would be quite near, in a moment he would know.

“Pruitt, Pruitt.” Pollen words, nectareous, sprinkled with flower dust. The dream-thing waited. It did not—like the rest—dart away frightened.

“Pruitt. Pruitt.” The voice came from outside himself. From far away and down, from some incredible depth like the place in his mind where They had a nest—only it was distant—and deep. Quite deep. So hot and deep.

With an immense effort Pruitt blinked.

“Look at me.” The voice was dulcet and alluring.

Again Pruitt blinked, and as his wits ebbed in like a sluggish tide bringing the watching dream-thing with it, he saw a man.

He stood tall and commanding and from chin to toe he was wrapped in a flowing cape and, in the flickering candlelight, the cape had the exact outlines of Pruitt’s shadow, and in and about the cape swam the watching dream-thing as if it were at home. Above the cloak the man’s face was a grinning mask and through the mouth the nostrils and the slits of eyes poured a reddish translucent light.

A glow. Like that of a Halloween pumpkin head, only intensified a thousandfold.

"Pruitt, look, Pruitt." The folds of the cloak lifted and fell as if an invisible arm had gestured. Pruitt followed the gesture hypnotically. His neck twisted round, slowly, slowly, until his gaze encompassed a rain of insects. A living curtain of them. A shimmering and noiseless cascade of colorless flies, gauzy winged, long bodied.

"Flies, Pruitt. Millions of flies."

Pruitt once more rotated his neck until he confronted the stranger. The blind dream-thing giggled at him and swam into a pleat of darkness.

"Who—are—you?" The words were thick and sweet on Pruitt's tongue like other words he half remembered speaking a thousand years ago on some dim plane in some hazy twilight world.

"My name is Asmodeus, Pruitt. Asmodeus. Isn't it a beautiful name?"

"Yes."

"Say it, Pruitt."

"Asmodeus."

"Again."

"Asmodeus."

"Again, Pruitt."

"Asmodeus."

"What do you see in my cloak?"

"A dream-thought."

"And what is it doing?"

"It is gibbering at me."

"Why?"

"Because your cloak has the power of darkness and I may not enter until—"

"Until what, Pruitt?"

"Until I look into your eyes and see—"

"See what, Pruitt?"

"What is written therein."

"And what is written therein? Look into my eyes, Pruitt. Look long and well. What is written therein?"

"It is written what I wish to know. It is written—"

"What is written, Pruitt?"

"It is written of the limitless, the eternal, the foreverness, of the what is and was ordained to ever be, unceasingly, beyond the ends of Time for . . . for—"



"For whom, Pruitt?"

The boy wrenched his eyes away. "No," he said, and with rising crescendo, "no, no, no, no, no." He scooted backward across the floor, pushing with his hands, shoving with his heels, his face contorted with terror. "No," he babbled, "no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no."

"Yes, Pruitt, for whom?"

The boy reached the door and lurched to his feet, his jaw flaccid, his eyes staring in their sockets. He turned and fled up the path, heedless of the pelting flies that fastened themselves to his clothes and tangled in his hair, and touched his flesh like ghostly, clinging fingers, and scrunched beneath his feet as he ran on—his breath breaking from his lungs in sobbing gasps.

"Miss Bittner . . . help . . . Miss Bittner . . . Aunt . . . Harry . . . help—"

At the bend waiting for him stood the figure he had left behind in the bathhouse.

"For whom, Pruitt?"

"No, no, no."

"For whom, Pruitt?"

"No, oh no, no!"

"For whom, Pruitt?"

"For the DAMNED," the boy shrieked and, wheeling, he ran back the way he had come, the flies sticking to his skin, mashing as he tried frantically to rid himself of them as on he sped.

The man behind him began to chant. High, shrill, and mocking, and the dream-thought took it up, and the earth, and the trees, and the sky that dripped flies, and the pilings of the pier clustered with their pulsating bodies, and the water, patched as far as eye could see with clotted islands of flies, flies, flies. And from his own throat came laughter, crazed and wanton, unrestrained and terrible, peal upon peal of hellish laughter that would not stop. Even as his legs would not stop when they reached the end of the pier.

A red-breasted robin—a fly in its beak—watched the widening ripples. A garden lizard scampered over a tuft of grass and joined company with a toad at the water's edge, as if to lend their joint moral support to the turtle who slid off the bank and with jerky motions of its striped legs went down to investigate the thing that was entwined so securely in a fishing net there on the sandy bottom by the pier.

Miss Bittner idly flipped through a textbook on derivatives. The textbook was a relic of bygone days and the pages were studded with pressed wildflowers brittle with age. With a fingernail she loosened a tissue-thin four-leaf clover. It had left its yellow-green aura on the printed text.

"Beelzebub," Miss Bittner read absently, "stems from the Hebraic. *Beel*—meaning idol, *sebub*—meaning flies: Synonyms, lesser known, not in common usage are: Appolyon, Abbadon, Asmodeus—" but Miss Bittner's attention flagged. She closed the book, yawned and wondered and wondered lazily where Pruitt was.

She went to the window and immediately drew back with revulsion. Green Bay flies. Heavens, they were all over everything. The horrid creatures. Funny how they blew in off the water. She recalled last year, when she had been with the Braithwaites in Michigan, they had come—and in such multitudes—that the townspeople had had to shovel them up off the streets. Actually shovel them. She had been ill for three whole days thereafter.

She hoped Pruitt wouldn't be dismayed by them. She must guard against showing her own helpless panic as she had done at teatime. Children placed such implicit faith in the invincibility of their elders.

Dear Pruitt, he had been so charming to her today.

Dear little Pruitt.

## THAT ONLY A MOTHER

by *Judith Merrill*

**M**MARGARET reached over to the other side of the bed where Hank should have been. Her hand patted the empty pillow, and then she came altogether awake, wondering that the old habit should remain after so many months. She tried to curl up, cat-style, to hoard her own warmth, found she couldn't do it any more, and climbed out of bed with a pleased awareness of her increasingly clumsy bulkiness.

Morning motions were automatic. On the way through the kitchenette, she pressed the button that would start breakfast cooking—the doctor had said to eat as much breakfast as she could—and tore the paper out of the facsimile machine. She folded the long sheet care-

fully to the "National News" section, and propped it on the bathroom shelf to scan while she brushed her teeth.

No accidents. No direct hits. At least none that had been officially released for publication. *Now, Maggie, don't get started on that. No accidents. No hits. Take the nice newspaper's word for it.*

The three clear chimes from the kitchen announced that breakfast was ready. She set a bright napkin and cheerful colored dishes on the table in a futile attempt to appeal to a faulty morning appetite. Then, when there was nothing more to prepare, she went for the mail, allowing herself the full pleasure of prolonged anticipation, because today there would *surely* be a letter.

There was. There were. Two bills and a worried note from her mother: "Darling, why didn't you write and tell me sooner? I'm thrilled, of course, but, well one hates to mention these things, but are you *certain* the doctor was right? Hank's been around all that uranium or thorium of whatever it is all these years, and I know you say he's a designer, not a technician, and he doesn't get near anything that might be dangerous, but you know he used to, back at Oak Ridge. Don't you think . . . well, of course, I'm just being a foolish old woman, and I don't want you to get upset. You know much more about it than I do, and I'm sure your doctor was right. He *should* know . . ."

Margaret made a face over the excellent coffee, and caught herself refolding the paper to the medical news.

*Stop it, Maggie, stop it! The radiologist said Hank's job couldn't have exposed him. And the bombed area we drove past . . . No, no. Stop it, now! Read the social notes or the recipes, Maggie girl.*

A well-known geneticist, in the medical news, said that it was possible to tell with absolute certainty, at five months, whether the child would be normal, or at least whether the mutation was likely to produce anything freakish. The worst cases, at any rate, could be prevented. Minor mutations, of course, displacements in facial features, or changes in brain structure could not be detected. And there had been some cases recently, of normal embryos with atrophied limbs that did not develop beyond the seventh or eighth month. But, the doctor concluded cheerfully, the *worst* cases could now be predicted and prevented.

*"Predicted and prevented." We predicted it, didn't we? Hank and the others, they predicted it. But we didn't prevent it. We could have stopped it in '46 and '47. Now . . .*

Margaret decided against the breakfast. Coffee had been enough

for her in the morning for ten years; it would have to do for today. She buttoned herself into the interminable folds of material that, the salesgirl had assured her, was the *only* comfortable thing to wear during the last few months. With a surge of pure pleasure, the letter and newspaper forgotten, she realized she was on the next to the last button. It wouldn't be long now.

The city in the early morning had always been a special kind of excitement for her. Last night it had rained, and the sidewalks were still damp-gray instead of dusty. The air smelled the fresher, to a city-bred woman, for the occasional pungency of acrid factory smoke. She walked the six blocks to work, watching the lights go out in the all-night hamburger joints, where the plate-glass walls were already catching the sun, and the lights go on in the dim interiors of cigar stores and dry-cleaning establishments.

The office was in a new Government building. In the rolovator, on the way up, she felt, as always, like a frankfurter roll in the ascending half of an old-style rotary toasting machine. She abandoned the air-foam cushioning gratefully at the fourteenth floor, and settled down behind her desk, at the rear of a long row of identical desks.

Each morning the pile of papers that greeted her was a little higher. These were, as everyone knew, the decisive months. The war might be won or lost on these calculations as well as any others. The manpower office had switched her here when her old expediter's job got to be too strenuous. The computer was easy to operate, and the work was absorbing, if not as exciting as the old job. But you didn't just stop working these days. Everyone who could do anything at all was needed.

*And—she remembered the interview with the psychologist—I'm probably the unstable type. Wonder what sort of neurosis I'd get sitting home reading that sensational paper . . .*

She plunged into the work without pursuing the thought.

February 18

HANK DARLING,

Just a note—from the hospital, no less. I had a dizzy spell at work, and the doctor took it to heart. Blessed if I know what I'll do with myself lying in bed for weeks, just waiting—but Dr. Boyer seems to think it may not be so long.

There are too many newspapers around here. More infanticides all the time, and they can't seem to get a jury to convict any of them.

It's the fathers who do it. Lucky thing you're not around, in case—

Oh, darling, that wasn't a very *funny* joke, was it? Write as often as you can, will you? I have too much time to think. But there really isn't anything wrong, and nothing to worry about.

Write often, and remember I love you.

MAGGIE

SPECIAL SERVICE TELEGRAM

February 21, 1953  
22:04 LK37G

From: Tech: Lieut. H. Marvell

X47-016 GCNY

To: Mrs. H. Marvell

Women's Hospital

New York City

HAD DOCTOR'S GRAM STOP WILL ARRIVE FOUR OH TEN STOP SHORT LEAVE  
STOP YOU DID IT MAGGIE STOP LOVE HANK

February 25

HANK DEAR,

So you didn't see the baby either? You'd think a place this size would at least have visiplates on the incubators, so the fathers could get a look, even if the poor benighted mommas can't. They tell me I won't see her for another week, or maybe more—but of course, mother always warned me if I didn't slow my pace, I'd probably even have my babies too fast. Why must she *always* be right?

Did you meet that battle-ax of a nurse they put on here? I imagine they save her for people who've already had theirs, and don't let her get too near the prospectives—but a woman like that simply shouldn't be allowed in a maternity ward. She's obsessed with mutations, can't seem to talk about anything else. Oh, well, *ours* is all right, even if it was in an unholy hurry.

I'm tired. They warned me not to sit up so soon, but I *had* to write you. All my love, darling,

MAGGIE

February 29

DARLING,

I finally got to see her! It's all true, what they say about new babies and the face that only a mother could love—but it's all there,

darling, eyes, ears, and noses—no, only one!—all in the right places. We're so *lucky*, Hank.

I'm afraid I've been a rambunctious patient. I kept telling that hatchet-faced female with the mutation mania that I wanted to *see* the baby. Finally the doctor came in to "explain" everything to me, and talked a lot of nonsense, most of which I'm sure no one could have understood, any more than I did. The only thing I got out of it was that she didn't actually *have* to stay in the incubator; they just thought it was "wiser."

I think I got a little hysterical at that point. Guess I was more worried than I was willing to admit, but I threw a small fit about it. The whole business wound up with one of those hushed medical conferences outside the door, and finally the Woman in White said: "Well, we might as well. Maybe it'll work out better that way."

I'd heard about the way doctors and nurses in these places develop a God complex, and believe me it is as true figuratively as it is literally that a mother hasn't got a leg to stand on around here.

*I am awfully weak, still. I'll write again soon. Love,*

MAGGIE

March 8

DEAREST HANK,

Well the nurse was wrong if she told you that. She's an idiot anyhow. It's a girl. It's easier to tell with babies than with cats, and I *know*. How about Henrietta?

I'm home again, and busier than a betatron. They got *everything* mixed up at the hospital, and I had to teach myself how to bathe her and do just about everything else. She's getting prettier, too. When can you get a leave, a *real* leave?

Love,

MAGGIE

May 26

HANK DEAR,

You should see her now—and you shall. I'm sending along a reel of color movie. My mother sent her those nighties with drawstrings all over. I put one on, and right now she looks like a snow-white potato sack with that beautiful, beautiful flower-face blooming on top. Is that *me* talking? Am I a doting mother? But wait till you *see* her!

\* \* \*

July 10

. . . Believe it or not, as you like, but your daughter can talk, and I don't mean baby talk. Alice discovered it—she's a dental assistant in the WACs, you know—and when she heard the baby giving out what I thought was a string of gibberish, she said the kid knew words and sentences, but couldn't say them clearly because she has no teeth yet. I'm taking her to a speech specialist.

September 13

. . . We have a prodigy for real! Now that all her front teeth are in, her speech is perfectly clear and—a new talent now—she can sing! I mean really carry a tune! At seven months! Darling, my world would be perfect if you could only get home.

November 19

. . . At last. The little goon was so busy being clever, it took her all this time to learn to crawl. The doctor says development in these cases is always erratic. . .

## SPECIAL SERVICE TELEGRAM

December 1, 1953  
08:47 LK59F

From: Tech. Lieut. H. Marvell

X47-016 GCNY

To: Mrs. H. Marvell

Apt. K-17

504 E. 19 St.

N.Y. N.Y.

WEEK'S LEAVE STARTS TOMORROW STOP WILL ARRIVE AIRPORT TEN OH  
FIVE STOP DON'T MEET ME STOP LOVE LOVE LOVE HANK

Margaret let the water run out of the bathinette until only a few inches were left, and then loosed her hold on the wriggling baby.

"I think it was better when you were retarded, young woman," she informed her daughter happily. "You *can't* crawl in a bathinette, you know."

"Then why can't I go in the bathtub?" Margaret was used to her child's volubility by now, but every now and then it caught her unawares. She swooped the resistant mass of pink flesh into a towel, and began to rub.

"Because you're too little, and your head is very soft, and bathtubs are very hard."

"Oh. Then when can I go in the bathtub?"

"When the outside of your head is as hard as the inside, brain-child." She reached toward a pile of fresh clothing. "I cannot understand," she added, pinning a square of cloth through the nightgown, "why a child of your intelligence can't learn to keep a diaper on the way other babies do. They've been used for centuries, you know, with perfectly satisfactory results."

The child disdained to reply; she had heard it too often. She waited patiently until she had been tucked, clean and sweet-smelling, into a white-painted crib. Then she favored her mother with a smile that inevitably made Margaret think of the first golden edge of the sun bursting into a rosy pre-dawn. She remembered Hank's reaction to the color pictures of his beautiful daughter, and with the thought, realized how late it was.

"Go to sleep, puss. When you wake up, you know, your *Daddy* will be here."

"Why?" asked the four-year-old mind, waging a losing battle to keep the ten-month-old body awake.

Margaret went into the kitchenette and set the timer for the roast. She examined the table, and got her clothes from the closet, new dress, new shoes, new slip, new everything, bought weeks before and saved for the day Hank's telegram came. She stopped to pull a paper from the facsimile, and, with clothes and news, went into the bathroom, and lowered herself gingerly into the steaming luxury of a scented tub.

She glanced through the paper with indifferent interest. Today at least there was no need to read the national news. There was an article by a geneticist. The same geneticist. Mutations, he said, were increasing disproportionately. It was too soon for recessives; even the first mutants, born near Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1946 and 1947 were not old enough yet to breed. *But my baby's all right*. Apparently, there was some degree of free radiation from atomic explosions causing the trouble. *My baby's fine. Precocious, but normal*. If more attention had been paid to the first Japanese mutations, he said . . .

*There was that little notice in the paper in the spring of '47. That was when Hank quit at Oak Ridge. "Only two or three per cent of those guilty of infanticide are being caught and punished in Japan today . . ." But MY BABY'S all right.*

She was dressed, combed, and ready to the last light brush-on of lip paste, when the door chime sounded. She dashed for the door,



and heard, for the first time in eighteen months the almost-forgotten sound of a key turning in the lock before the chime had quite died away.

"Hank!"

"Maggie!"

And then there was nothing to say. So many days, so many months, of small news piling up, so many things to tell him, and now she just stood there, staring at a khaki uniform and a stranger's pale face. She traced the features with the finger of memory. The same high-bridged nose, wide-set eyes, fine feathery brows; the same long jaw, the hair a little farther back now on the high forehead, the same tilted curve to his mouth. Pale . . . Of course, he'd been underground all this time. And strange, stranger because of lost familiarity than any newcomer's face could be.

She had time to think all that before his hand reached out to touch her, and spanned the gap of eighteen months. Now, again, there was nothing to say, because there was no need. They were together, and for the moment that was enough.

"Where's the baby?"

"Sleeping. She'll be up any minute."

No urgency. Their voices were as casual as though it were a daily exchange, as though war and separation did not exist. Margaret picked up the coat he'd thrown on the chair near the door, and hung it carefully in the hall closet. She went to check the roast, leaving him to wander through the rooms by himself, remembering and coming back. She found him, finally, standing over the baby's crib.

She couldn't see his face, but she had no need to.

"I think we can wake her just this once." Margaret pulled the covers down, and lifted the white bundle from the bed. Sleepy lids pulled back heavily from smoky brown eyes.

"Hello." Hank's voice was tentative.

"Hello." The baby's assurance was more pronounced.

He had heard about it, of course, but that wasn't the same as hearing it. He turned eagerly to Margaret. "She really can—?"

"Of course she can, darling. But what's more important, she can even do nice normal things like other babies do, even stupid ones. Watch her crawl!" Margaret set the baby on the big bed.

For a moment young Henrietta lay and eyed her parents dubiously.

"Crawl?" she asked.

"That's the idea. Your Daddy is new around here, you know. He wants to see you show off."

"Then put me on my tummy."

"Oh, of course." Margaret obligingly rolled the baby over.

"What's the matter?" Hank's voice was still casual, but an under-current in it began to charge the air of the room. "I thought they turned over first."

"This baby," Margaret would not notice the tension, "*this* baby does things when she wants to."

This baby's father watched with softening eyes while the head advanced and the body hunched up, propelling itself across the bed.

"Why the little rascal," he burst into relieved laughter. "She looks like one of those potato-sack racers they used to have on picnics. Got her arms pulled out of the sleeves already." He reached over and grabbed the knot at the bottom of the long nightie.

"I'll do it, darling." Margaret tried to get there first.

"Don't be silly, Maggie. This may be *your* first baby, but *I* had five kid brothers." He laughed her away, and reached with his other hand for the string that closed one sleeve. He opened the sleeve bow, and groped for an arm.

"The way you wriggle," he addressed his child sternly, as his hand touched a moving knob of flesh at the shoulder, "anyone might think you were a worm, using your tummy to crawl on, instead of your hands and feet."

Margaret stood and watched, smiling. "Wait till you hear her sing, darling—"

His right hand traveled down from the shoulder to where he thought an arm would be, traveled down, and straight down, over firm small muscles that writhed in an attempt to move against the pressure of his hand. He let his fingers drift up again to the shoulder. With infinite care, he opened the knot at the bottom of the night gown. His wife was standing by the bed, saying, "She can do 'Jingle Bells,' and—"

His left hand felt along the soft knitted fabric of the gown, up towards the diaper that folded, flat and smooth, across the bottom end of his child. No wrinkles. No kicking. No . . .

"Maggie." He tried to pull his hands from the neat fold in the diaper, from the wriggling body. "Maggie." His throat was dry; words came hard, low and grating. He spoke very slowly, thinking

the sound of each word to make himself say it. His head was spinning, but he had to *know* before he let it go. "Maggie, why . . . didn't you . . . tell me?"

"Tell you what, darling?" Margaret's poise was the immemorial patience of woman confronted with man's childish impetuosity. Her sudden laugh sounded fantastically easy and natural in that room; it was all clear to her now. "Is she wet? I didn't know."

*She didn't know.* His hands, beyond control, ran up and down the soft-skinned baby body, the sinuous, limbless body. *Oh God, dear God*—his head shook and his muscles contracted, in a bitter spasm of hysteria. His fingers tightened on his child—*Oh, God, she didn't know . . .*

## PART

# 5

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## ALIEN BROTHERS

HEREWITH, what might easily be termed a section of "monsters." But two of the three surely do not deserve the description; they are monstrous merely in our way of looking at things, whereas to their eyes it is, of course, we who are the unnatural beings. Only the narrator of the first story really merits the term, for it alone was *Born of Man and Woman*, it alone should have been one of us—but most certainly isn't. Rarely has an author so successfully handled the twice-difficult problem of "otherness"—depicting the thinking processes of a nonhuman mind in terms comprehensible to human readers—as does Richard Matheson in this brief and remarkable story.

*Keyhole* and *Terminal Quest* are both, loosely, "science fiction," and both deal with aliens who might be met in man's exploration of space. But neither story is concerned with the standard Bug-Eyed Monster of science fiction. Instead, both Murray Leinster and Poul Anderson raise some aspects of a peculiar problem of morality. Both offer extrapolations, in terms of the child, of the ruthlessness civilized man has historically displayed here on Earth toward "backward" peoples who have stood in the path of what is sometimes called the march of progress. (*Terminal Quest* presents by far the oldest "child" in this collection, but a child nonetheless.)



## BORN OF MAN AND WOMAN

by *Richard Matheson*

**X**——This day when it had light mother called me a retch. You retch she said. I saw in her eyes the anger. I wonder what it is a retch.

This day it had water falling from upstairs. It fell all around. I saw that. The ground of the back I watched from the little window. The ground it sucked up the water like thirsty lips. It drank too much and it got sick and runny brown. I didn't like it.

Mother is a pretty I know. In my bed place with cold walls around I have a paper things that was behind the furnace. It says on it SCREENSTARS. I see in the pictures faces like of mother and father. Father says they are pretty. Once he said it.

And also mother he said. Mother so pretty and me decent enough. Look at you he said and didn't have the nice face. I touched his arm and said it is alright father. He shook and pulled away where I couldn't reach.

Today mother let me off the chain a little so I could look out the little window. That's how I saw the water falling from upstairs.

**XX**——This day it had goldness in the upstairs. As I know, when I looked at it my eyes hurt. After I look at it the cellar is red.

I think this was church. They leave the upstairs. The big machine swallows them and rolls out past and is gone. In the back part is the *little* mother. She is much small than me. I am big. It is a secret but I have pulled the chain out of the wall. I can see out the little window all I like.

In this day when it got dark I had eat my food and some bugs. I hear laughs upstairs. I like to know why there are laughs for. I took the chain from the wall and wrapped it around me. I walked squish to the stairs. They creak when I walk on them. My legs slip on them because I don't walk on stairs. My feet stick to the wood.

I went up and opened a door. It was a white place. White as white jewels that come from upstairs sometime. I went in and stood quiet. I hear the laughing some more. I walk to the sound and look through

to the people. More people than I thought was. I thought I should laugh with them.

Mother came out and pushed the door in. It hit me and hurt. I fell back on the smooth floor and the chain made noise. I cried. She made a hissing noise into her and put her hand on her mouth. Her eyes got big.

She looked at me. I heard father call. What fell he called. She said a iron board. Come help pick it up she said. He came and said now is *that* so heavy you need. He saw me and grew big. The anger came in his eyes. He hit me. I spilled some of the drip on the floor from one arm. It was not nice. It made ugly green on the floor.

Father told me to go to the cellar. I had to go. The light it hurt some now in my eyes. It is not so like that in the cellar.

Father tied my legs and arms up. He put me on my bed. Upstairs I heard laughing while I was quiet there looking on a black spider that was swinging down to me. I thought what father said. Ohgod he said. And only eight.

XXX———This day father hit in the chain again before it had light. I have to try pull it out again. He said I was bad to come upstairs. He said never do that again or he would beat me hard. That hurts.

I hurt. I slept the day and rested my head against the cold wall. I thought of the white place upstairs.

XXXX———I got the chain from the wall out. Mother was upstairs. I heard little laughs very high. I looked out the window. I saw all little people like the little mother and little fathers too. They are pretty.

They were making nice noise and jumping around the ground. Their legs was moving hard. They are like mother and father. Mother says all right people look like they do.

One of the little fathers saw me. He pointed at the window. I let go and slid down the wall in the dark. I curled up as they would not see. I heard their talks by the window and foots running. Upstairs there was a door hitting. I heard the little mother call upstairs. I heard heavy steps and I rushed to my bed place. I hit the chain in the wall and lay down on my front.

I heard mother come down. Have you been at the window she said. I heard the anger. *Stay* away from the window. You have pulled the chain out again.

She took the stick and hit me with it. I didn't cry. I can't do that. But the drip ran all over the bed. She saw it and twisted away and made a noise. Oh mygod mygod she said why have you *done* this to me? I heard the stick go bounce on the stone floor. She ran upstairs. I slept the day.

XXXXX-----This day it had water again. When mother was upstairs I heard the little one come slow down the steps. I hidded myself in the coal bin for mother would have anger if the little mother saw me.

She had a little live thing with her. It walked on the arms and had pointy ears. She said things to it.

It was all right except the live thing smelled me. It ran up the coal and looked down at me. The hairs stood up. In the throat it made an angry noise. I hissed but it jumped on me.

I didn't want to hurt it. I got fear because it bit me harder than the rat does. I hurt and the little mother screamed. I grabbed the live thing tight. It made sounds I never heard. I pushed it all together. It was lumpy and red on the black coal.

I hid there when mother called. I was afraid of the stick. She left. I crept over the coal with the thing. I hid it under my pillow and rested on it. I put the chain in the wall again.

X-----This is another times. Father chained me tight. I hurt because he beat me. This time I hit the stick out of his hands and made noise. He went away and his face was white. He ran out of my bed place and locked the door.

I am not so glad. All day it is cold in here. The chain comes slow out of the wall. And I have a bad anger with mother and father. I will show them. I will do what I did that once.

I will screech and laugh loud. I will run on the walls. Last I will hang head down by all my legs and laugh and drip green all over until they are sorry they didn't be nice to me.

If they try to beat me again I'll hurt them. I will.



## KEYHOLE

by *Murray Leinster*

**W**HEN they brought Butch into the station in Tycho Crater he seemed to shrivel as the gravity coils in the air lock went on. He was impossible to begin with. He was all big eyes and skinny arms and legs, and he was very young and he didn't need air to breathe. Worden saw him as a limp bundle of bristly fur and terrified eyes as his captors handed him over.

"Are you crazy?" demanded Worden angrily. "Bringing him in like this? Would you take a human baby into eight gravities? Get out of the way!"

He rushed for the nursery that had been made ready for somebody like Butch. There was a rebuilt dwelling-cave on one side. The other side was a human schoolroom. And under the nursery the gravity coils had been turned off so that in that room things had only the weight that was proper to them on the Moon.

The rest of the station had coils to bring everything up to normal weight for Earth. Otherwise the staff of the station would be seasick most of the time. Butch was in the Earth-gravity part of the station when he was delivered, and he couldn't lift a furry spindly paw.

In the nursery, though, it was different. Worden put him on the floor. Worden was the uncomfortable one there—his weight only twenty pounds instead of a normal hundred and sixty. He swayed and reeled as a man does on the Moon without gravity coils to steady him.

But that was the normal thing to Butch. He uncurled himself and suddenly flashed across the nursery to the reconstructed dwelling-cave. It was a pretty good job, that cave. There were the five-foot chipped rocks shaped like dunce caps, found in all residences of Butch's race. There was the rocking stone on its base of other flattened rocks. But the spear stones were fastened down with wire in case Butch got ideas.

Butch streaked it to these familiar objects. He swarmed up one of the dunce-cap stones and locked his arms and legs about its top, clinging close. Then he was still. Worden regarded him. Butch was mo-

tionless for minutes, seeming to take in as much as possible of his surroundings without moving even his eyes.

Suddenly his head moved. He took in more of his environment. Then he stirred a third time and seemed to look at Worden with an extraordinary intensity—whether of fear or pleading Worden could not tell.

“Hmm,” said Worden, “so that’s what those stones are for! Perches or beds or roosts, eh? I’m your nurse, fella. We’re playing a dirty trick on you but we can’t help it.”

He knew Butch couldn’t understand, but he talked to him as a man does talk to a dog or a baby. It isn’t sensible, but it’s necessary.

“We’re going to raise you up to be a traitor to your kinfolk,” he said with some grimness. “I don’t like it, but it has to be done. So I’m going to be very kind to you as part of the conspiracy. Real kindness would suggest that I kill you instead—but I can’t do that.”

Butch stared at him, unblinking and motionless. He looked something like an Earth monkey but not too much so. He was completely impossible but he looked pathetic.

Worden said bitterly, “You’re in your nursery, Butch. Make yourself at home!”

He went out and closed the door behind him. Outside he glanced at the video screens that showed the interior of the nursery from four different angles. Butch remained still for a long time. Then he slipped down to the floor. This time he ignored the dwelling-cave of the nursery.

He went interestedly to the human-culture part. He examined everything there with his oversized soft eyes. He touched everything with his incredibly handlike tiny paws. But his touches were tentative. Nothing was actually disturbed when he finished his examination.

He went swiftly back to the dunce-cap rock, swarmed up it, locked his arms and legs about it again, blinked rapidly and seemed to go to sleep. He remained motionless with closed eyes until Worden grew tired of watching him and moved away.

The whole affair was preposterous and infuriating. The first men to land on the Moon knew that it was a dead world. The astronomers had been saying so for a hundred years, and the first and second expeditions to reach Luna from Earth found nothing to contradict the theory.

But a man from the third expedition saw something moving among the upflung rocks of the Moon’s landscape and he shot it and the ex-

istence of Butch's kind was discovered. It was inconceivable of course that there should be living creatures where there was neither air nor water. But Butch's folk did live under exactly those conditions.

The dead body of the first living creature killed on the Moon was carried back to Earth and biologists grew indignant. Even with a specimen to dissect and study they were inclined to insist that there simply wasn't any such creature. So the fourth and fifth and sixth lunar expeditions hunted Butch's relatives very earnestly for further specimens for the advancement of science.

The sixth expedition lost two men whose spacesuits were punctured by what seemed to be weapons while they were hunting. The seventh expedition was wiped out to the last man. Butch's relatives evidently didn't like being shot as biological specimens.

It wasn't until the tenth expedition of four ships established a base in Tycho Crater that men had any assurance of being able to land on the Moon and get away again. Even then the staff of the station felt as if it were under permanent siege.

Worden made his report to Earth. A baby lunar creature had been captured by a tractor party and brought into Tycho Station. A nursery was ready and the infant was there now, alive. He seemed to be uninjured. He seemed not to mind an environment of breathable air for which he had no use. He was active and apparently curious and his intelligence was marked.

There was so far no clue to what he ate—if he ate at all—though he had a mouth like the other collected specimens and the tooth-like concretions which might serve as teeth. Worden would of course continue to report in detail. At the moment he was allowing Butch to accustom himself to his new surroundings.

He settled down in the recreation room to scowl at his companion scientists and try to think, despite the program beamed on radar frequency from Earth. He definitely didn't like his job, but he knew that it had to be done. Butch had to be domesticated. He had to be persuaded that he was a human being, so human beings could find out how to exterminate his kind.

It had been observed before, on Earth, that a kitten raised with a litter of puppies came to consider itself a dog and that even pet ducks came to prefer human society to that of their own species. Some talking birds of high intelligence appeared to be convinced that they were people and acted that way. If Butch reacted similarly he would become a traitor to his kind for the benefit of man. And it was necessary!

Men had to have the Moon, and that was all there was to it. Gravity on the Moon was one eighth that of gravity on Earth. A rocket ship could make the Moon voyage and carry a cargo, but no ship yet built could carry fuel for a trip to Mars or Venus if it started out from Earth.

With a fueling stop on the Moon, though, the matter was simple. Eight drums of rocket fuel on the Moon weighed no more than one on Earth. A ship itself weighed only one eighth as much on Luna. So a rocket that took off from Earth with ten drums of fuel could stop at a fuel base on the Moon and soar away again with two hundred, and sometimes more.

With the Moon as a fueling base men could conquer the solar system. Without the Moon, mankind was earthbound. Men had to have the Moon!

But Butch's relatives prevented it. By normal experience there could not be life on an airless desert with such monstrous extremes of heat and cold as the Moon's surface experienced. But there was life there. Butch's kinfolk did not breathe oxygen. Apparently they ate it in some mineral combination and it interacted with other minerals in their bodies to yield heat and energy.

Men thought squids peculiar because their blood stream used copper in place of iron, but Butch and his kindred seemed to have complex carbon compounds in place of both. They were intelligent in some fashion, it was clear. They used tools, they chipped stone, and they had long, needlelike stone crystals which they threw as weapons.

No metals, of course, for lack of fire to smelt them. There couldn't be fire without air. But Worden reflected that in ancient days some experimenters had melted metals and set wood ablaze with mirrors concentrating the heat of the sun. With the naked sunlight of the Moon's surface, not tempered by air and clouds, Butch's folk could have metals if they only contrived mirrors and curved them properly like the mirrors of telescopes on Earth.

Worden had an odd sensation just then. He looked around sharply as if somebody had made a sudden movement. But the video screen merely displayed a comedian back on Earth, wearing a funny hat. Everybody looked at the screen.

As Worden watched, the comedian was smothered in a mass of soapsuds and the studio audience two hundred and thirty thousand miles away squealed and applauded the exquisite humor of the scene.

In the Moon station in Tycho Crater somehow it was less than comical.

Worden got up and shook himself. He went to look again at the screens that showed the interior of the nursery. Butch was motionless on the absurd cone-shaped stone. His eyes were closed. He was simply a furry, pathetic little bundle, stolen from the airless wastes outside to be bred into a traitor to his race.

Worden went to his cabin and turned in. Before he slept, though, he reflected that there was still some hope for Butch. Nobody understood his metabolism. Nobody could guess at what he ate. Butch might starve to death. If he did he would be lucky. But it was Worden's job to prevent it.

Butch's relatives were at war with men. The tractors that crawled away from the station—they went amazingly fast on the Moon—were watched by big-eyed furry creatures from rock crevices and from behind the boulders that dotted the lunar landscape.

Needle-sharp throwing stones flicked through emptiness. They splintered on the tractor bodies and on the tractor ports, but sometimes they jammed or broke a tread and then the tractor had to stop. Somebody had to go out and clear things or make repairs. And then a storm of throwing stones poured upon him.

A needle-pointed stone, traveling a hundred feet a second, hit just as hard on Luna as it did on Earth—and it traveled farther. Space-suits were punctured. Men died. Now tractor treads were being armored and special repair-suits were under construction, made of hardened steel plates.

Men who reached the Moon in rocket ships were having to wear armor like medieval knights and men-at-arms! There was a war on. A traitor was needed. And Butch was elected to be that traitor.

When Worden went into the nursery again—the days and nights on the Moon are two weeks long apiece, so men ignored such matters inside the station—Butch leaped for the dunce-cap stone and clung to its top. He had been fumbling around the rocking stone. It still swayed back and forth on its plate. Now he seemed to try to squeeze himself to unity with the stone spire, his eyes staring enigmatically at Worden.

"I don't know whether we'll get anywhere or not," said Worden conversationally. "Maybe you'll put up a fight if I touch you. But we'll see."

He reached out his hand. The small furry body—neither hot nor

cold but the temperature of the air in the station—resisted desperately. But Butch was very young. Worden peeled him loose and carried him across the room to the human schoolroom equipment. Butch curled up, staring fearfully.

"I'm playing dirty," said Worden, "by being nice to you, Butch. Here's a toy."

Butch stirred in his grasp. His eyes blinked rapidly. Worden put him down and wound up a tiny mechanical toy. It moved. Butch watched intently. When it stopped he looked back at Worden. Worden wound it up again. Again Butch watched. When it ran down a second time the tiny handlike paw reached out.

With an odd tentativeness, Butch tried to turn the winding key. He was not strong enough. After an instant he went loping across to the dwelling-cave. The winding key was a metal ring. Butch fitted that over a throw-stone point, and twisted the toy about. He wound it up. He put the toy on the floor and watched it work. Worden's jaw dropped.

"Brains!" he said wryly. "Too bad, Butch! You know the principle of the lever. At a guess you've an eight-year-old human brain! I'm sorry for you, fella!"

At the regular communication hour he made his report to Earth. Butch was teachable. He only had to see a thing done once—or at most twice—to be able to repeat the motions involved.

"And," said Worden, carefully detached, "he isn't afraid of me now. He understands that I intend to be friendly. While I was carrying him I talked to him. He felt the vibration of my chest from my voice.

"Just before I left him I picked him up and talked to him again. He looked at my mouth as it moved and put his paw on my chest to feel the vibrations. I put his paw at my throat. The vibrations are clearer there. He seemed fascinated. I don't know how you'd rate his intelligence but it's above that of a human baby."

Then he said with even greater detachment, "I am disturbed. If you must know, I don't like the idea of exterminating his kind. They have tools, they have intelligence. I think we should try to communicate with them in some way—try to make friends—stop killing them for dissection."

The communicator was silent for the second and a half it took his voice to travel to Earth and the second and a half it took to come back. Then the recording clerk's voice said briskly, "Very good, Mr. Worden! Your voice was very clear!"

Worden shrugged his shoulders. The lunar station in Tycho was a highly official enterprise. The staff on the Moon had to be competent—and besides, political appointees did not want to risk their precious lives—but the Earth end of the business of the Space Exploration Bureau was run by the sort of people who do get on official payrolls. Worden felt sorry for Butch—and for Butch's relatives.

In a later lesson session Worden took an empty coffee tin into the nursery. He showed Butch that its bottom vibrated when he spoke into it, just as his throat did. Butch experimented busily. He discovered for himself that it had to be pointed at Worden to catch the vibrations.

Worden was unhappy. He would have preferred Butch to be a little less rational. But for the next lesson he presented Butch with a really thin metal diaphragm stretched across a hoop. Butch caught the idea at once.

When Worden made his next report to Earth he felt angry.

"Butch has no experience of sound as we have, of course," he said curtly. "There's no air on the Moon. But sound travels through rocks. He's sensitive to vibrations in solid objects just as a deaf person can feel the vibrations of a dance floor if the music is loud enough.

"Maybe Butch's kind has a language or a code of sounds sent through the rock underfoot. They do communicate somehow! And if they've brains and a means of communication they aren't animals and shouldn't be exterminated for our convenience!"

He stopped. The chief biologist of the Space Exploration Bureau was at the other end of the communication beam then. After the necessary pause for distance his voice came blandly.

"Splendid, Worden! Splendid reasoning! But we have to take the longer view. Exploration of Mars and Venus is a very popular idea with the public. If we are to have funds—and the appropriations come up for a vote shortly—we have to make progress toward the nearer planets. The public demands it. Unless we can begin work on a refueling base on the Moon, public interest will cease!"

Worden said urgently, "Suppose I send some pictures of Butch? He's very human, sir! He's extraordinarily appealing! He has personality! A reel or two of Butch at his lessons ought to be popular!"

Again that irritating wait while his voice traveled a quarter-million miles at the speed of light and the wait for the reply.

"The—ah—lunar creatures, Worden," said the chief biologist re-

gretfully, "have killed a number of men who have been publicized as martyrs to science. We cannot give favorable publicity to creatures that have killed men!" Then he added blandly, "But you are progressing splendidly, Worden—*splendidly!* Carry on!"

His image faded from the video screen. Worden said naughty words as he turned away. He'd come to like Butch. Butch trusted him. Butch now slid down from that crazy perch of his and came rushing to his arms every time he entered the nursery.

Butch was ridiculously small—no more than eighteen inches high. He was preposterously light and fragile in his nursery, where only Moon gravity obtained. And Butch was such an earnest little creature, so soberly absorbed in everything that Worden showed him!

He was still fascinated by the phenomena of sound. Humming or singing—even Worden's humming and singing—entranced him. When Worden's lips moved now Butch struck an attitude and held up the hoop diaphragm with a tiny finger pressed to it to catch the vibrations Worden's voice made.

Now too when he grasped an idea Worden tried to convey he tended to swagger. He became more human in his actions with every session of human contact. Once, indeed, Worden looked at the video screens which spied on Butch and saw him—all alone—solemnly going through every gesture and every movement Worden had made. He was pretending to give a lesson to an imaginary still-tinier companion. He was pretending to be Worden, apparently for his own satisfaction!

Worden felt a lump in his throat. He was enormously fond of the little mite. It was painful that he had just left Butch to help in the construction of a vibrator-microphone device which would transfer his voice to rock vibrations and simultaneously pick up any other vibrations that might be made in return.

If the members of Butch's race did communicate by tapping on rocks or the like, men could eavesdrop on them—could locate them, could detect ambushes in preparation, and apply mankind's deadly military countermeasures.

Worden hoped the gadget wouldn't work. But it did. When he put it on the floor of the nursery and spoke into the microphone, Butch did feel the vibrations underfoot. He recognized their identity with the vibrations he'd learned to detect in air.

He made a skipping exultant hop and jump. It was plainly the uttermost expression of satisfaction. And then his tiny foot pattered and scratched furiously on the floor. It made a peculiar scratchy tap-



ping noise which the microphone picked up. Butch watched Worden's face, making the sounds which were like highly elaborated footfalls.

"No dice, Butch," said Worden unhappily. "I can't understand it. But it looks as if you've started your treason already. This'll help wipe out some of your folks."

He reported it reluctantly to the head of the station. Microphones were immediately set into the rocky crater floor outside the station and others were made ready for exploring parties to use for the detection of Moon creatures near them. Oddly enough, the microphones by the station yielded results right away.

It was near sunset. Butch had been captured near the middle of the three-hundred-and-thirty-four-hour lunar day. In all the hours between—a week by Earth time—he had had no nourishment of any sort. Worden had conscientiously offered him every edible and inedible substance in the station. Then at least one sample of every mineral in the station collection.

Butch regarded them all with interest but without appetite. Worden—liking Butch—expected him to die of starvation and thought it a good idea. Better than encompassing the death of all his race, anyhow. And it did seem to him that Butch was beginning to show a certain sluggishness, a certain lack of bounce and energy. He thought it was weakness from hunger.

Sunset progressed. Yard by yard, fathom by fathom, half mile by half mile, the shadows of the miles-high western walls of Tycho crept across the crater floor. There came a time when only the central hump had sunlight. Then the shadow began to creep up the eastern walls. Presently the last thin jagged line of light would vanish and the colossal cup of the crater would be filled to overflowing with the night.

Worden watched the incandescent sunlight growing even narrower on the cliffs. He would see no other sunlight for two weeks' Earth time. Then abruptly an alarm bell rang. It clanged stridently, furiously. Doors hissed shut, dividing the station into airtight sections.

Loud-speakers snapped, "*Noises in the rock outside! Sounds like Moon creatures talking nearby! They may plan an attack! Everybody into spacesuits and get guns ready!*"

At just that instant the last thin sliver of sunshine disappeared. Worden thought instantly of Butch. There was no spacesuit to fit him. Then he grimaced a little. Butch didn't need a spacesuit.

Worden got into the clumsy outfit. The lights dimmed. The harsh airless space outside the station was suddenly bathed in light. The multimillion-lumen beam, made to guide rocket ships to a landing even at night, was turned on to expose any creatures with designs on its owners. It was startling to see how little space was really lighted by the beam and how much of stark blackness spread on beyond.

The loud-speaker snapped again, "*Two Moon creatures! Running away! They're zigzagging! Anybody who wants to take a shot—*" The voice paused. It didn't matter. Nobody is a crack shot in a space-suit. "*They left something behind!*" said the voice in the loud-speaker. It was sharp and uneasy.

"I'll take a look at that," said Worden. His own voice startled him but he was depressed. "I've got a hunch what it is."

Minutes later he went out through the air lock. He moved lightly despite the cumbrous suit he wore. There were two other staff members with him. All three were armed and the searchlight beam stabbed here and there erratically to expose any relative of Butch who might try to approach them in the darkness.

With the light at his back Worden could see that trillions of stars looked down upon Luna. The zenith was filled with infinitesimal specks of light of every conceivable color. The familiar constellations burned ten times as brightly as on Earth. And Earth itself hung nearly overhead. It was three-quarters full—a monstrous bluish giant in the sky, four times the Moon's diameter, its ice caps and continents mistily to be seen.

Worden went forebodingly to the object left behind by Butch's kin. He wasn't much surprised when he saw what it was. It was a rocking stone on its plate with a fine impalpable dust on the plate, as if something had been crushed under the egg-shaped upper stone acting as a mill.

Worden said sourly into his helmet microphone, "It's a present for Butch. His kinfolk know he was captured alive. They suspect he's hungry. They've left some grub for him of the kind he wants or needs most."

That was plainly what it was. It did not make Worden feel proud. A baby—Butch—had been kidnaped by the enemies of its race. That baby was a prisoner and its captors would have nothing with which to feed it. So someone, greatly daring—Worden wondered somberly if it was Butch's father and mother—had risked their lives to leave

food for him with a rocking stone to tag it for recognition as food.

"It's a dirty shame," said Worden bitterly. "All right! Let's carry it back. Careful not to spill the powdered stuff!"

His lack of pride was emphasized when Butch fell upon the unidentified powder with marked enthusiasm. Tiny pinch by tiny pinch Butch consumed it with an air of vast satisfaction. Worden felt ashamed.

"You're getting treated pretty rough, Butch," said Worden. "What I've already learned from you will cost a good many hundred of your folks' lives. And they're taking chances to feed you! I'm making you a traitor and myself a scoundrel."

Butch thoughtfully held up the hoop diaphragm to catch the voice vibrations in the air. He was small and furry and absorbed. He decided that he could pick up sounds better from the rock underfoot. He pressed the communicator microphone on Worden. He waited.

"No!" said Worden roughly. "Your people are too human. Don't let me find out any more, Butch. Be smart and play dumb!"

But Butch didn't. It wasn't very long before Worden was teaching him to read. Oddly, though, the rock microphones that had given the alarm at the station didn't help the tractor parties at all. Butch's kinfolk seemed to vanish from the neighborhood of the station altogether. Of course if that kept up the construction of a fuel base could be begun and the actual extermination of the species carried out later. But the reports on Butch were suggesting other possibilities.

"If your folks stay vanished," Worden told Butch, "it'll be all right for a while—and only for a while. I'm being urged to try to get you used to Earth gravity. If I succeed, they'll want you on Earth in a zoo. And if that works—why, they'll be sending other expeditions to get more of your kinfolk to put in other zoos."

Butch watched Worden, motionless.

"And also"—Worden's tone was very grim—"there's some miniature mining machinery coming up by the next rocket. I'm supposed to see if you can learn to run it."

Butch made scratching sounds on the floor. It was unintelligible of course, but it was an expression of interest at least. Butch seemed to enjoy the vibrations of Worden's voice, just as a dog likes to have his master talk to him. Worden grunted.

"We humans class you as an animal, Butch. We tell ourselves

that all the animal world should be subject to us. Animals should work for us. If you act too smart we'll hunt down all your relatives and set them to work digging minerals for us. You'll be with them. But I don't want you to work your heart out in a mine, Butch! It's wrong!"

Butch remained quite still. Worden thought sickishly of small furry creatures like Butch driven to labor in airless mines in the Moon's frigid depths. With guards in spacesuits watching lest any try to escape to the freedom they'd known before the coming of men. With guns mounted against revolt. With punishments for rebellion or weariness.

It wouldn't be unprecedented. The Indians in Cuba when the Spanish came . . . Negro slavery in both Americas . . . concentration camps . . .

Butch moved. He put a small furry paw on Worden's knee. Worden scowled at him.

"Bad business," he said harshly. "I'd rather not get fond of you. You're a likable little cuss but your race is doomed. The trouble is that you didn't bother to develop a civilization. And if you had, I suspect we'd have smashed it. We humans aren't what you'd call admirable."

Butch went over to the blackboard. He took a piece of pastel chalk—ordinary chalk was too hard for his Moon-gravity muscles to use—and soberly began to make marks on the slate. The marks formed letters. The letters made words. The words made sense.

YOU, wrote Butch quite incredibly in neat pica lettering, GOOD FRIEND.

He turned his head to stare at Worden. Worden went white. "I haven't taught you those words, Butch!" he said very quietly. "What's up?"

He'd forgotten that his words, to Butch, were merely vibrations in the air or in the floor. He'd forgotten they had no meaning. But Butch seemed to have forgotten it too. He marked soberly:

MY FRIEND GET SPACESUIT. He looked at Worden and marked ONCE MORE. TAKE ME OUT. I COME BACK WITH YOU.

He looked at Worden with large incongruously soft and appealing eyes. And Worden's brain seemed to spin inside his skull. After a long time Butch printed again—YES.

Then Worden sat very still indeed. There was only Moon gravity in the nursery and he weighed only one eighth as much as on Earth. But he felt very weak. Then he felt grim.

"Not much else to do, I suppose," he said slowly. "But I'll have to carry you through Earth gravity to the air lock."

He got to his feet. Butch made a little leap up into his arms. He curled up there, staring at Worden's face. Just before Worden stepped through the door Butch reached up a skinny paw and caressed Worden's cheek tentatively.

"Here we go!" said Worden. "The idea was for you to be a traitor. I wonder—"

But with Butch a furry ball, suffering in the multiplied weight Earth gravity imposed upon him, Worden made his way to the air lock. He donned a spacesuit. He went out.

It was near sunrise then. A long time had passed and Earth was now in its last quarter and the very highest peak of all that made up the crater wall glowed incandescent in the sunshine. But the stars were still quite visible and very bright. Worden walked away from the station, guided by the Earth-shine on the ground underfoot.

Three hours later he came back. Butch skipped and hopped beside his spacesuited figure. Behind them came two other figures. They were smaller than Worden but much larger than Butch. They were skinny and furry and they carried a burden. A mile from the station he switched on his suit radio. He called. A startled voice answered in his earphones.

"It's Worden," he said dryly. "I've been out for a walk with Butch. We visited his family and I've a couple of his cousins with me. They want to pay a visit and present some gifts. Will you let us in without shooting?"

There were exclamations. There was confusion. But Worden went on steadily toward the station while another high peak glowed in sunrise light and a third seemed to burst into incandescence. Dawn was definitely on the way.

The air-lock door opened. The party from the airless Moon went in. When the air lock filled, though, and the gravity coils went on, Butch and his relatives became helpless. They had to be carried to the nursery. There they uncurled themselves and blinked enigmatically at the men who crowded into the room where gravity was normal for the Moon and at the other men who stared in the door.

"I've got a sort of message," said Worden. "Butch and his relatives want to make a deal with us. You'll notice that they've put themselves at our mercy. We can kill all three of them. But they want to make a deal."

The head of the station said uncomfortably, "You've managed two-way communication, Worden?"

"I haven't," Worden told him. "They have. They've proved to me that they've brains equal to ours. They've been treated as animals and shot as specimens. They've fought back—naturally! But they want to make friends. They say that we can never use the Moon except in spacesuits and in stations like this, and they could never take Earth's gravity. So there's no need for us to be enemies. We can help each other."

The head of the station said dryly, "Plausible enough, but we have to act under orders, Worden. Did you explain that?"

"They know," said Worden. "So they've got set to defend themselves if necessary. They've set up smelters to handle metals. They get the heat by sun mirrors, concentrating sunlight. They've even begun to work with gases held in containers. They're not far along with electronics yet, but they've got the theoretic knowledge and they don't need vacuum tubes. They live in a vacuum. They can defend themselves from now on."

The head said mildly, "I've watched Butch, you know, Worden. And you don't look crazy. But if this sort of thing is sprung on the armed forces on Earth there'll be trouble. They've been arguing for armed rocket ships. If your friends start a real war for defense—if they can—maybe rocket warships will be the answer."

Worden nodded.

"Right. But our rockets aren't so good that they can fight this far from a fuel store, and there couldn't be one on the Moon with all of Butch's kinfolk civilized—as they nearly are now and as they certainly will be within the next few weeks. Smart people, these cousins and such of Butch!"

"I'm afraid they'll have to prove it," said the head. "Where'd they get this sudden surge in culture?"

"From us," said Worden. "Smelting from me, I think. Metallurgy and mechanical engineering from the tractor mechanics. Geology—call it lunology here—mostly from you."

"How's that?" demanded the head.

"Think of something you'd like Butch to do," said Worden grimly, "and then watch him."

The head stared and then looked at Butch. Butch—small and furry and swaggering—stood up and bowed profoundly from the waist. One paw was placed where his heart could be. The other made a

grandiose sweeping gesture. He straightened up and strutted, then climbed swiftly into Worden's lap and put a skinny furry arm about his neck.

"That bow," said the head, very pale, "is what I had in mind. You mean—"

"Just so," said Worden. "Butch's ancestors had no air to make noises in for speech. So they developed telepathy. In time, to be sure, they worked out something like music—sounds carried through rock. But like our music it doesn't carry meaning. They communicate directly from mind to mind. Only we can't pick up communications from them and they can from us."

"They read our minds!" said the head. He licked his lips. "And when we first shot them for specimens they were trying to communicate. Now they fight."

"Naturally," said Worden. "Wouldn't we? They've been picking our brains. They can put up a terrific battle now. They could wipe out this station without trouble. They let us stay so they could learn from us. Now they want to trade."

"We have to report to Earth," said the head slowly, "but—"

"They brought along some samples," said Worden. "They'll swap diamonds, weight for weight, for records. They like our music. They'll trade emeralds for textbooks—they can read now! And they'll set up an atomic pile and swap plutonium for other things they'll think of later. Trading on that basis should be cheaper than a war!"

"Yes," said the head. "It should. That's the sort of argument men will listen to. But how—"

"Butch," said Worden ironically. "Just Butch! We didn't capture him—they planted him on us! He stayed in the station and picked our brains and relayed the stuff to his relatives. We wanted to learn about them, remember? It's like the story of the psychologist. . . ."

*There's a story about a psychologist who was studying the intelligence of a chimpanzee. He led the chimp into a room full of toys, went out, closed the door and put his eye to the keyhole to see what the chimp was doing. He found himself gazing into a glittering, interested brown eye only inches from his own. The chimp was looking through the keyhole to see what the psychologist was doing.*

## TERMINAL QUEST

by Poul Anderson

**T**HE SUN woke him.

He stirred uneasily, feeling the long shafts of light slant over the land. The muted gossip of birds became a rush of noise and a small wind blew till the leaves chattered at him. Wake up, wake up, wake up, Rugo, there is a new day on the hills and you can't lie sleeping, wake up!

The light reached under his eyelids, roiling the darkness of dreams. He mumbled and curled into a tighter knot, drawing sleep back around him like a cloak, sinking toward the dark and the unknowingness with his mother's face before him.

She laughed down the long ways of night, calling and calling, and he tried to follow her, but the sun wouldn't let him.

*Mother, he whimpered. Mother, please come back, Mother.*

She had gone and left him, once very long ago. He had been little then and the cave had been big and gloomy and cold, and there were flutterings and watchings in the shadows of it and he had been frightened. She had said she was going after food, and had kissed him and gone off down the steep moonlit valley. And there she must have met the Strangers, because she never came back. And he had cried for a long time and called her name, but she didn't return.

That had been so long ago that he couldn't number the years. But now that he was getting old, she must have remembered him and been sorry she left, for lately she often came back at night.

The dew was cold on his skin. He felt the stiffness in him, the ache of muscle and bone and dulling nerve, and forced himself to move. If he stirred all at once, stretching himself and not letting his throat rasp with the pain of it, he could work the damp and the cold and the earth out, he could open his eyes and look at the new day.

It was going to be hot. Rugo's vision wasn't so good any more, the sun was only a blur of fire low on the shadowy horizon, and the mist that streamed through the dales turned it ruddy. But he knew that before midday it would be hot.



He got up, slowly climbing to all four feet, pulling himself erect with the help of a low branch. Hunger was a dull ache in him. He looked emptily around at the thicket, a copse of scrub halfway up the hillside. There were the bushes and the trees, a hard summer green that would be like metal later in the day. There were the dead leaves rustling soggily underfoot, still wet with the dew that steamed away in white vapors. There were birds piping up the sun, but nowhere food, nowhere anything to eat.

*Mother, you said you would bring back something to eat.*

He shook his big scaly head, clearing out the fog of dreams. Today he would have to go down into the valley. He had eaten the last berries on the hillside, he had waited here for days with weakness creeping from his belly through his bones, and now he would have to go down to the Strangers.

He went slowly out of the thicket and started down the hillside. The grass rustled under his feet, the earth quivered a little beneath his great weight. The hill slanted up to the sky and down to the misty dales, and he was alone with the morning.

Only grass and the small flowers grew here. Once the hills had been tall with forest; he recalled cool shadowy depths and the windy roar of the treetops, small suns spattered on the ground and the drunken sweetness of resin smell in summer and the blaze of broken light from a million winter crystals. But the Strangers had cut down the woods and now there were only rotting stumps and his blurred remembering. His alone, for the men who had hewed down the forest were dead and their sons never knew—and when he was gone, who would care? Who would be left to care?

He came to a brook that rushed down the hillside, rising from a spring higher up and flowing to join the Thunder River. The water was cold and clean and he drank heavily, slopping it into him with both hands and wriggling his tail with the refreshment of it. This much remained to him, at least, though the source was dwindling now that the watershed was gone. But he would be dead before the brook was dry, so it didn't matter too much.

He waded over it. The cold water set his lame foot to tingling and needling. Beyond it he found the old logging trail and went down that. He walked slowly, not being eager to do that which he must, and tried to make a plan.

The Strangers had given him food now and then, out of charity or in return for work. Once he had labored almost a year for a man, who had given him a place to sleep and as much as he wanted to eat

—a good man to work for, not full of the hurry which seemed to be in his race, with a quiet voice and gentle eyes. But then the man had taken a woman, and she was afraid of Rugo, so he had had to leave.

A couple of times, too, men from Earth itself had come to talk to him. They had asked him many questions about his people. How had they lived, what was their word for this and that, did he remember any of their dances or music? But he couldn't tell them much, for his folk had been hunted before he was born, he had seen a flying-thing spear his father with flame and later his mother had gone to look for food and not come back. The men from Earth had, in fact, told him more than he could give them, told him about cities and books and gods which his people had had, and if he had wanted to learn these things from the Strangers they could have told him more. They, too, had paid him something, and he had eaten well for a while.

*I am old now, thought Rugo, and not very strong. I never was strong, beside the powers they have. One of us could drive fifty of them before him—but one of them, seated at the wheel of a thing of metal and fire, could reap a thousand of us. And I frighten their women and children and animals. So it will be hard to find work, and I may have to beg a little bread for no more return than going away. And the grain that they will feed me grew in the soil of this world; it is strong with the bones of my father and fat with the flesh of my mother. But one must eat.*

When he came down into the valley, the mists had lifted in ragged streamers and already he could feel the heat of the sun. The trail led onto a road, and he turned north toward the human settlements. Nobody was in sight yet, and it was quiet. His footfalls rang loud on the pavement, it was hard under his soles and the impact of walking jarred up into his legs like small sharp needles. He looked around him, trying to ignore the hurting.

They had cut down the trees and harrowed the land and sowed grain of Earth, until now the valley lay open to the sky. The brassy sun of summer and the mordant winds of winter rode over the deep glens he remembered, and the only trees were in neat orchards bearing alien fruit. It was as if these Strangers were afraid of the dark, as if they were so frightened by shadows and half-lights and rustling unseen distances that they had to clear it all away, one sweep of fire and thunder and then the bright inflexible steel of their world rising above the dusty plains.

Only fear could make beings so vicious, even as fear had driven Rugo's folk to rush, huge and scaled and black, out of the mountains, to smash houses and burn grain fields and wreck machines, even as fear had brought an answer from the Strangers which heaped stinking bodies in the tumbled ruins of the cities he had never seen. Only the Strangers were more powerful, and their fears had won.

He heard the machine coming behind him, roaring and pounding down the road with a whistle of cloven air flapping in its wake, and remembered in a sudden gulping that it was forbidden to walk in the middle of the road. He scrambled to one side, but it was the wrong one, the side they drove on, and the truck screamed around him on smoking tires and ground to a halt on the shoulder.

A Stranger climbed out, and he was almost dancing with fury. His curses poured forth so fast that Rugo couldn't follow them. He caught a few words: "Damned weird thing. . . . Coulda killed me. . . . Oughta be shot. . . . Have the law on yuh. . . ."

Rugo stood watching. He had twice the height of the skinny pink shape that jittered and railed before him, and some four times the bulk, and though he was old, one sweep of his hand would stave in the skull and spatter the brains on the hot hard concrete. Only all the power of the Strangers was behind the creature, fire and ruin and flying steel, and he was the last of his folk and sometimes his mother came at night to see him. So he stood quietly, hoping the man would get tired and go away.

A booted foot slammed against his shin, and he cried out with the pain of it and lifted one arm the way he had done as a child when the bombs were falling and metal rained around him.

The man sprang back. "Don't yuh try it," he said quickly. "Don't do nothing. They'll hunt yuh down if yuh touch me."

"Go," said Rugo, twisting his tongue and throat to the foreign syllables which he knew better than the dimly recalled language of his people. "Please go."

"Yuh're on'y here while yuh behave yuhrself. Keep yuhr place, see. Nasty devil! Watch yuhrself." The man got back into the truck and started it. The spinning tires threw gravel back at Rugo.

He stood watching the machine, his hands hanging empty at his sides, until it was beyond his aging sight. Then he started walking again, careful to stay on the correct edge of the road.

Presently a farm appeared over a ridge. It lay a little way in from

the highway, a neat white house sitting primly among trees with its big outbuildings clustered behind it and the broad yellowing grain-fields beyond. The sun was well into the sky now, mist and dew had burned away, the wind had fallen asleep. It was still and hot. Rugo's feet throbbed with the hardness of the road.

He stood at the entrance, wondering if he should go in or not. It was a rich place, they'd have machines and no use for his labor. When he passed by here before, the man had told him shortly to be on his way. But they could perhaps spare a piece of bread and a jug of water, just to be rid of him or maybe to keep him alive. He knew he was one of the neighborhood sights, the last native. Visitors often climbed up his hill to see him and toss a few coins at his feet and take pictures while he gathered them.

He puzzled out the name on the mailbox. *Elias Whately*. He'd try his luck with Elias Whately.

As he came up the driveway a dog bounded forth and started barking, high shrill notes that hurt his ears. The animal danced around and snapped with a rage that was half panic. None of the beasts from Earth could stand the sight and smell of him; they knew he was not of their world and a primitive terror rose in them. He remembered the pain when teeth nipped his rheumatic legs. Once he had killed a dog that bit him, a single unthinking swipe of his tail, and the owner had fired a shotgun at him. His scales had turned most of the charge, but some was still lodged deep in his flesh and bit him again when the days were cold.

"Please," he said to the dog. His bass rumbled in the warm still air and the barking grew more frantic. "Please, I will not harm, please do not bite."

"O-oh!"

The woman in the front yard let out a little scream and ran before him, up the steps and through the door to slam it in his face. Rugo sighed, feeling suddenly tired. She was afraid. They were all afraid. They had called his folk trolls, which were something evil in their old myths. He remembered that his grandfather, before he died in a shelterless winter, had called them torrogs, which he said were pale bony things that ate the dead, and Rugo smiled with a wryness that was sour in his mouth.

But little use in trying here. He turned to go.

"You!"

He turned back to face the tall man who stood in the door. The

man held a rifle, and his long face was clamped tight. Behind him peeked a red-headed boy, maybe thirteen years old, a cub with the same narrow eyes as his father.

"What's the idea of coming in here?" asked the man. His voice was like the grating of iron.

"Please, sir," said Rugo, "I am hungry. I thought if I could do some work, or if you had any scraps—"

"So now it's begging, eh?" demanded Whately. "Don't you know that's against the law? You could be put in jail. By heaven, you ought to be! Public nuisance, that's all you are."

"I only wanted work," said Rugo.

"So you come in and frighten my wife? You know there's nothing here for a savage to do. Can you run a tractor? Can you repair a generator? Can you even eat without slobbering it on the ground?" Whately spat. "You're a squatter on somebody else's land, and you know it. If I owned that property you'd be out on your worthless butt so fast you wouldn't know which end was up."

"Be glad you're alive! When I think of what you murdering slimy monsters did— Forty years! Forty years, crammed in stinking space-ships, cutting themselves off from Earth and all the human race, dying without seeing ground, fighting every foot of all the light-years, to get to Tau Ceti—and then you said the Earthmen couldn't stay! Then you came and burned their homes and butchered women and children! The planet's well rid of you, all the scum of you, and it's a wonder somebody doesn't take a gun and clear off the last of the garbage." He half lifted his weapon.

It was no use explaining, thought Rugo. Maybe there really had been a misunderstanding, as his grandfather had claimed, maybe the old counselors had thought the first explorers were only asking if more like them could come and had not expected settlers when they gave permission—or maybe, realizing that the Strangers would be too strong, they had decided to break their word and fight to hold their planet.

But what use now? The Strangers had won the war, with guns and bombs and a plague virus that went like a scythe through the natives; they had hunted the few immunes down like animals, and now he was the last of his kind in all the world and it was too late to explain.

"Sic 'im, Shep!" cried the boy. "Sic 'im! Go get 'im!"

The dog barked in closer, rushing and retreating, trying to work its cowardice into rage.

"Shut up, Sam," said Whately to his son. Then to Rugo, "Get!"

"I will leave," said Rugo. He tried to stop the trembling that shuddered in him, the nerve-wrenching fear of what the gun could spit. He was not afraid to die, he thought sickly, he would welcome the darkness when it came—but his life was so deep-seated, he would live and live and live while the slugs tore into him. He might take hours to die.

"I will be on my way, sir," he said.

"No, you won't," snapped Whately. "I won't have you going down to the village and scaring little kids there. Back where you came from!"

"But, sir—please—"

"Get!" The gun pointed at him, he looked down the muzzle and turned and went out the gate. Whately waved him to the left, back down the road.

The dog charged in and sank its teeth in an ankle where the scales had fallen away. He screamed with the pain of it and began to run, slowly and heavily, weaving in his course. The boy Sam laughed and followed him.

"Nyaah, nyaah, nyaah, ugly ol' troll, crawl back down in yuhr dirty ol' hole!"

After a while there were other children, come from the neighboring farms in that timeless blur of running and raw lungs and thudding heart and howling, thundering noise. They followed him, and their dogs barked, and the flung stones rattled off his sides with little swords where they struck.

"Nyaah, nyaah, nyaah, ugly ol' troll, crawl back down in yuhr dirty ol' hole!"

"Please," he whispered. "Please."

When he came to the old trail he hardly saw it. The road danced in a blinding glimmer of heat and dust, the world was tipping and whirling about him, and the clamor in his ears drowned out their shrilling. They danced around him, sure of their immunity, sure of the pain and the weakness and the loneliness that whimpered in his throat, and the dogs yammered and rushed in and nipped his tail and his swollen legs.

Presently he couldn't go on. The hillside was too steep, there was no will left to drive his muscles. He sat down, pulling in knees and tail, hiding his head in his arms, hardly aware in the hot, roaring,

whirling blindness that they stoned him and pummeled him and screamed at him.

*Night and rain and the west wind crying in high trees, a cool wet softness of grass and the wavering little fire, the grave eyes of my father and the dear lost face of my mother— Out of the night and the rainy wind and the forest they hewed down, out of the years and the blurring memories and the shadowland of dreams, come to me, mother, come to me and take me in your arms and carry me home.*

After a while they grew tired of it and went away, some turning back and some wandering higher up into the hills after berries. Rugo sat unmoving, buried in himself, letting a measure of strength and the awareness of his pain seep back.

He burned and pulsed, jagged bolts shot through his nerves, his throat was too dry for swallowing and the hunger was like a wild animal deep in his belly. And overhead the sun swam in a haze of heat, pouring it down over him, filling the air with an incandescence of arid light.

After still a longer time, he opened his eyes. The lids felt raw and sandy, vision wavered as if the heat-shimmer had entered his brain. There was a man who stood watching him.

Rugo shrank back, lifting a hand before his face. But the man stood quietly, puffing away on a battered old pipe. He was shabbily dressed and there was a rolled bundle on his shoulders.

"Had a pretty rough session there, didn't you, old-timer?" he asked. His voice was soft. "Here." He bent a lanky frame over the crouching native. "Here, you need a drink."

Rugo lifted the canteen to his lips and gulped till it was empty. The man looked him over. "You're not too banged up," he decided. "Just cuts and abrasions; you trolls always were a tough breed. I'll give you some aneurine, though."

He fished a tube of yellow salve out of one pocket and smeared it on the wounds. The hurt eased, faded to a warm tingle, and Rugo sighed.

"You are very kind, sir," he said unsurely.

"Nah. I wanted to see you anyway. How you feel now? Better?"

Rugo nodded, slowly, trying to stop the shivers which still ran in him. "I am well, sir," he said.

"Don't 'sir' me. Too many people'd laugh themselves sick to hear it. What was your trouble, anyway?"

"I—I wanted food, sir—pardon me. I w-wanted food. But they

—he—told me to go back. Then the dogs came, and the young ones—”

“Kids can be pretty gruesome little monsters at times, all right. Can you walk, old fella? I’d like to find some shade.”

Rugo pulled himself to his feet. It was easier than he had thought it would be. “Please, if you will be so kind, I know a place with trees—”

The man swore, softly and imaginatively. “So that’s what they’ve done. Not content with blotting out a whole race, they have to take the guts from the last one left. Look, you, I’m Manuel Jones, and you’ll speak to me as one free bum to another or not at all. Now let’s find your trees.”

They went up the trail without speaking much, though the man whistled a dirty song to himself, and crossed the brook and came to the thicket. When Rugo lay down in the light-speckled shade it was as if he had been born again. He sighed and let his body relax, flowing into the ground, drawing of its old strength.

The human started a fire and opened some cans in his pack and threw their contents into a small kettle. Rugo watched hungrily, hoping he would give him a little, ashamed and angry with himself for the way his stomach rumbled. Manuel Jones squatted under a tree, shoved his hat off his forehead, and got his pipe going afresh.

Blue eyes in a weatherbeaten face watched Rugo with steadiness and no hate nor fear. “I’ve been looking forward to seeing you,” he said. “I wanted to meet the last member of a race which could build the Temple of Otheii.”

“What is that?” asked Rugo.

“You don’t *know*?”

“No, sir—I mean, pardon me, no, Mr. Jones—”

“Manuel. And don’t you forget it.”

“No, I was born while the Strangers were hunting the last of us—Manuel. We were always fleeing. I was only a few years old when my mother was killed. I met the last other Gunnur—member of my race—when I was only about twenty. That was almost two hundred years ago. Since then I have been the last.”

“God,” whispered Manuel. “God, what a race of free-wheeling devils we are!”

“You were stronger,” said Rugo. “And anyway it is very long ago now. Those who did it are dead. Some humans have been good to me. One of them saved my life; he got the others to let me live. And some of the rest have been kind.”



"Funny sort of kindness, I'd say." Manuel shrugged. "But as you put it, Rugo, it's too late now."

He drew heavily on his pipe. "Still, you had a great civilization. It wasn't technically minded like ours, it wasn't human or fully understandable to humans, but it had its own greatness. Oh, it was a bloody crime to slaughter you, and we'll have to answer for it some day."

"I am old," said Rugo. "I am too old to hate."

"But not too old to be lonesome, eh?" Manuel's smile was lopsided. He fell into silence, puffing blue clouds into the blaze of air.

Presently he went on, thoughtfully, "Of course, one can understand the humans. They were the poor and the disinherited of our land-hungry Earth, they came forty years over empty space with all their hopes, giving their lives to the ships so their children might land—and then your council forbade it. They *couldn't* return, and man never was too nice about his methods when need drove him. They were lonely and scared, and your hulking horrible appearance made it worse. So they fought. But they needn't have been so thorough about it. That was sheer hellishness."

"It does not matter," said Rugo. "It was long ago."

They sat for a while in silence, huddled under the shade against the white flame of sunlight, until the food was ready.

"Ah." Manuel reached gratefully for his eating utensils. "It's not too good, beans and stuff, and I haven't an extra plate. Mind just reaching into the kettle?"

"I—I— It is not needful," mumbled Rugo, suddenly shy again.

"The devil it isn't! Help yourself, old-timer, plenty for all."

The smell of food filled Rugo's nostrils, he could feel his mouth going wet and his stomach screaming at him. And the Stranger really seemed to mean it. Slowly, he dipped his hands into the vessel and brought them out full and ate with the ungraceful manners of his people.

Afterward they lay back, stretching and sighing and letting the faint breeze blow over them. There hadn't been much for one of Rugo's size, but he had emptied the kettle and was more full than he had been for longer than he could well recall.

"I am afraid this meal used all your supplies," he said clumsily.

"No matter," yawned Manuel. "I was damn sick of beans anyway. Meant to lift a chicken tonight."

"You are not from these parts," said Rugo. There was a thawing

within him. Here was someone who seemed to expect nothing more than friendship. You could lie in the shade beside him and watch a lone shred of cloud drift over the hot blue sky and let every nerve and muscle go easy. You felt the fullness of your stomach, and you lolled on the grass, and idle words went from one to another, and that was all there was and it was enough.

"You are not a plain tramp," he added thoughtfully.

"Maybe not," said Manuel. "I taught school a good many years ago, in Cetusport. Got into a bit of trouble and had to hit the road and liked it well enough not to settle down anywhere since. Hobo, hunter, traveler to any place that sounds interesting—it's a big world and there's enough in it for a lifetime. I want to get to know this New Terra planet, Rugo. Not that I mean to write a book or any such nonsense. I just want to know it."

He sat up on one elbow. "That's why I came to see you," he said. "You're part of the old world, the last part of it except for empty ruins and a few torn pages in museums. But I have a notion that your race will always haunt us, that no matter how long man is here something of you will enter into him." There was a half mystical look on his lean face. He was not the dusty tramp now but something else which Rugo could not recognize.

"The planet was yours before we came," he said, "and it shaped you and you shaped it; and now the landscape which was yours will become part of us, and it'll change us in its own slow and subtle ways. I think that whenever a man camps out alone on New Terra, in the big hills where you hear the night talking up in the trees, I think he'll always remember something. There'll always be a shadow just beyond his fire, a voice in the wind and in the rivers, something in the soil that will enter the bread he eats and the water he drinks, and that will be the lost race which was yours."

"It may be so," said Rugo unsurely. "But we are all gone now. Nothing of ours is left."

"Some day," said Manuel, "the last man is going to face your loneliness. We won't last forever either. Sooner or later age or enemies or our own stupidity or the darkening of the universe will come for us. I hope that the last man can endure life as bravely as you did."

"I was not brave," said Rugo. "I was often afraid. They hurt me, sometimes, and I ran."

"Brave in the way that counts," said Manuel.

They talked for a while longer, and then the human rose. "I've got to go, Rugo," he said. "If I'm going to stay here for a while, I'll

have to go down to the village and get a job of some sort. May I come up again tomorrow and see you?"

Rugo got up with him and wrapped the dignity of a host about his nakedness. "I would be honored," he said gravely.

He stood watching the man go until he was lost to sight down the curve of the trail. Then he sighed a little. Manuel was good, yes, he was the first one in a hundred years who had not hated or feared him, or been overly polite and apologetic, but had simply traded words as one free being to another.

What had he said? "One free bum to another." Yes, Manuel was a good bum.

He would bring food tomorrow, Rugo knew, and this time there would be more said, the comradeship would be wholly easy and the eyes wholly frank. It pained him that he could offer nothing in return.

But wait, maybe he could. The farther hills were thick with berries, some must still be there even this late in the season. Birds and animals and humans couldn't have taken them all, and he knew how to look. Yes, he could bring back a great many berries, that would go well with a meal.

It was a long trip, and his sinews protested at the thought. He grunted and set out, slowly. The sun was wheeling horizonward, but it would be a few hours yet till dark.

He went over the crest of the hill and down the other side. It was hot and quiet, the air shimmered around him, leaves hung limp on the few remaining trees. The summer-dried grass rustled harshly under his feet, rocks rolled aside and skittered down the long slope with a faint click. Beyond, the range stretched into a blue haze of distance. It was lonely up here, but he was used to that and liked it.

Berries—yes, a lot of them clustered around Thunder Falls, where there was always coolness and damp. To be sure, the other pickers knew that as well as he, but they didn't know all the little spots, the slanting rocks and the wet crannies and the sheltering overgrowths of brush. He could bring home enough for a good meal.

He wound down the hillside and up the next. More trees grew here. He was glad of the shade and moved a little faster. Maybe he should pull out of this district altogether. Maybe he would do better in a less thickly settled region, where there might be more people like Manuel. He needed humans, he was too old now to live off the country, but they might be easier to get along with on the frontier.

They weren't such a bad race, the Strangers. They had made war with all the fury that was in them, had wiped out a threat with unnecessary savagery; they still fought and cheated and oppressed each other; they were silly and cruel and they cut down the forests and dug up the earth and turned the rivers dry. But among them were a few like Manuel, and he wondered if his own people had boasted more of that sort than the Strangers did.

Presently he came out on the slope of the highest hill in the region and started climbing it toward Thunder Falls. He could hear the distant roaring of a cataract, half lost in the pounding of his own blood as he fought his aging body slowly up the rocky slant, and in the dance of sunlight he stopped to breathe and tell himself that not far ahead were shadow and mist and a coolness of rushing waters. And when he was ready to come back, the night would be there to walk home with him.

The shouting falls drowned out the voices of the children, nor had he looked for them since he knew they were forbidden to visit this danger spot without adults along. When he topped the stony ridge and stood looking down into the gorge, he saw them just below and his heart stumbled in sickness.

The whole troop was there, with red-haired Sam Whately leading them in a berry hunt up and down the cragged rocks and along the pebbled beach. Rugo stood on the bluff above them, peering down through the fine cold spray and trying to tell his panting body to turn and run before they saw him. Then it was too late; they had spotted his dark form and were crowding closer, scrambling up the bluff with a wicked rain of laughter.

"Looka that!" He heard Sam's voice faintly through the roar and crash of the falls. "Looky who's here! O! Blackie!"

A stone cracked against his ribs. He half turned to go, knowing dully that he could not outrun them. Then he remembered that he had come to gather berries for Manuel Jones, who had called him brave, and a thought came.

He called out in a bass that trembled through the rocks, "Do not do that!"

"Yaah, listen what he says, ha-ha-ha!"

"Leave me alone," cried Rugo, "or I will tell your parents that you were here."

They stopped then, almost up to him, and for a moment only the yapping dogs spoke. Then Sam sneered at him. "Aw, who'd lissen to yuh, ol' troll?"

"I think they will believe me," said Rugo. "But if you do not believe it, try and find out."

They hovered for a moment, unsure, staring at each other. Then Sam said, "Okay, ol' tattletale, okay. But you let us be, see?"

"I will do that," said Rugo, and the hard held breath puffed out of him in a great sigh. He realized how painfully his heart had been fluttering, and weakness was watery in his legs.

They went sullenly back to their berry gathering, and Rugo scrambled down the bluff and took the opposite direction.

They called off the dogs too, and soon he was out of sight of them.

The gorge walls rose high and steep on either side of the falls. Here the river ran fast, green and boiling white, cold and loud as it sprang over the edge in a veil of rainbowed mist. Its noise filled the air, rang between the crags and hooted in the water-hollowed caves. The vibrations of the toppling stream shivered unceasingly through the ground. It was cool and wet here, and there was always a wind blowing down the length of the ravine. The fall wasn't high, only about twenty feet, but the river thundered down it with brawling violence and below the cataract it was deep and fast and full of rocks and whirlpools.

Plants were scattered between the stones, small bushes and a few slender trees. Rugo found some big tsga leaves and twisted them together into a good-sized bag as his mother had taught him, and started hunting. The berries grew on low, round-leafed bushes that clustered under rocks and taller plants, wherever they could find shelter, and it was something of an art to locate them easily. Rugo had had many decades of practice.

It was peaceful work. He felt his heart and lungs slowing, content and restfulness stole over him. So had he gone with his mother, often and often in the time that was clearer to him than all the blurred years between, and it was as if she walked beside him now and showed him where to look and smiled when he turned over a bush and found the little blue spheres. He was gathering food for his friend, and that was good.

After some time, he grew aware that a couple of the children had left the main group and were following him, a small boy and girl tagging at a discreet distance and saying nothing. He turned and stared at them, wondering if they meant to attack him after all, and they looked shyly away.

"You sure find a lot of them, Mister Troll," said the boy at last, timidly.

"They grow here," grunted Rugo with unease.

"I'm sorry they was so mean to you," said the girl. "Me and Tommy wasn't there or we wouldn't of let them."

Rugo couldn't remember if they had been with the pack that morning or not. It didn't matter. They were only being friendly in the hope he would show them where to find the berries.

Still, no few of the Stranger cubs had liked him in the past, those who were too old to be frightened into screaming fits by his appearance and too young to be drilled into prejudice, and he had been fond of them in turn. And whatever the reason of these two, they were speaking nicely.

"My dad said the other day he thought he could get you to do some work for him," said the boy. "He'd pay you good."

"Who is your father?" asked Rugo uncertainly.

"He's Mr. Jim Stackman."

Yes, Stackman had never been anything but pleasant, in the somewhat strained and awkward manner of humans. They felt guilty for what their grandparents had done, as if that could change matters. But it was something. Most humans were pretty decent; their main fault was the way they stood by when others of their race did evil, stood by and said nothing and felt embarrassed.

"Mr. Whately won't let me go down there," said Rugo.

"Oh, him!" said the boy with elaborate scorn. "My dad'll take care of old Sourpuss Whately."

"I don't like Sam Whately neither," said the girl. "He's mean, like his old man."

"Why do you do as he says, then?" asked Rugo.

The boy looked uncomfortable. "He's bigger'n the rest of us," he muttered.

Yes, that was the way of humans, and it wasn't really their fault that the Manuel Joneses were so few among them. They suffered more for it than anyone else, probably.

"Here is a nice berry bush," said Rugo. "You can pick it if you want to."

He sat down on a mossy bank, watching them eat, thinking that maybe things had changed today. Maybe he wouldn't need to move away after all.

The girl came and sat down beside him. "Can you tell me a story, Mister Troll?" she asked.

"H'm?" Rugo was startled out of his reverie.

"My daddy says an old-timer like you must know lots of things," she said.

Why, yes, thought Rugo, he did know a good deal, but it wasn't the sort of tale you could give children. They didn't know hunger and loneliness and shuddering winter cold, weakness and pain and the slow grinding out of hope, and he didn't want them ever to know it. But, well, he could remember a few things besides. His father had told him stories of what had once been, and—

*Your race will always haunt us, no matter how long man is here something of you will enter into him. . . . There'll always be a shadow just beyond the fire, a voice in the wind and in the rivers, something in the soil that will enter the bread he eats and the water he drinks, and that will be the lost race which was yours.*

"Why, yes," he said slowly. "I think so."

The boy came and sat beside the girl, and they watched him with large eyes. He leaned back against the bank and fumbled around in his mind.

"A long time ago," he said, "before people had come to New Terra, there were trolls like me living here. We built houses and farms, and we had our songs and our stories just like you do. So I can tell you a little bit about that, and maybe some day when you are grown up and have children of your own you can tell them."

"Sure," said the boy.

"Well," said Rugo, "there was once a troll king named Utorri who lived in the Western Dales, not far from the sea. He lived in a big castle with towers reaching up so they nearly scraped the stars, and the wind was always blowing around the towers and ringing the bells. Even when the trolls were asleep they could hear the shivering of the bells. And it was a rich castle, whose doors always stood open to any wayfarers, and each night there was a feast where all the great trolls met and music sounded and the heroes told of their wanderings—"

"Hey, look!"

The children's heads turned, and Rugo's annoyed glance followed theirs. The sun was low now, its rays were long and slanting and touched the hair of Sam Whately with fire where he stood. He had climbed up on the highest crag above the falls and balanced swaying on the narrow perch, laughing. The laughter drifted down through the boom of waters, faint and clear in the evening.

"Gee, he shouldn't," said the little girl.

"I'm the king of the mountain!"

"Young fool," grumbled Rugo.

"I'm the king of the mountain!"

"Sam, come down—" The child's voice was almost lost in thunder.

He laughed again and crouched, feeling with his hands along the rough stone for a way back. Rugo stiffened, remembering how slippery the rocks were and how the river hungered.

The boy started down, and lost his hold and toppled.

Rugo had a glimpse of the red head as it rose over the foaming green. Then it was gone, snuffed like a torch as the river sucked it under.

Rugo started to his feet, yelling, remembering that even now he had the strength of many humans and that a man had called him brave. Some dim corner of his mind told him to wait, to stop and think, and he ran to the shore with the frantic knowledge that if he did consider the matter wisely he would never go in.

The water was cold around him, it sank fangs of cold into his body and he cried out with the pain.

Sam's head appeared briefly at the foot of the cataract, whirling downstream. Rugo's feet lost bottom and he struck out, feeling the current grab him and yank him from shore.

Swimming, whipping downstream, he shook the water from his eyes and gasped and looked wildly around. Yes, there came Sam, a little above him, swimming with mindless reflex.

The slight body crashed against his shoulder. Almost, the river had its way, then he got a clutch on the arm and his legs and tail and free hand were working.

They whirled on down the stream and he was deaf and blind and the strength was spilling from him like blood from an open wound.

There was a rock ahead. Dimly he saw it through the cruel blaze of sunlight, a broad flat stone rearing above a foam of water. He flailed, striving for it, sobbing the wind into his empty lungs, and they hit with a shock that exploded in his bones.

Wildly he grabbed at the smooth surface, groping for a handhold. One arm lifted Sam Whately's feebly stirring body out, fairly tossed it on top of the rock, and then the river had him again.

The boy hadn't breathed too much water, thought Rugo in his darkening brain. He could lie there till a flying-thing from the village picked him up. *Only—why did I save him? Why did I save him? He stoned me, and now I'll never be able to give Manuel those*



*berries. I'll never finish the story of King Utorri and his heroes.*

The water was cool and green around him as he sank. He wondered if his mother would come for him.

A few miles farther down, the river flows broad and quiet between gentle banks. Trees grow there, and the last sunlight streams through their leaves to glisten on the surface. This is down in the valley, where the homes of man are built.

## PART

# 6

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## LITTLE SUPERMAN, WHAT NOW?

"I TEACH YOU *the superman*. Man is something which shall be surpassed." Thus spake Nietzsche; but how will man feel about being surpassed? Certainly he is unlikely to allow himself to be labelled an Extinct Type without putting up a desperate fight. And how does a superchild, member of a very special sort of minority, handle the all but insoluble problem of adjustment to the "normal" society into which he is born?

Both Katherine MacLean's *The Origin of the Species* and Wilmar H. Shiras' *In Hiding* examine, from different angles, the effects of purely societal pressures upon the minds and personalities of young mutant-supermen. Miss MacLean makes her point through deft use of analogy. Mrs. Shiras brings her gifted youngsters right on stage, thus boldly facing up to a literary dilemma that has snagged many a writer. It is one thing to claim that your characters are truly super-human, but quite another thing to make your readers believe it. Perhaps only a writer can really appreciate just how difficult is a story of this type; but any reader, fortunately, can enjoy it. (*In Hiding*, incidentally, is only the first portion of a remarkable book dealing with these Children of the Atom, recently published by The Gnome Press.)



## THE ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES

by Katherine MacLean

May 10, 1953; 2:30 A.M.

DEAR JACK:

Some acts seem to change the meaning of the universe. Yesterday I killed.

It's a poor way to begin a letter, I admit. I'm writing this down because I have to tell someone, *now*; because I can't keep it to myself, and no one else is awake. Looking out the window, I can see the empty streets of our little suburb lying silvered in the moonlight. I can't wake anyone at this hour to talk to him, though I desperately want to hear a human voice. This letter is the next best thing.

You don't know much about my work, Jack, only that I am a neurosurgeon. We play cards together, and argue politics, and you and your wife invite me to theater parties and try to marry me off to pretty girls—but I don't think I've ever told you exactly what I do.

I operate on brains.

I take out parts of people's brains; that is my profession.

I am well known in my field, for I do what other neurosurgeons cannot do. At first it was just small tumors that I took out, and then I progressed to removing smaller and smaller tumors that others could not find, and injured tissue that others could not locate, the tiny scars of old concussions and birth injuries that send electric pulsations out of phase with the waves of the rest of the brain, and so cause seizures—what is called epilepsy.

I open up their skulls—it's all very mechanical, Jack, mere carpentry. The patient is conscious, but reassured and calm, knowing that he won't feel anything. His head is shaved and screened off with towels so he can't see what I am doing. I cut the scalp in three sides of a wide square and fold the skin back from the bone. Then I take a wide drill and drill four holes through the thick skull bone, one at each corner of the square, then take a hand drill with a small rotary saw blade and run the buzzing blade slowly from one hole to another. It is a trap door of bone now. An assistant pries it

up, turns it back. (There is almost no blood and, afterwards, only a few thin scars to show for it.)

I can see the brain now through a thin tough lining of dura. I cut the dura with scissors and fold it back like a page of a book. And there it is, the living brain, grey and quivering slightly with the throbbing of the few blood vessels branching on its surface.

I have to locate the spot that is causing the trouble, and rapidly now. It is difficult to see anything in the curves and folds of soft grey. An assistant hands me an electrode that gives tiny currents of electricity, a current so small that if it touches the scar I am searching for it will not set off a seizure, but the patient will recognize the sensation of one coming, the odd emotion, the dizziness and distance and "aura" that warns a second before an attack and say, "There it is." I touch the pencil electrode here and there over the grey surface, the tiny current here bringing alive an old memory in the patient's mind, here making one of his fingers twitch, here bringing a sensation of watching something green spinning before his eyes.

"There it is. That felt like it. Getting warmer, Doc," he says, and I bend closer, touching the electrode in narrowing circles, and then I see it, a tiny section of grey that is different and rougher, a twisting of tiny blood vessels in it that makes a pinkness and wrong color.

I take the scar out gently, using a little sucking tube that wiffles air into itself with a sighing noise and pulls the soft detachable grey layer up into itself, leaving a small section of unthinking, unelectrical, passive white shining through from inside. . . .

The operation is expensive, tremendously so. The hospital will pay only part. The patient and his family are poor—they always are; it is difficult for a man who has spasms to hold a job, and then there's the cost of the accidents and hurts that come from the inevitable falling when the seizures strike.

So I often stand with the insufflator hissing in my hand for one minute more, trying to think of something else I can do, some other way—but time is precious. I bend forward again and begin. The grey delicate layers of thought and of perceptive feeling, the layers that mean sensitivity with the hands and skill with the fingers go easily up into the little tube like soft, damp fluff and leave a widening circle of white.

It is the left hemisphere I make useless, the left hemisphere that controls feeling and thinking and skills in right-handed people. This patient was right-handed and left-brained; now he will have to be

left-handed, and learn now to think and feel and regain his old skills as best he can with the right half-brain that remains. He is middle-aged; it will be hard to change and begin again. But it is better perhaps than falling down in fits and cracking his head against the pavement until he has no brain at all.

I have a reputation. They say that I know more about the human brain than any man who has ever lived. They have heard of my skill in London and Prague and Paris and Moscow and New York, and surgeons come from all these places to watch me operate.

From these operations, from looking at the human brain, that marvelous instrument exposed before me almost daily, from touching it gently with electricity and hearing the patients report what odd sensations, what odd thoughts and memories come, I have learned much. . . .

I do other kinds of operations, too. At first I operated only on epileptics. But it is not just scars that are damaging to the brain. Sometimes thoughts and memories make their own kind of scars, and do their own kind of damage. Having an occasional fit and falling down before an auto is not the worst thing that can happen to a man. He could live in an asylum and scream, "open open open," or "hat hat hat," day and night, alone in a cell, helpless in some inside agony no one can reach or soothe.

Experimenting despairingly, neurologists found that the severing frontal sections of the brain—it is known as lobotomy—would cure those scars too. But they cut blindly. Often the operation stopped the screaming and brought peace, but usually a dull animal peace, and sometimes the peace of death.

Because of my knowledge and experience, I was asked to help the best and most precious spirits: the great conductor who had broken down; the author who could only write down the words that strange voices shouted in his mind; the over-worked statesman who could now listen only to imagined whisperings against himself; all the others with great responsibilities who had been broken by trying too hard to fulfill them.

So I began doing this other kind of operation. Because I knew the brain, could study their encephalograph brain-electricity charts and trace the convolutions carefully like a familiar map, I could take out merely that narrow small section that was giving them hurt, and destroy nothing else.

People came from my operations cured and happy, without that

numb animal look that sometimes follows lobotomy. They came out adjusted to life for the first time, not wanting and not missing the things that I had cut away. They were grateful.

But as I operated, I was trying not to think.

For you see, Jack, I knew what I was doing to each brain. I knew what those delicate grey tissue cells were that I removed with the hissing insufflator tube. I knew what part of the human mind and soul I was taking. Sensitivity to the hurts and loves of others . . . dreams and longings and plans for the future . . . the deeper reactions to music and poetry . . . the sensitive adjustment of values and motives to new situations . . . emotional insight . . . creative logic . . .

Always it was those sections which were scarred by experience, sending distortion and agony through the mind.

While I work steadily, efficiently, seemingly calm, the thoughts come, and I cannot stop them.

What kind of life is it that I am adjusting this man to, that he will be most sane and adjusted when the best parts of his mind are taken out?

Society is very old, and custom very ancient, and most of our ways were handed to us from far back in the darkness of time. Can some of it be traced back to herds and packs that were not human? Were not the first men born misfit into a society of apes? If children were born into an asylum and raised only by the inmates, would not they become sincerely "mad" in such surroundings, and think at last that everything around them was natural and right? The texture of tradition is learned in early childhood; it grafts itself onto the mind and seems like instinct, too natural to be consciously noted.

I think of George, the archetype of all the children of fact and legend who have been adopted by the animals. He was raised by wolves; they suckled him and were friendly and tolerant, like dogs, and they fed him through the long period of his babyhood.

The first thing for him to learn was to survive. After that, his developing human mind should have been free to continue learning and discovering until he demonstrated his innate human superiority. That is what you would expect.

But first he had to learn to be strong and cunning as a successful wolf. So all the tremendous skill and capacity for creative learning of the human-child mind was poured into learning the tricks and skills of the wolf way of life.

But he was *not* a wolf. What was natural to them had to be learned painfully by him: to run on four feet instead of on his long

hind legs; to sniff with his nose instead of using his eyes; to repress the natural babbling and baby muttering that was so dangerous in this life; to repress the curiosity of a developing mind that wanted to stop and pick things up with his odd un-wolflike front paws—and thus risk being left behind by the pack and, with his poor, inadequate sense of smell, become lost. He was a misfit and a cripple by the standards of the wild dogs of the woods. They must have been very patient, indeed.

George managed at last to become a self-supporting wolf. But by that time he was an inferiority-complex, not-very-bright wolf, neurotic and trembling and unable to reason or to adjust his behavior (that is the way with extreme neurosis), a wolf who snapped and snarled at the humans who captured him, who howled lonesomely to be let free to return to the cold woods, and who at last died—very much as an animal in a zoo may die of inability to adjust to life in captivity.

If I had been there then, with the techniques I know now, I could have adjusted George. I could have operated and removed the source of his neurosis, and made him a contented, well-adjusted wolf. But a *wolf*, not a man. For it was the human parts of his mind that were misfit, scarred and inhibited and rendered useless by repression, left only as sources of pain and insanity.

And so I think again, as I operate on the man now under my knife: what kind of world is it that I am adjusting him to, that he will be most sane and adjusted when the best parts of his mind are taken out?

Were not the first men born misfit, like George, into a society of apes? They might have wanted nothing more than to be happy, well-adjusted apes. But evolution is ruthless and indifferent to individual cost, and it can't be stopped. The original breed of mankind must have multiplied and spread across the Earth because they learned to get by in the world of apes, making a copy, that—physically weak, neurotic, and mentally crippled as it was—was more efficient than the original. Perhaps if George had been born with more intelligence or even genius, he would have been able to make himself into a leader of wolves, ready to breed a race of wolf-imitations. But then he would have been even more of a misfit—he would have become mad, a lunatic wolf. I think of the chanting, the ritual, the blood sacrifice of primitive man. Mad . . . a lunatic wolf or a lunatic superape, twisted carbon copies, both of them.

And the twistedness perpetuating itself. The young are born with-



out warp, but what happens when they are born into an asylum and taught to behave like the adults there? Neurotic behavior is intolerant of any other way of behaving than its own. What starts as forced mimicry could soon become completely natural to the learning child. Neurotic behavior is rigid, conservative, obsessive and inflexible. Six million years we have had already, gradually working toward sanity, but God, how slowly and with such relapses! And, in all that time, all that our cortex, our new brilliance, has given us is animal conquest of the other animals, and for the rest—neurosis, frustration, and an inhibition that can make the best portions of our minds give us only pain and distortion.

And all I can do to help is to remove parts of the brain.

One in seven of us will break down and be hospitalized at some point of our lives, and perhaps all of us who walk the streets of the world would be happier without the subtle grey cells I take from brains, the layer of brilliance that is given the unbearable cross of concealing itself so that we may learn, painfully, to be good imitation apes, instead of men. We don't know what it is to be human; we have never been allowed.

This is a long letter, but I will get to the point now.

Yesterday I performed an operation that I had been begged to do. It was the parents who came and begged me, for the sake of their twelve-year-old boy. He was feeble-minded. They had been told that he should go to a training home with others like him, yet they fought against fate, they wanted to believe that he could grow to run and laugh and be bright like any other normal boy. They claimed that he had been a *brilliant* baby—perhaps he had sustained a head injury or had a brain tumor, and I must cure him.

I was dubious. All parents seem to think their first baby is brilliant. No operation can cure a child who is naturally feeble-minded.

They grew desperate and told me stories of remarkable things the child had done before it was two years old, but the stories were of things that only the boy's nurse had seen, probably made up by the nurse to please them. I did not believe the stories, but the parents were sensitive and obviously thoughtful, so I told them that if the boy had shown such an obvious change he *might* have sustained a head injury.

They begged me, and they were wealthy, and sincerely, pitifully eager for their son. So for their sake, and for the fees they could offer that would help poorer cases, I did it.

The encephalographs had been abnormal. I was expecting perhaps to find a tumor.

When the cap of bone was off and the rough outline of the boy's brain showed under the thin dura, it looked wrong. I was afraid.

For a half a moment I stood, while a professional entertainer continued to hold the boy's sleepy attention by making shadow pictures with his hands. I stood there, and without any move that might betray my reaction to the assisting doctors, I reproached myself bitterly for spoiling the pleasure of perfect health the boy at least had had by giving him metal plates in his head where the safe, solid bone should be. Even if I closed it up immediately without going further. . . . The outline of the surface of his brain looked wrong, different, unworkable. The boy was naturally feeble-minded, I thought, and was glad that the movie cameras were not watching this operation, glad that I had decided not to use this operation on a "healthy, contented child" as an example for others of what to do. Now there would be no record of a mistake.

He had been happy the way he was. I reached for an instrument to begin closing the opening, admitting the mistake.

But then the shape of the boy's brain began to look clearer to me under the obscuring layer, the differences having a form of their own, assuming a shape I could not quite believe.

I turned from the instrument I had been reaching for, took one that would cut the dura, cut it and turned it back.

He had not been happy!

God knows what thoughts were passing through that living, functioning brain as I looked down at it. Thoughts far past any following of mine. Perhaps his thinking had withdrawn from reality in order that reality could have no influence on the body it inhabited; or perhaps he was conscious and pretending, behaving like a two-year-old infant because it was too incredibly difficult to behave just like a twelve-year-old boy. He probably understood where he was and what was happening and apparently did not care.

From the central cleft, like wings just beginning to grow, an extra pair of lobes folded back and down over the surface—lobes like nothing I had ever seen before! They were alive and operating—I had seen their electrical pattern recorded by the electroencephalograph, had noticed the odd pattern without understanding it. The lobes were *thinking*. The brain was the brain of a different species, one beyond genius!

I had to decide what to do.

The tray of instruments was waiting, and on it lay the wire-edged cauterizing knives that were used to take out a tumor.

I had not hesitated long enough for the observers and students around me to wonder why I had stopped. I don't think any of them remember clearly what they saw or understand it.

I am a surgeon; my habit and training is to remove that which is causing the trouble. I must have moved rapidly (the observers complimented me afterward on the unusual speed and sureness of the operation), but to me those moments lasted forever. I can remember the horror, and the thought as I touched it—*It knows what I am doing!*

Dawn is beginning to grey the sky, and a bird has let out a few sleepy twitters and dozed off again. Animals are so *happy*, Jack, so well-adjusted to their environment.

The boy is normal now, the way his parents wanted him to be. He is an average twelve-year-old boy, not much better nor much worse than the other boys he'll go to school with, talk with, play baseball with. He'll be all right now, but I can still see the blood and the cut nerves and the strange lobes. And I wish I could sleep.

## IN HIDING

from CHILDREN OF THE ATOM

by Wilmar H. Shiras

**P**ETER WELLES, psychiatrist, eyed the boy thoughtfully. Why had Timothy Paul's teacher sent him for examination?

"I don't know, myself, that there's really anything wrong with Tim," Miss Page had told Dr. Welles. "He seems perfectly normal. He's rather quiet as a rule, doesn't volunteer answers in class or anything of that sort. He gets along well enough with other boys and seems reasonably popular, although he has no special friends. His grades are satisfactory—he gets B faithfully in all his work. But when you've been teaching as long as I have, Peter, you get a feeling about certain ones. There is a tension about him—a look in his eyes sometimes—and he is very absentminded."

"What would your guess be?" Welles had asked. Sometimes these hunches were very valuable. Miss Page had taught school for thirty-odd years; she had been Peter's teacher in the past, and he thought highly of her opinion.

"I ought not to say," she answered. "There's nothing to go on—yet. But he might be starting something, and if it could be headed off—"

"Physicians are often called before the symptoms are sufficiently marked for the doctor to be able to see them," said Welles. "A patient, or the mother of a child, or any practiced observer, can often see that something is going to be wrong. But it's hard for the doctor in such cases. Tell me what you think I should look for."

"You won't pay too much attention to me? It's just what occurred to me, Peter; I know I'm not a trained psychiatrist. But it could be delusions of grandeur. Or it could be a withdrawing from the society of others. I always have to speak to him twice to get his attention in class—and he has no real chums."

Welles had agreed to see what he could find, and promised not to be too much influenced by what Miss Page herself called "an old woman's notions."

Timothy, when he presented himself for examination, seemed like an ordinary boy. He was perhaps a little small for his age, he had big dark eyes and close-cropped dark curls, thin sensitive fingers and—yes, a decided air of tension. But many boys were nervous on their first visit to the—psychiatrist. Peter often wished that he was able to concentrate on one or two schools, and spend a day a week or so getting acquainted with all the youngsters.

In response to Welles' preliminary questioning, Tim replied in a clear, low voice, politely and without wasting words. He was thirteen years old, and lived with his grandparents. His mother and father had died when he was a baby, and he did not remember them. He said that he was happy at home, and that he liked school "pretty well," that he liked to play with other boys. He named several boys when asked who his friends were.

"What lessons do you like at school?"

Tim hesitated, then said: "English, and arithmetic . . . and history . . . and geography," he finished thoughtfully. Then he looked up, and there was something odd in the glance.

"What do you like to do for fun?"

"Read, and play games."

"What games?"

"Ball games . . . and marbles . . . and things like that. I like to play with other boys," he added, after a barely perceptible pause, "anything they play."

"Do they play at your house?"

"No; we play on the school grounds. My grandmother doesn't like noise."

Was that the reason? When a quiet boy offers explanations, they may not be the right ones.

"What do you like to read?"

But about his reading Timothy was vague. He liked, he said, to read "boys' books," but could not name any.

Welles gave the boy the usual intelligence tests. Tim seemed willing, but his replies were slow in coming. *Perhaps*, Welles thought, I'm imagining this, but he is too careful—too *cautious*. Without taking time to figure exactly, Welles knew what Tim's I.Q. would be—about 120.

"What do you do outside of school?" asked the psychiatrist.

"I play with the other boys. After supper, I study my lessons."

"What did you do yesterday?"

"We played ball on the school playground."

Welles waited a while to see whether Tim would say anything of his own accord. The seconds stretched into minutes.

"Is that all?" said the boy finally. "May I go now?"

"No; there's one more test I'd like to give you today. A game, really. How's your imagination?"

"I don't know."

"Cracks on the ceiling—like those over there—do they look like anything to you? Faces, animals, or anything?"

Tim looked.

"Sometimes. And clouds, too. Bob saw a cloud last week that was like a hippo." Again the last sentence sounded like something tacked on at the last moment, a careful addition made for a reason.

Welles got out the Rorschach cards. But at the sight of them, his patient's tension increased, his wariness became unmistakably evident. The first time they went through the cards, the boy could scarcely be persuaded to say anything but, "I don't know."

"You can do better than this," said Welles. "We're going through them again. If you don't see anything in these pictures, I'll have to mark you a failure," he explained. "That won't do. You did all right on the other things. And maybe next time we'll do a game you'll like better."

"I don't feel like playing this game now. Can't we do it again next time?"

"May as well get it done now. It's not only a game, you know, Tim; it's a test. Try harder, and be a good sport."

So Tim, this time, told what he saw in the ink blots. They went through the cards slowly, and the test showed Tim's fear, and that there was something he was hiding; it showed his caution, a lack of trust, and an unnaturally high emotional self-control.

Miss Page had been right; the boy needed help.

"Now," said Welles cheerfully, "that's all over. We'll just run through them again quickly and I'll tell you what other people have seen in them."

A flash of genuine interest appeared on the boy's face for a moment.

Welles went through the cards slowly, seeing that Tim was attentive to every word. When he first said, "And some see what you saw here," the boy's relief was evident. Tim began to relax, and even to volunteer some remarks. When they had finished he ventured to ask a question.

"Dr. Welles, could you tell me the name of this test?"

"It's sometimes called the Rorschach test, after the man who worked it out."

"Would you mind spelling that?"

Welles spelled it, and added: "Sometimes it's called the ink-blot test."

Tim gave a start of surprise, and then relaxed again with a visible effort.

"What's the matter? You jumped."

"Nothing."

"Oh, come on! Let's have it," and Welles waited.

"Only that I thought about the ink-pool in the Kipling stories," said Tim, after a minute's reflection. "This is different."

"Yes, very different," laughed Welles. "I've never tried that. Would you like to?"

"Oh, no, sir," cried Tim earnestly.

"You're a little jumpy today," said Welles. "We've time for some more talk, if you are not too tired."

"No, I'm not very tired," said the boy warily.

Welles went to a drawer and chose a hypodermic needle. It wasn't usual, but perhaps—"I'll just give you a little shot to relax your nerves, shall I? Then we'd get on better."

When he turned around, the stark terror on the child's face stopped Welles in his tracks.

"Oh, no! Don't! Please, please, don't!"

Welles replaced the needle and shut the drawer before he said a word.

"I won't," he said, quietly. "I didn't know you didn't like shots. I won't give you any, Tim."

The boy, fighting for self-control, gulped and said nothing.

"It's all right," said Welles, lighting a cigarette and pretending to watch the smoke rise. Anything rather than appear to be watching the badly shaken small boy shivering in the chair opposite him. "Sorry. You didn't tell me about the things you don't like, the things you're afraid of."

The words hung in the silence.

"Yes," said Timothy slowly. "I'm afraid of shots. I hate needles. It's just one of those things." He tried to smile.

"We'll do without them, then. You've passed all the tests, Tim, and I'd like to walk home with you and tell your grandmother about it. Is that all right with you?"

"Yes, sir."

"We'll stop for something to eat," Welles went on, opening the door for his patient. "Ice cream, or a hot dog."

They went out together.

Timothy Paul's grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Davis, lived in a large old-fashioned house that spelled money and position. The grounds were large, fenced, and bordered with shrubbery. Inside the house there was little that was new, everything was well-kept. Timothy led the psychiatrist to Mr. Davis's library, and then went in search of his grandmother.

When Welles saw Mrs. Davis, he thought he had some of the explanation. Some grandmothers are easy-going, jolly, comparatively young. This grandmother was, as it soon became apparent, quite different.

"Yes, Timothy is a pretty good boy," she said, smiling on her grandson. "We have always been strict with him, Dr. Welles, but I believe it pays. Even when he was a mere baby, we tried to teach him right ways. For example, when he was barely three I read him some little stories. And a few days later he was trying to tell us, if you will believe it, that he could read! Perhaps he was too young to know the nature of a lie, but I felt it my duty to make him understand. When he insisted, I spanked him. The child had a remark-

able memory, and perhaps he thought that was all there was to reading. Well! I don't mean to brag of my brutality," said Mrs. Davis, with a charming smile. "I assure you, Dr. Welles, it was a painful experience for me. We've had very little occasion for punishments. Timothy is a good boy."

Welles murmured that he was sure of it.

"Timothy, you may deliver your papers now," said Mrs. Davis. "I am sure Dr. Welles will excuse you." And she settled herself for a good long talk about her grandson.

Timothy, it seemed, was the apple of her eye. He was a quiet boy, an obedient boy, and a bright boy.

"We have our rules, of course. I have never allowed Timothy to forget that children should be seen and not heard, as the good old-fashioned saying is. When he first learned to turn somersaults, when he was three or four years old, he kept coming to me and saying, 'Grandmother, see me!' I simply had to be firm with him. 'Timothy,' I said, 'let us have no more of this! It is simply showing off. If it amuses you to turn somersaults, well and good. But it doesn't amuse me to watch you endlessly doing it. Play if you like, but do not demand admiration.'"

"Did you never play with him?"

"Certainly I played with him. And it was a pleasure to me also. We—Mr. Davis and I—taught him a great many games, and many kinds of handicraft. We read stories to him and taught him rhymes and songs. I took a special course in kindergarten craft, to amuse the child—and I must admit that it amused me also!" added Tim's grandmother, smiling reminiscently. "We made houses of toothpicks, with balls of clay at the corners. His grandfather took him for walks and drives. We no longer have a car, since my husband's sight has begun to fail him slightly, so now the garage is Timothy's workshop. We had windows cut in it, and a door, and nailed the large doors shut."

It soon became clear that Tim's life was not all strictures by any means. He had a workshop of his own, and upstairs beside his bedroom was his own library and study.

"He keeps his books and treasures there," said his grandmother, "his own little radio, and his schoolbooks, and his typewriter. When he was only seven years old, he asked us for a typewriter. But he is a careful child, Dr. Welles, not at all destructive, and I had read that in many schools they make use of typewriters in teaching young children to read and write and to spell. The words look the



same as in printed books, you see; and less muscular effort is involved. So his grandfather got him a very nice noiseless typewriter, and he loved it dearly. I often hear it purring away as I pass through the hall. Timothy keeps his own rooms in good order, and his shop also. It is his own wish. You know how boys are—they do not wish others to meddle with their belongings. ‘Very well, Timothy,’ I told him, ‘if a glance shows me that you can do it yourself properly, nobody will go into your rooms; but they must be kept neat.’ And he has done so for several years. A very neat boy, Timothy.”

“Timothy didn’t mention his paper route,” remarked Welles. “He said only that he plays with other boys after school.”

“Oh, but he does,” said Mrs. Davis. “He plays until five o’clock, and then he delivers his papers. If he is late, his grandfather walks down and calls him. The school is not very far from here, and Mr. Davis frequently walks down and watches the boys at their play. The paper route is Timothy’s way of earning money to feed his cats. Do you care for cats, Dr. Welles?”

“Yes, I like cats very much,” said the psychiatrist. “Many boys like dogs better.”

“Timothy had a dog when he was a baby—a collie.” Her eyes grew moist. “We all loved Ruff dearly. But I am no longer young, and the care and training of a dog is difficult. Timothy is at school or at the Boy Scout camp or something of the sort a great part of the time, and I thought it best that he should not have another dog. But you wanted to know about our cats, Dr. Welles. I raise Siamese cats.”

“Interesting pets,” said Welles cordially. “My aunt raised them at one time.”

“Timothy is very fond of them. But three years ago he asked me if he could have a pair of black Persians. At first I thought not; but we like to please the child, and he promised to build their cages himself. He had taken a course in carpentry at vacation school. So he was allowed to have a pair of beautiful black Persians. But the very first litter turned out to be short-haired, and Timothy confessed that he had mated his queen to my Siamese tom, to see what would happen. Worse yet, he had mated his tom to one of my Siamese queens. I really was tempted to punish him. But, after all, I could see that he was curious as to the outcome of such crossbreeding. Of course I said the kittens must be destroyed. The second litter was exactly like the first—all black, with short hair. But you know what children are.

Timothy begged me to let them live, and they were his first kittens. Three in one litter, two in the other. He might keep them, I said, if he would take full care of them and be responsible for all the expense. He mowed lawns and ran errands and made little footstools and bookcases to sell, and did all sorts of things, and probably used his allowance, too. But he kept the kittens and has a whole row of cages in the yard beside his workshop."

"And their offspring?" inquired Welles, who could not see what all this had to do with the main question, but was willing to listen to anything that might lead to information.

"Some of the kittens appear to be pure Persian, and others pure Siamese. These he insisted on keeping, although, as I have explained to him, it would be dishonest to sell them, since they are not pure-bred. A good many of the kittens are black short-haired and these we destroy. But enough of cats, Dr. Welles. And I am afraid I am talking too much about my grandson."

"I can understand that you are very proud of him," said Welles.

"I must confess that we are. And he is a bright boy. When he and his grandfather talk together, and with me also, he asks very intelligent questions. We do not encourage him to voice his opinions—I detest the smart-Aleck type of small boy—and yet I believe they would be quite good opinions for a child of his age."

"Has his health always been good?" asked Welles.

"On the whole, very good. I have taught him the value of exercise, play, wholesome food and suitable rest. He has had a few of the usual childish ailments, not seriously. And he never has colds. But, of course, he takes his cold shots twice a year when we do."

"Does he mind the shots?" asked Welles, as casually as he could.

"Not at all. I always say that he, though so young, sets an example I find hard to follow. I still flinch, and really rather dread the ordeal."

Welles looked toward the door at a sudden, slight sound.

Timothy stood there, and he had heard. Again, fear was stamped on his face and terror looked out of his eyes.

"Timothy," said his grandmother, "don't stare."

"Sorry, sir," the boy managed to say.

"Are your papers all delivered? I did not realize we had been talking for an hour, Dr. Welles. Would you like to see Timothy's cats?" Mrs. Davis inquired graciously. "Timothy, take Dr. Welles to see your pets. We have had quite a talk about them."

\* \* \*

Welles got Tim out of the room as fast as he could. The boy led the way around the house and into the side yard where the former garage stood.

There the man stopped.

"Tim," he said, "you don't have to show me the cats if you don't want to."

"Oh, that's all right."

"Is that part of what you are hiding? If it is, I don't want to see it until you are ready to show me."

Tim looked up at him then.

"Thanks," he said. "I don't mind about the cats. Not if you like cats really."

"I really do. But, Tim, this I would like to know: You're not afraid of the needle. Could you tell me why you were afraid . . . why you said you were afraid . . . of my shot? The one I promised not to give you after all?"

Their eyes met.

"You won't tell?" asked Tim.

"I won't tell."

"Because it was pentothal. Wasn't it?"

Welles gave himself a slight pinch. Yes, he was awake. Yes, this was a little boy asking him about pentothal. A boy who—yes, certainly, a boy who knew about it.

"Yes, it was," said Welles. "A very small dose. You know what it is?"

"Yes, sir. I . . . I read about it somewhere. In the papers."

"Never mind that. You have a secret—something you want to hide. That's what you are afraid about, isn't it?"

The boy nodded dumbly.

"If it's anything wrong, or that might be wrong, perhaps I could help you. You'll want to know me better, first. You'll want to be sure you can trust me. But I'll be glad to help, any time you say the word, Tim. Or I might stumble on to things the way I did just now. One thing though—I never tell secrets."

"Never?"

"Never. Doctors and priests don't betray secrets. Doctors seldom, priests never. I guess I am more like a priest, because of the kind of doctoring I do."

He looked down at the boy's bowed head.

"Helping fellows who are scared sick," said the psychiatrist very gently. "Helping fellows in trouble, getting things straight again, fix-

ing things up, unsnarling tangles. When I can, that's what I do. And I don't tell anything to anybody. It's just between that one fellow and me."

*But, he added to himself, I'll have to find out. I'll have to find out what ails this child. Miss Page is right—he needs me.*

They went to see the cats.

There were the Siamese in their cages, and the Persians in their cages, and there, in several small cages, the short-haired black cats and their hybrid offspring. "We take them into the house, or let them into this big cage, for exercise," explained Tim. "I take mine into my shop sometimes. These are all mine. Grandmother keeps hers on the sun porch."

"You'd never know these were not all pure-bred," observed Welles. "Which did you say were the full Persians? Any of their kittens here?"

"No; I sold them."

"I'd like to buy one. But these look just the same—it wouldn't make any difference to me. I want a pet, and wouldn't use it for breeding stock. Would you sell me one of these?"

Timothy shook his head.

"I'm sorry. I never sell any but the pure-breds."

It was then that Welles began to see what problem he faced. Very dimly he saw it, with joy, relief, hope and wild enthusiasm.

"Why not?" urged Welles. "I can wait for a pure-bred, if you'd rather, but why not one of these? They look just the same. Perhaps they'd be more interesting."

Tim looked at Welles for a long, long minute.

"I'll show you," he said. "Promise to wait here? No, I'll let you come into the workroom. Wait a minute, please."

The boy drew a key from under his blouse, where it had hung suspended from a chain, and unlocked the door of his shop. He went inside, closed the door, and Welles could hear him moving about for a few moments. Then he came to the door and beckoned.

"Don't tell grandmother," said Tim. "I haven't told her yet. If it lives, I'll tell her next week."

In the corner of the shop under a table there was a box, and in the box there was a Siamese cat. When she saw a stranger she tried to hide her kittens; but Tim lifted her gently, and then Welles saw. Two of the kittens looked like little white rats with stringy tails and smudgy paws, ears and noses. But the third—yes, it was going to be a different sight. It was going to be a beautiful cat if it lived. It had

long, silky white hair like the finest Persian, and the Siamese markings were showing up plainly.

Welles caught his breath.

"Congratulations, old man! Haven't you told anyone yet?"

"She's not ready to show. She's not a week old."

"But you're going to show her?"

"Oh, yes, grandmother will be thrilled. She'll love her. Maybe there'll be more."

"You knew this would happen. You made it happen. You planned it all from the start," accused Welles.

"Yes," admitted the boy.

"How did you know?"

The boy turned away.

"I read it somewhere," said Tim.

The cat jumped back into the box and began to nurse her babies. Welles felt as if he could endure no more. Without a glance at anything else in the room—and everything else was hidden under tarpaulins and newspapers—he went to the door.

"Thanks for showing me, Tim," he said. "And when you have any to sell, remember me. I'll wait. I want one like that."

The boy followed him out and locked the door carefully.

"But Tim," said the psychiatrist, "that's not what you were afraid I'd find out. I wouldn't need a drug to get you to tell me this, would I?"

Tim replied carefully, "I didn't want to tell this until I was ready. Grandmother really ought to know first. But you made me tell you."

"Tim," said Peter Welles earnestly, "I'll see you again. Whatever you are afraid of, don't be afraid of me. I often guess secrets. I'm on the way to guessing yours already. But nobody else need ever know."

He walked rapidly home, whistling to himself from time to time. Perhaps he, Peter Welles, was the luckiest man in the world.

He had scarcely begun to talk to Timothy on the boy's next appearance at the office, when the phone in the hall rang. On his return, when he opened the door he saw a book in Tim's hands. The boy made a move as if to hide it, and thought better of it.

Welles took the book and looked at it.

"Want to know more about Rorschach, eh?" he asked.

"I saw it on the shelf. I—"

"Oh, that's all right," said Welles, who had purposely left the book

near the chair Tim would occupy. "But what's the matter with the library?"

"They've got some books about it, but they're on the closed shelves. I couldn't get them." Tim spoke without thinking first, and then caught his breath.

But Welles replied calmly: "I'll get it out for you. I'll have it next time you come. Take this one along today when you go. Tim, I mean it—you can trust me."

"I can't tell you anything," said the boy. "You've found out some things. I wish . . . oh, I don't know what I wish! But I'd rather be let alone. I don't need help. Maybe I never will. If I do, can't I come to you then?"

Welles pulled out his chair and sat down slowly.

"Perhaps that would be the best way, Tim. But why wait for the ax to fall? I might be able to help you ward it off—what you're afraid of. You can kid people along about the cats; tell them you were fooling around to see what would happen. But you can't fool all of the people all of the time, they tell me. Maybe with me to help, you could. Or with me to back you up, the blowup would be easier. Easier on your grandparents, too."

"I haven't done anything wrong!"

"I'm beginning to be sure of that. But things you try to keep hidden may come to light. The kitten—you could hide it, but you don't want to. You've got to risk something to show it."

"I'll tell them I read it somewhere."

"That wasn't true, then. I thought not. You figured it out."

There was silence.

Then Timothy Paul said: "Yes, I figured it out. But that's my secret."

"It's safe with me."

But the boy did not trust him yet. Welles soon learned that he had been tested. Tim took the book home, and returned it, took the library books which Welles got for him, and in due course returned them also. But he talked little and was still wary. Welles could talk all he liked, but he got little or nothing out of Tim. Tim had told all he was going to tell. He would talk about nothing except what any boy would talk about.

After two months of this, during which Welles saw Tim officially once a week and unofficially several times—showing up at the school playground to watch games, or meeting Tim on the paper route and

treating him to a soda after it was finished—Welles had learned very little more. He tried again. He had probed no more during the two months, respected the boy's silence, trying to give him time to get to know and trust him.

But one day he asked: "What are you going to do when you grow up, Tim? Breed cats?"

Tim laughed a denial.

"I don't know what, yet. Sometimes I think one thing, sometimes another."

This was a typical boy answer. Welles disregarded it.

"What would you like to do best of all?" he asked.

Tim leaned forward eagerly. "What you do!" he cried.

"You've been reading up on it, I suppose," said Welles, as casually as he could. "Then you know, perhaps, that before anyone can do what I do, he must go through it himself, like a patient. He must also study medicine and be a full-fledged doctor, of course. You can't do that yet. But you can have the works now, like a patient."

"Why? For the experience?"

"Yes. And for the cure. You'll have to face that fear and lick it. You'll have to straighten out a lot of other things, or at least face them."

"My fear will be gone when I'm grown up," said Timothy. "I think it will. I hope it will."

"Can you be sure?"

"No," admitted the boy. "I don't know exactly why I'm afraid. I just know I *must* hide things. Is that bad, too?"

"Dangerous, perhaps."

Timothy thought a while in silence. Welles smoked three cigarettes and yearned to pace the floor, but dared not move.

"What would it be like?" asked Tim finally.

"You'd tell me about yourself. What you remember. Your childhood—the way your grandmother runs on when she talks about you."

"She sent me out of the room. I'm not supposed to think I'm bright," said Tim, with one of his rare grins.

"And you're not supposed to know how well she reared you?"

"She did fine," said Tim. "She taught me all the wisest things I ever knew."

"Such as what?"

"Such as shutting up. Not telling all you know. Not showing off."

"I see what you mean," said Welles. "Have you heard the story of St. Thomas Aquinas?"

"No."

"When he was a student in Paris, he never spoke out in class, and the others thought him stupid. One of them kindly offered to help him, and went over all the work very patiently to make him understand it. And then one day they came to a place where the other student got all mixed up and had to admit he didn't understand. Then Thomas suggested a solution and it was the right one. He knew more than any of the others all the time; but they called him the Dumb Ox."

Tim nodded gravely.

"And when he grew up?" asked the boy.

"He was the greatest thinker of all time," said Welles. "A fourteenth-century super-brain. He did more original work than any other ten great men; and he died young."

After that, it was easier.

"How do I begin?" asked Timothy.

"You'd better begin at the beginning. Tell me all you can remember about your early childhood, before you went to school."

Tim gave this his consideration.

"I'll have to go forward and backward a lot," he said. "I couldn't put it all in order."

"That's all right. Just tell me today all you can remember about that time of your life. By next week you'll have remembered more. As we go on to later periods of your life, you may remember things that belonged to an earlier time; tell them then. We'll make some sort of order out of it."

Welles listened to the boy's revelations with growing excitement. He found it difficult to keep outwardly calm.

"When did you begin to read?" Welles asked.

"I don't know when it was. My grandmother read me some stories, and somehow I got the idea about the words. But when I tried to tell her I could read, she spanked me. She kept saying I couldn't, and I kept saying I could, until she spanked me. For a while I had a dreadful time, because I didn't know any word she hadn't read to me—I guess I sat beside her and watched, or else I remembered and then went over it by myself right after. I must have learned as soon as I got the idea that each group of letters on the page was a word."



"The word-unit method," Welles commented. "Most self-taught readers learned like that."

"Yes. I have read about it since. And Macaulay could read when he was three, but only upside-down, because of standing opposite when his father read the Bible to the family."

"There are many cases of children who learned to read as you did, and surprised their parents. Well? How did you get on?"

"One day I noticed that two words looked almost alike and sounded almost alike. They were 'can' and 'man.' I remember staring at them and then it was like something beautiful boiling up in me. I began to look carefully at the words, but in a crazy excitement. I was a long while at it, because when I put down the book and tried to stand up I was stiff all over. But I had the idea, and after that it wasn't hard to figure out almost any words. The really hard words are the common ones that you get all the time in easy books. Other words are pronounced the way they are spelled."

"And nobody knew you could read?"

"No. Grandmother told me not to say I could, so I didn't. She read to me often, and that helped. We had a great many books, of course. I liked those with pictures. Once or twice they caught me with a book that had no pictures, and then they'd take it away and say, 'I'll find a book for a little boy.'"

"Do you remember what books you liked then?"

"Books about animals, I remember. And geographies. It was funny about animals—"

Once you got Timothy started, thought Welles, it wasn't hard to get him to go on talking.

"One day I was at the Zoo," said Tim, "and by the cages alone. Grandmother was resting on a bench and she let me walk along by myself. People were talking about the animals and I began to tell them all I knew. It must have been funny in a way, because I had read a lot of words I couldn't pronounce correctly, words I had never heard spoken. They listened and asked me questions and I thought I was just like grandfather, teaching them the way he sometimes taught me. And then they called another man to come, and said, 'Listen to this kid; he's a scream!' and I saw they were all laughing at me."

Timothy's face was redder than usual, but he tried to smile as he added, "I can see now how it must have sounded funny. And unexpected, too; that's a big point in humor. But my little feelings were so dreadfully hurt that I ran back to my grandmother crying,

and she couldn't find out why. But it served me right for disobeying her. She always told me not to tell people things; she said a child had nothing to teach its elders."

"Not in that way, perhaps—at that age."

"But, honestly, some grown people don't know very much," said Tim. "When we went on the train last year, a woman came up and sat beside me and started to tell me things a little boy should know about California. I told her I'd lived here all my life, but I guess she didn't even know we are taught things in school, and she tried to tell me things, and almost everything was wrong."

"Such as what?" asked Welles, who had also suffered from tourists.

"We . . . she said so many things . . . but I thought this was the funniest: She said all the Missions were so old and interesting, and I said yes, and she said, 'You know, they were all built long before Columbus discovered America,' and I thought she meant it for a joke, so I laughed. She looked very serious and said, 'Yes, those people all come up here from Mexico.' I suppose she thought they were Aztec temples."

Welles, shaking with laughter, could not but agree that many adults were sadly lacking in the rudiments of knowledge.

"After that Zoo experience, and a few others like it, I began to get wise to myself," continued Tim. "People who knew things didn't want to hear me repeating them, and people who didn't know, wouldn't be taught by a four-year-old baby. I guess I was four when I began to write."

"How?"

"Oh, I just thought if I couldn't say anything to anybody at any time, I'd burst. So I began to put it down—in printing, like in books. Then I found out about writing, and we had some old-fashioned schoolbooks that taught how to write. I'm left-handed. When I went to school, I had to use my right hand. But by then I had learned how to pretend that I didn't know things. I watched the others and did as they did. My grandmother told me to do that."

"I wonder why she said that," marveled Welles.

"She knew I wasn't used to other children, she said, and it was the first time she had left me to anyone else's care. So, she told me to do what the others did and what my teacher said," explained Tim simply, "and I followed her advice literally. I pretended I didn't know anything, until the others began to know it, too. Lucky I was

so shy. But there were things to learn, all right. Do you know, when I was first sent to school, I was disappointed because the teacher dressed like other women. The only picture of teachers I had noticed were those in an old Mother Goose book, and I thought that all teachers wore hoop skirts. But as soon as I saw her, after the little shock of surprise, I knew it was silly, and I never told."

The psychiatrist and the boy laughed together.

"We played games. I had to learn to play with children, and not be surprised when they slapped or pushed me. I just couldn't figure out why they'd do that, or what good it did them. But if it was to surprise me, I'd say 'Boo' and surprise them some time later; and if they were mad because I had taken a ball or something they wanted, I'd play with them."

"Anybody ever try to beat you up?"

"Oh, yes. But I had a book about boxing—with pictures. You can't learn much from pictures, but I got some practice too, and that helped. I didn't want to win, anyway. That's what I like about games of strength or skill—I'm fairly matched, and I don't have to be always watching in case I might show off or try to boss somebody around."

"You must have tried bossing sometimes."

"In books, they all cluster around the boy who can teach new games and think up new things to play. But I found out that doesn't work. They just want to do the same thing all the time—like hide and seek. It's no fun if the first one to be caught is 'it' next time. The rest just walk in any old way and don't try to hide or even to run, because it doesn't matter whether they are caught. But you can't get the boys to see that, and play right, so the last one caught is 'it'."

Timothy looked at his watch.

"Time to go," he said. "I've enjoyed talking to you, Dr. Welles. I hope I haven't bored you too much."

Welles recognized the echo and smiled appreciatively at the small boy.

"You didn't tell me about the writing. Did you start to keep a diary?"

"No. It was a newspaper. One page a day, no more and no less. I still keep it," confided Tim. "But I get more on the page now. I type it."

"And you write with either hand now?"

"My left hand is my own secret writing. For school and things like that I use my right hand."

When Timothy had left, Welles congratulated himself. But for the next month he got no more. Tim would not reveal a single significant fact. He talked about ball-playing, he described his grandmother's astonished delight over the beautiful kitten, he told of its growth and the tricks it played. He gravely related such enthralling facts as that he liked to ride on trains, that his favorite wild animal was the lion, and that he greatly desired to see snow falling. But not a word of what Welles wanted to hear. The psychiatrist, knowing that he was again being tested, waited patiently.

Then one afternoon when Welles, fortunately unoccupied with a patient, was smoking a pipe on his front porch, Timothy Paul strode into the yard.

"Yesterday Miss Page asked me if I was seeing you and I said yes. She said she hoped my grandparents didn't find it too expensive, because you had told her I was all right and didn't need to have her worrying about me. And then I said to grandma, was it expensive for you to talk to me, and she said, 'Oh no, dear; the school pays for that. It was your teacher's idea that you have a few talks with Dr. Welles.'"

"I'm glad you came to me, Tim, and I'm sure you didn't give me away to either of them. Nobody's paying me. The school pays for my services if a child is in a bad way and his parents are poor. It's a new service, since 1956. Many maladjusted children can be helped—much more cheaply to the state than the cost of having them go crazy or become criminals or something. You understand all that. But—sit down, Tim!—I can't charge the state for you, and I can't charge your grandparents. You're adjusted marvelously well in every way, as far as I can see; and when I see the rest, I'll be even more sure of it."

"Well—gosh! I wouldn't have come—" Tim was stammering in confusion. "You ought to be paid. I take up so much of your time. Maybe I'd better not come any more."

"I think you'd better. Don't you?"

"Why are you doing it for nothing, Dr. Welles?"

"I think you know why."

The boy sat down in the glider and pushed himself meditatively back and forth. The glider squeaked.

"You're interested. You're curious," he said.

"That's not all, Tim."

*Squeak-squeak. Squeak-squeak.*

"I know," said Timothy. "I believe it. Look, is it all right if I call you Peter? Since we're friends."

At their next meeting, Timothy went into details about his newspaper. He had kept all the copies, from the first smudged, awkwardly printed pencil issues to the very latest neatly typed ones. But he would not show Welles any of them.

"I just put down every day the things I most wanted to say, the news or information or opinion I had to swallow unsaid. So it's a wild medley. The earlier copies are awfully funny. Sometimes I guess what they were all about, what made me write them. Sometimes I remember. I put down the books I read too, and mark them like school grades, on two points—how I liked the book, and whether it was good. And whether I had read it before, too."

"How many books do you read? What's your reading speed?"

It proved that Timothy's reading speed on new books of adult level varied from eight hundred to nine hundred fifty words a minute. The average murder mystery—he loved them—took him a little less than an hour. A year's homework in history, Tim performed easily by reading his textbook through three or four times during the year. He apologized for that, but explained that he had to know what was in the book so as not to reveal in examinations too much that he had learned from other sources. Evenings, when his grandparents believed him to be doing homework he spent his time reading other books, or writing his newspaper, "or something." As Welles had already guessed, Tim had read everything in his grandfather's library, everything of interest in the public library that was not on the closed shelves, and everything he could order from the state library.

"What do the librarians say?"

"They think the books are for my grandfather. I tell them that, if they ask what a little boy wants with such a big book. Peter, telling so many lies is what gets me down. I have to do it, don't I?"

"As far as I can see, you do," agreed Welles. "But here's material for a while in my library. There'll have to be a closed shelf here, too, though, Tim."

"Could you tell me why? I know about the library books. Some of them might scare people, and some are—"

"Some of my books might scare you too, Tim. I'll tell you a little about abnormal psychology if you like, one of these days, and then I think you'll see that until you're actually trained to deal with such cases, you'd be better off not knowing too much about them."

"I don't want to be morbid," agreed Tim. "All right. I'll read only what you give me. And from now on I'll tell you things. There was more than the newspaper, you know."

"I thought as much. Do you want to go on with your tale?"

"It started when I first wrote a letter to a newspaper—of course, under a pen name. They printed it. For a while I had a high old time of it—a letter almost every day, using all sorts of pen names. Then I branched out to magazines, letters to the editor again. And stories—I tried stories."

He looked a little doubtfully at Welles, who said only: "How old were you when you sold the first story?"

"Eight," said Timothy. "And when the check came, with my name on it, 'T. Paul,' I didn't know what in the world to do."

"That's a thought. What did you do?"

"There was a sign in the window of the bank. I always read signs, and that one came back to my mind. 'Banking By Mail.' You can see I was pretty desperate. So I got the name of a bank across the Bay and I wrote them—on my typewriter—and said I wanted to start an account, and here was a check to start it with. Oh, I was scared stiff, and had to keep saying to myself that, after all, nobody could do much to me. It was my own money. But you don't know what it's like to be only a small boy! They sent the check back to me and I died ten deaths when I saw it. But the letter explained. I hadn't endorsed it. They sent me a blank to fill out about myself. I didn't know how many lies I dared to tell. But it was my money and I had to get it. If I could get it into the bank, then some day I could get it out. I gave my business as 'author' and I gave my age as twenty-four. I thought that was awfully old."

"I'd like to see the story. Do you have a copy of the magazine around?"

"Yes," said Tim. "But nobody noticed it—I mean, 'T. Paul' could be anybody. And when I saw magazines for writers on the newsstands and bought them, I got on to the way to use a pen name on the story and my own name and address up in the corner. Before that I used a pen name and sometimes never got the things back or heard about them. Sometimes I did, though."

"What then?"

"Oh, then I'd endorse the check payable to me and sign the pen name, and then sign my own name under it. Was I scared to do that! But it was my money."

"Only stories?"

"Articles, too. And things. That's enough of that for today. Only—I just wanted to say—a while ago, T. Paul told the bank he wanted to switch some of the money over to a checking account. To buy books by mail, and such. So, I could pay you, Dr. Welles—" with sudden formality.

"No, Tim," said Peter Welles firmly. "The pleasure is all mine. What I want is to see the story that was published when you were eight. And some of the other things that made T. Paul rich enough to keep a consulting psychiatrist on the payroll. And, for the love of Pete, will you tell me how all this goes on without your grandparents' knowing a thing about it?"

"Grandmother thinks I send in box tops and fill out coupons," said Tim. "She doesn't bring in the mail. She says her little boy gets such a big bang out of that little chore. Anyway that's what she said when I was eight. I played mailman. And there were box tops—I showed them to her, until she said, about the third time, that really she wasn't greatly interested in such matters. By now she has the habit of waiting for me to bring in the mail."

Peter Welles thought that was quite a day of revelation. He spent a quiet evening at home, holding his head and groaning, trying to take it all in.

And that I. Q.—120, nonsense! The boy had been holding out on him. Tim's reading had obviously included enough about I. Q. tests, enough puzzles and oddments in magazines and such, to enable him to stall successfully. What could he do if he would co-operate?

Welles made up his mind to find out.

He didn't find out. Timothy Paul went swiftly through the whole range of Superior Adult tests without a failure of any sort. There were no tests yet devised that could measure his intelligence. While he was still writing his age with one figure, Timothy Paul had faced alone, and solved alone, problems that would have baffled the average adult. He had adjusted to the hardest task of all—that of appearing to be a fairly normal, B-average small boy.

And it must be that there was more to find out about him. What did he write? And what did he do besides read and write, learn carpentry and breed cats and magnificently fool his whole world?

When Peter Welles had read some of Tim's writings, he was surprised to find that the stories the boy had written were vividly human, the product of close observation of human nature. The articles, on the other hand, were closely reasoned and showed thorough study and research. Apparently Tim read every word of several newspapers and a score or more of periodicals.

"Oh, sure," said Tim, when questioned. "I read everything. I go back once in a while and review old ones, too."

"If you can write like this," demanded Welles, indicating a magazine in which a staid and scholarly article had appeared, "and this"—this was a man-to-man political article giving the arguments for and against a change in the whole Congressional system—"then why do you always talk to me in the language of an ordinary stupid schoolboy?"

"Because I'm only a boy," replied Timothy. "What would happen if I went around talking like that?"

"You might risk it with me. You've showed me these things."

"I'd never dare to risk talking like that. I might forget and do it again before others. Besides, I can't pronounce half the words."

"What!"

"I never look up a pronunciation," explained Timothy. "In case I do slip and use a word beyond the average, I can anyway hope I didn't say it right."

Welles shouted with laughter, but was sober again as he realized the implications back of that thoughtfulness.

"You're just like an explorer living among savages," said the psychiatrist. "You have studied the savages carefully and tried to imitate them so they won't know there are differences."

"Something like that," acknowledged Tim.

"That's why your stories are so human," said Welles. "That one about the awful little girl—"

They both chuckled.

"Yes, that was my first story," said Tim. "I was almost eight, and there was a boy in my class who had a brother, and the boy next door was the other one, the one who was picked on."

"How much of the story was true?"

"The first part. I used to see, when I went over there, how that girl picked on Bill's brother's friend, Steve. She wanted to play with Steve all the time herself and whenever he had boys over, she'd do something awful. And Steve's folks were like I said—they wouldn't let Steve do anything to a girl. When she threw all the watermelon



rinds over the fence into his yard, he just had to pick them all up and say nothing back; and she'd laugh at him over the fence. She got him blamed for things he never did, and when he had work to do in the yard she'd hang out of her window and scream at him and make fun. I thought first, what made her act like that, and then I made up a way for him to get even with her, and wrote it out the way it might have happened."

"Didn't you pass the idea on to Steve and let him try it?"

"Gosh, no! I was only a little boy. Kids seven don't give ideas to kids ten. That's the first thing I had to learn—to be always the one that kept quiet, especially if there was any older boy or girl around, even only a year or two older. I had to learn to look blank and let my mouth hang open and say, 'I don't get it,' to almost everything."

"And Miss Page thought it was odd that you had no close friends of your own age," said Welles. "You must be the loneliest boy that ever walked this earth, Tim. You've lived in hiding like a criminal. But tell me, what are you afraid of?"

"I'm afraid of being found out, of course. The only way I can live in this world is in disguise—until I'm grown up, at any rate. At first it was just my grandparents' scolding me and telling me not to show off, and the way people laughed if I tried to talk to them. Then I saw how people hate anyone who is better or brighter or luckier. Some people sort of trade off; if you're bad at one thing you're good at another, but they'll forgive you for being good at some things, if you're not good at others so they can balance it off. They can beat you at something. You have to strike a balance. A child has no chance at all. No grownup can stand it to have a child know anything he doesn't. Oh, a little thing if it amuses them. But not much of anything. There's an old story about a man who found himself in a country where everyone else was blind. I'm like that—but they shan't put out my eyes. I'll never let them know I can see anything."

"Do you see things that no grown person can see?"

Tim waved his hand towards the magazines.

"Only like that, I meant. I hear people talking in street cars and stores, and while they work, and around. I read about the way they act—in the news. I'm like them, just like them, only I seem about a hundred years older—more matured."

"Do you mean that none of them have much sense?"

"I don't mean that exactly. I mean that so few of them have any, or show it if they do have. They don't even seem to want to. They're good people in their way, but what could they make of me? Even

when I was seven, I could understand their motives, but they couldn't understand their own motives. And they're so lazy—they don't seem to want to know or to understand. When I first went to the library for books, the books I learned from were seldom touched by any of the grown people. But they were meant for ordinary grown people. But the grown people didn't want to know things—they only wanted to fool around. I feel about most people the way my grandmother feels about babies and puppies. Only she doesn't have to pretend to be a puppy all the time," Tim added, with a little bitterness.

"You have a friend now, in me."

"Yes, Peter," said Tim, brightening up. "And I have pen friends, too. People like what I write, because they can't see I'm only a little boy. When I grow up—"

Tim did not finish that sentence. Welles understood, now, some of the fears that Tim had not dared to put into words at all. When he grew up, would he be as far beyond all other grownups as he had, all his life, been above his contemporaries? The adult friends whom he now met on fairly equal terms—would they then, too, seem like babies or puppies?

Peter did not dare to voice the thought, either. Still less did he venture to hint at another thought. Tim, so far, had no great interest in girls; they existed for him as part of the human race, but there would come a time when Tim would be a grown man and would wish to marry. And where among the puppies could he find a mate?

"When you're grown up, we'll still be friends," said Peter. "And who are the others?"

It turned out that Tim had pen friends all over the world. He played chess by correspondence—a game he never dared to play in person, except when he forced himself to move the pieces about idly and let his opponent win at least half the time. He had, also, many friends who had read something he had written, and had written to him about it, thus starting a correspondence-friendship. After the first two or three of these, he had started some on his own account, always with people who lived at a great distance. To most of these he gave a name which, although not false, looked it. That was Paul T. Lawrence. Lawrence was his middle name; and with a comma after the Paul, it was actually his own name. He had a post office box under that name, for which T. Paul of the large bank account was his reference.

"Pen friends abroad? Do you know languages?"

Yes, Tim did. He had studied by correspondence, also; many universities gave extension courses in that manner, and lent the student records to play so that he could learn the correct pronunciation. Tim had taken several such courses, and learned other languages from books. He kept all these languages in practice by means of the letters to other lands and the replies which came to him.

"I'd buy a dictionary, and then I'd write to the mayor of some town, or to a foreign newspaper, and ask them to advertise for some pen friends to help me learn the language. We'd exchange souvenirs and things."

Nor was Welles in the least surprised to find that Timothy had also taken other courses by correspondence. He had completed, within three years, more than half the subjects offered by four separate universities, and several other courses, the most recent being Architecture. The boy, not yet fourteen, had completed a full course in that subject, and had he been able to disguise himself as a full-grown man, could have gone out at once and built almost anything you'd like to name, for he also knew much of the trades involved.

"It always said how long an average student took, and I'd take that long," said Tim, "so, of course, I had to be working several schools at the same time."

"And carpentry at the playground summer school?"

"Oh, yes. But there I couldn't do too much, because people could see me. But I learned how, and it made a good cover-up, so I could make cages for the cats, and all that sort of thing. And many boys are good with their hands. I like to work with my hands. I built my own radio, too—it gets all the foreign stations, and that helps me with my languages."

"How did you figure it out about the cats?" said Welles.

"Oh, there had to be recessives, that's all. The Siamese coloring was a recessive, and it had to be mated with another recessive. Black was one possibility, and white was another, but I started with black because I liked it better. I might try white too, but I have so much else on my mind—"

He broke off suddenly and would say no more.

Their next meeting was by prearrangement at Tim's workshop. Welles met the boy after school and they walked to Tim's home together; there the boy unlocked his door and snapped on the lights.

Welles looked around with interest. There was a bench, a tool

chest. Cabinets, padlocked. A radio, clearly not store-purchased. A file cabinet, locked. Something on a table, covered with a cloth. A box in the corner—no, two boxes in two corners. In each of them was a mother cat with kittens. Both mothers were black Persians.

"This one must be all black Persian," Tim explained. "Her third litter and never a Siamese marking. But this one carries both recessives in her. Last time she had a Siamese short-haired kitten. This morning—I had to go to school. Let's see."

They bent over the box where the new-born kittens lay. One kitten was like the mother. The other two were Siamese-Persian; a male and a female.

"You've done it again, Tim!" shouted Welles. "Congratulations!"

They shook hands in jubilation.

"I'll write it in the record," said the boy blissfully.

In a nickel book marked "Compositions" Tim's left hand added the entries. He had used the correct symbols— $F_1$ ,  $F_2$ ,  $F_3$ ; Ss, Bl.

"The dominants in capitals," he explained, "B for black, and S for short hair; the recessives in small letters—s for Siamese, l for long hair. Wonderful to write ll or ss again, Peter! Twice more. And the other kitten is carrying the Siamese marking as a recessive."

He closed the book in triumph.

"Now," and he marched to the covered thing on the table, "my latest big secret."

Tim lifted the cloth carefully and displayed a beautifully built doll house. No, a model house—Welles corrected himself swiftly. A beautiful model, and—yes, built to scale.

"The roof comes off. See, it has a big storage room and a room for a play room or a maid or something. Then I lift off the attic—"

"Good heavens!" cried Peter Welles. "Any little girl would give her soul for this!"

"I used fancy wrapping papers for the wallpapers. I wove the rugs on a little hand loom," gloated Timothy. "The furniture's just like real, isn't it? Some I bought; that's plastic. Some I made of construction paper and things. The curtains were the hardest; but I couldn't ask grandmother to sew them—"

"Why not?" the amazed doctor managed to ask.

"She might recognize this afterwards," said Tim, and he lifted off the upstairs floor.

"Recognize it? You haven't showed it to her? Then when would she see it?"

"She might not," admitted Tim. "But I don't like to take some risks."

"That's a very livable floor plan you've used," said Welles, bending closer to examine the house in detail.

"Yes, I thought so. It's awful how many house plans leave no clear wall space for books or pictures. Some of them have doors placed so you have to detour around the dining room table every time you go from the living room to the kitchen, or so that a whole corner of a room is good for nothing, with doors at all angles. Now, I designed this house to—"

"You designed it, Tim!"

"Why, sure. Oh, I see—you thought I built it from blueprints I'd bought. My first model home, I did, but the architecture courses gave me so many ideas that I wanted to see how they would look. Now, the cellar and game room—"

Welles came to himself an hour later, and gasped when he looked at his watch.

"It's too late. My patient has gone home again by this time. I may as well stay—how about the paper route?"

"I gave that up. Grandmother offered to feed the cats as soon as I gave her the kitten. And I wanted the time for this. Here are the pictures of the house."

The color prints were very good.

"I'm sending them and an article to the magazines," said Tim. "This time I'm T. L. Paul. Sometimes I used to pretend all the different people I am were talking together—but now I talk to you instead, Peter."

"Will it bother the cats if I smoke? Thanks. Nothing I'm likely to set on fire, I hope? Put the house together and let me sit here and look at it. I want to look in through the windows. Put its lights on. There."

The young architect beamed, and snapped on the little lights.

"Nobody can see in here. I got Venetian blinds; and when I work in here, I even shut them sometimes."

"If I'm to know all about you, I'll have to go through the alphabet from A to Z," said Peter Welles. "This is Architecture. What else in the A's?"

"Astronomy. I showed you those articles. My calculations proved correct. Astrophysics—I got A in the course, but haven't done anything original so far. Art, no. I can't paint or draw very well, except

mechanical drawing. I've done all the Merit Badge work in scouting, all through the alphabet."

"Darned if I can see you as a Boy Scout," protested Welles.

"I'm a very good Scout. I have almost as many badges as any other boy my age in the troop. And at camp I do as well as most city boys."

"Do you do a good turn every day?"

"Yes," said Timothy. "Started that when I first read about Scouting—I was a Scout at heart before I was old enough to be a Cub. You know, Peter, when you're very young, you take all that seriously about the good deed every day, and the good habits and ideals and all that. And then you get older and it begins to seem funny and childish and posed and artificial, and you smile in a superior way and make jokes. But there is a third step, too, when you take it all seriously again. People who make fun of the Scout Law are doing the boys a lot of harm; but those who believe in things like that don't know how to say so, without sounding priggish and platitudinous. I'm going to do an article on it before long."

"Is the Scout Law your religion—if I may put it that way?"

"No," said Timothy. "But 'a Scout is Reverent.' Once I tried to study the churches and find out what was the truth. I wrote letters to pastors of all denominations—all those in the phone book and the newspaper—when I was on a vacation in the East, I got the names, and then wrote after I got back. I couldn't write to people here in the city. I said I wanted to know which church was true, and expected them to write to me and tell me about theirs, and argue with me, you know. I could read library books, and all they had to do was recommend some, I told them, and then correspond with me a little about them."

"Did they?"

"Some of them answered," said Tim, "but nearly all of them told me to go to somebody near me. Several said they were very busy men. Some gave me the name of a few books, but none of them told me to write again, and . . . and I was only a little boy. Nine years old, so I couldn't talk to anybody. When I thought it over, I knew that I couldn't very well join any church so young, unless it was my grandparents' church. I keep on going there—it is a good church and it teaches a great deal of truth, I am sure. I'm reading all I can find, so when I am old enough I'll know what I must do. How old would you say I should be, Peter?"

"College age," replied Welles. "You are going to college? By

then, any of the pastors would talk to you—except those that are too busy!”

“It’s a moral problem, really. Have I the right to wait? But I have to wait. It’s like telling lies—I have to tell some lies, but I hate to. If I have a moral obligation to join the church as soon as I find it, well, what then? I can’t until I’m eighteen or twenty?”

“If you can’t, you can’t. I should think that settles it. You are legally a minor, under the control of your grandparents, and while you might claim the right to go where your conscience leads you, it would be impossible to justify and explain your choice without giving yourself away entirely—just as you are obliged to go to school until you are at least eighteen, even though you know more than most Ph.D.’s. It’s all part of the game, and He who made you must understand that.”

“I’ll never tell you any lies,” said Tim. “I was getting so desperately lonely—my pen pals didn’t know anything about me really. I told them only what was right for them to know. Little kids are satisfied to be with other people, but when you get a little older you have to make friends, really.”

“Yes, that’s a part of growing up. You have to reach out to others and share thoughts with them. You’ve kept to yourself too long as it is.”

“It wasn’t that I wanted to. But without a real friend, it was only pretense, and I never could let my playmates know anything about me. I studied them and wrote stories about them and it was all of them, but it was only a tiny part of me.”

“I’m proud to be your friend, Tim. Every man needs a friend. I’m proud that you trust me.”

Tim patted the cat a moment in silence and then looked up with a grin.

“How would you like to hear my favorite joke?” he asked.

“Very much,” said the psychiatrist, bracing himself for almost any major shock.

“It’s records. I recorded this from a radio program.”

Welles listened. He knew little of music, but the symphony which he heard pleased him. The announcer praised it highly in little speeches before and after each movement. Timothy giggled.

“Like it?”

“Very much. I don’t see the joke.”

“I wrote it.”

“Tim, you’re beyond me! But I still don’t get the joke.”

"The joke is that I did it by mathematics. I calculated what ought to sound like joy, grief, hope, triumph, and all the rest, and—it was just after I had studied harmony; you know how mathematical that is."

Speechless, Welles nodded.

"I worked out the rhythms from different metabolisms—the way you function when under the influences of these emotions; the way your metabolic rate varies, your heartbeats and respiration and things. I sent it to the director of that orchestra, and he didn't get the idea that it was a joke—of course I didn't explain—he produced the music. I get nice royalties from it, too."

"You'll be the death of me yet," said Welles in deep sincerity. "Don't tell me anything more today; I couldn't take it. I'm going home. Maybe by tomorrow I'll see the joke and come back to laugh. Tim, did you ever fail at anything?"

"There are two cabinets full of articles and stories that didn't sell. Some of them I feel bad about. There was the chess story. You know, in 'Through the Looking Glass,' it wasn't a very good game, and you couldn't see the relation of the moves to the story very well."

"I never could see it at all."

"I thought it would be fun to take a championship game and write a fantasy about it, as if it were a war between two little old countries, with knights and foot-soldiers, and fortified walls in charge of captains, and the bishops couldn't fight like warriors, and, of course, the queens were women—people don't kill them, not in hand-to-hand fighting and . . . well, you see? I wanted to make up the attacks and captures, and keep the people alive, a fairytale war you see, and make the strategy of the game and the strategy of the war coincide, and have everything fit. It took me ever so long to work it out and write it. To understand the game as a chess game and then to translate it into human actions and motives, and put speeches to it to fit different kinds of people. I'll show it to you. I loved it. But nobody would print it. Chess players don't like fantasy, and nobody else likes chess. You have to have a very special kind of mind to like both. But it was a disappointment. I hoped it would be published, because the few people who like that sort of thing would like it *very* much."

"I'm sure I'll like it."

"Well, if you do like that sort of thing, it's what you've been waiting all your life in vain for. Nobody else has done it." Tim



stopped, and blushed as red as a beet. "I see what grandmother means. Once you get started bragging, there's no end to it. I'm sorry, Peter."

"Give me the story. I don't mind, Tim—brag all you like to me; I understand. You might blow up if you never expressed any of your legitimate pride and pleasure in such achievements. What I don't understand is how you have kept it all under for so long."

"I had to," said Tim.

The story was all its young author had claimed. Welles chuckled as he read it, that evening. He read it again, and checked all the moves and the strategy of them. It was really a fine piece of work. Then he thought of the symphony, and this time he was able to laugh. He sat up until after midnight, thinking about the boy. Then he took a sleeping pill and went to bed.

The next day he went to see Tim's grandmother. Mrs. Davis received him graciously.

"Your grandson is a very interesting boy," said Peter Welles carefully. "I'm asking a favor of you. I am making a study of various boys and girls in this district, their abilities and backgrounds and environment and character traits and things like that. No names will ever be mentioned, of course, but a statistical report will be kept, for ten years or longer, and some case histories might later be published. Could Timothy be included?"

"Timothy is such a good, normal little boy, I fail to see what would be the purpose of including him in such a survey."

"That is just the point. We are not interested in maladjusted persons in this study. We eliminate all psychotic boys and girls. We are interested in boys and girls who succeed in facing their youthful problems and making satisfactory adjustments to life. If we could study a selected group of such children, and follow their progress for the next ten years at least—and then publish a summary of the findings, with no names used—"

"In that case, I see no objection," said Mrs. Davis.

"If you'd tell me, then, something about Timothy's parents—their history?"

Mrs. Davis settled herself for a good long talk.

"Timothy's mother, my only daughter, Emily," she began, "was a lovely girl. So talented. She played the violin charmingly. Timothy is like her, in the face, but has his father's dark hair and eyes. Edwin had very fine eyes."

"Edwin was Timothy's father?"

"Yes. The young people met while Emily was at college in the East. Edwin was studying atomics there."

"Your daughter was studying music?"

"No; Emily was taking the regular liberal arts course. I can tell you little about Edwin's work, but after their marriage he returned to it and . . . you understand, it is painful for me to recall this, but their deaths were such a blow to me. They were so young."

Welles held his pencil ready to write.

"Timothy has never been told. After all, he must grow up in this world, and how dreadfully the world has changed in the past thirty years, Dr. Welles! But you would not remember the day before 1945. You have heard, no doubt of the terrible explosion in the atomic plant, when they were trying to make a new type of bomb? At the time, none of the workers seemed to be injured. They believed the protection was adequate. But two years later they were all dead or dying."

Mrs. Davis shook her head, sadly. Welles held his breath, bent his head, scribbled.

"Tim was born just fourteen months after the explosion, fourteen months to the day. Everyone still thought that no harm had been done. But the radiation had some effect which was very slow—I do not understand such things—Edwin died, and then Emily came home to us with the boy. In a few months she, too, was gone.

"Oh, but we do not sorrow as those who have no hope. It is hard to have lost her, Dr. Welles, but Mr. Davis and I have reached the time of life when we can look forward to seeing her again. Our hope is to live until Timothy is old enough to fend for himself. We were so anxious about him; but you see he is perfectly normal in every way."

"Yes."

"The specialists made all sorts of tests. But nothing is wrong with Timothy."

The psychiatrist stayed a little longer, took a few more notes, and made his escape as soon as he could. Going straight to the school, he had a few words with Miss Page and then took Tim to his office, where he told him what he had learned.

"You mean—I'm a mutation?"

"A mutant. Yes, very likely you are. I don't know. But I had to tell you at once."

"Must be a dominant, too," said Tim, "coming out this way in the first generation. You mean—there may be more? I'm not the only

one?" he added in great excitement. "Oh, Peter, even if I grow up past you I won't have to be lonely?"

There. He had said it.

"It could be, Tim. There's nothing else in your family that could account for you."

"But I have never found anyone at all like me. I would have known. Another boy or girl my age—like me—I would have known."

"You came West with your mother. Where did the others go, if they existed? The parents must have scattered everywhere, back to their homes all over the country, all over the world. We can trace them, though. And, Tim, haven't you thought it's just a little bit strange that with all your pen names and various contacts, people don't insist more on meeting you? Everything gets done by mail? It's almost as if the editors are used to people who hide. It's almost as if people are used to architects and astronomers and composers whom nobody ever sees, who are only names in care of other names at post office boxes. There's a chance—just a chance, mind you—that there are others. If there are, we'll find them."

"I'll work out a code they will understand," said Tim, his face screwed up in concentration. "In articles—I'll do it—several magazines and in letters I can inclose copies—some of my pen friends may be the ones—"

"I'll hunt up the records—they must be on file somewhere—psychologists and psychiatrists know all kinds of tricks—we can make some excuse to trace them all—the birth records—"

Both of them were talking at once, but all the while Peter Welles was thinking sadly, perhaps he had lost Tim now. If they did find those others, those to whom Tim rightfully belonged, where would poor Peter be? Outside, among the puppies—

Timothy Paul looked up and saw Peter Welles's eyes on him. He smiled.

"You were my first friend, Peter, and you shall be forever," said Tim. "No matter what, no matter who."

"But we must look for the others," said Peter.

"I'll never forget who helped me," said Tim.

An ordinary boy of thirteen may say such a thing sincerely, and a week later have forgotten all about it. But Peter Welles was content. Tim would never forget. Tim would be his friend always. Even when Timothy Paul and those like him should unite in a maturity undreamed of, to control the world if they chose, Peter Welles would be Tim's friend—not a puppy, but a beloved friend—as a loyal dog loved by a good master, is never cast out.

## PART

### 7

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## IN TIMES TO COME

NONE OF THESE CHILDREN are, strictly speaking, wonderful. They belong to their own time; it's merely that the normal environment of their particular period is—to today's reader—wonderful, or horrible, as the case may be. And each of these possible worlds-to-come has a most unusual impact upon its children:

"The Hatchery" is, of course, not a story, but a reasonably self-contained segment of Aldous Huxley's brilliant satire, *Brave New World*. It is, in effect, a guided tour of a factory in a society so mechanized as to turn the womb into a conveyor belt (an *extensio ad absurdum*, if ever there was one!) Errand Boy's young hero, with his wide-eyed conceptions of the romantic nature of the historical past, is probably a usual-enough schoolboy in his rightful place, but that place is the century after next, and he happens here to be off on a field trip.

Stephen Vincent Benét's narrative poem concludes this book (among other things). Let us assume, hopefully, that it is no more than an author's nightmare, and that any reference to the future of the human race is purely coincidental.



## "THE HATCHERY"

from BRAVE NEW WORLD

by Aldous Huxley

### I

**A** SQUAT grey building of only thirty-four stories. Over the main entrance the words, CENTRAL LONDON HATCHERY AND CONDITIONING CENTRE, and, in a shield, the World State's motto, COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY.

The enormous room on the ground floor faced towards the north. Cold for all the summer beyond the panes, for all the tropical heat of the room itself, a harsh thin light glared through the windows, hungrily seeking some draped lay figure, some pallid shape of academic goose-flesh, but finding only the glass and nickel and bleakly shining porcelain of a laboratory. Wintriness responded to wintriness. The overalls of the workers were white, their hands gloved with a pale corpse-coloured rubber. The light was frozen, dead, a ghost. Only from the yellow barrels of the microscopes did it borrow a certain rich and living substance, lying along the polished tubes like butter, streak after luscious streak in long recession down the work tables.

"And this," said the Director opening the door, "is the Fertilizing Room."

Bent over their instruments, three hundred Fertilizers were plunged, as the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning entered the room, in the scarcely breathing silence, the absent-minded, soliloquizing hum or whistle, of absorbed concentration. A troop of newly arrived students, very young, pink and callow, followed nervously, rather abjectly, at the Director's heels. Each of them carried a notebook, in which, whenever the great man spoke, he desperately scribbled. Straight from the horse's mouth. It was a rare privilege. The D.H.C. for Central London always made a point of personally conducting his new students round the various departments.

"Just to give you a general idea," he would explain to them. For of course some sort of general idea they must have, if they were to do their work intelligently—though as little of one, if they were to be good and happy members of society, as possible. For particulars,

as every one knows, make for virtue and happiness; generalities are intellectually necessary evils. Not philosophers but fret-sawyers and stamp collectors compose the backbone of society.

"Tomorrow," he would add, smiling at them with a slightly menacing geniality, "you'll be settling down to serious work. You won't have time for generalities. Meanwhile . . ."

Meanwhile it was a privilege. Straight from the horse's mouth into the notebook. The boys scribbled like mad.

Tall and rather thin but upright, the Director advanced into the room. He had a long chin and big, rather prominent teeth, just covered, when he was not talking, by his full, floridly curved lips. Old, young? Thirty? Fifty? Fifty-five? It was hard to say. And anyhow the question didn't arise; in this year of stability, A.F. 632, it didn't occur to you to ask it.

"I shall begin at the beginning," said the D.H.C. and the more zealous students recorded his intention in their notebooks: *Begin at the beginning*. "These," he waved his hand, "are the incubators." And opening an insulated door he showed them racks upon racks of numbered test-tubes. "The week's supply of ova. Kept," he explained, "at blood heat; whereas the male gametes," and here he opened another door, "they have to be kept at thirty-five instead of thirty-seven. Full blood heat sterilizes." Rams wrapped in thermogene beget no lambs.

Still leaning against the incubators he gave them, while the pencils scurried illegibly across the pages, a brief description of the modern fertilizing process; spoke first, of course, of its surgical introduction—"the operation undergone voluntarily for the good of Society, not to mention the fact that it carries a bonus amounting to six months' salary"; continued with some account of the technique for preserving the excised ovary alive and actively developing; passed on to a consideration of optimum temperature, salinity, viscosity; referred to the liquor in which the detached and ripened eggs were kept; and, leading his charges to the work tables, actually showed them how this liquor was drawn off from the test-tubes; how it was let out drop by drop onto the specially warmed slides of the microscopes; how the eggs which it contained were inspected for abnormalities, counted and transferred to a porous receptacle; how (and he now took them to watch the operation) this receptacle was immersed in a warm bouillon containing free-swimming spermatozoa—at a minimum concentration of one hundred thousand per cubic centimetre, he

insisted; and how, after ten minutes, the container was lifted out of the liquor and its contents re-examined; how, if any of the eggs remained unfertilized, it was again immersed, and, if necessary, yet again; how the fertilized ova went back to the incubators; where the Alphas and Betas remained until definitely bottled; while the Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons were brought out again, after only thirty-six hours, to undergo Bokanovsky's Process.

"Bokanovsky's Process," repeated the Director, and the students underlined the words in their little notebooks.

One egg, one embryo, one adult—normality. But a bokanovskified egg will bud, will proliferate, will divide. From eight to ninety-six buds, and every bud will grow into a perfectly formed embryo, and every embryo into a full-sized adult. Making ninety-six human beings grow where only one grew before. Progress.

"Essentially," the D.H.C. concluded, "bokanovskification consists of a series of arrests of development. We check the normal growth and, paradoxically enough, the egg responds by budding."

*Responds by budding.* The pencils were busy.

He pointed. On a very slowly moving band a rack full of test-tubes was entering a large metal box, another rack full was emerging. Machinery faintly purred. It took eight minutes for the tubes to go through, he told them. Eight minutes of hard X-rays being about as much as an egg can stand. A few died; of the rest, the least susceptible divided into two; most put out four buds; some eight; all were returned to the incubators, where the buds began to develop; then, after two days, were suddenly chilled, chilled and checked. Two, four, eight, the buds in their turn budded; and having budded were dosed almost to death with alcohol; consequently burgeoned again and having budded—bud out of bud out of bud—were thereafter—further arrest being generally fatal—left to develop in peace. By which time the original egg was in a fair way to becoming anything from eight to ninety-six embryos—a prodigious improvement, you will agree, on nature. Identical twins—but not in piddling twos and threes as in the old viviparous days, when an egg would sometimes accidentally divide; actually by dozens, by scores at a time.

"Scores," the Director repeated and flung out his arms, as though he were distributing largesse. "Scores."

But one of the students was fool enough to ask where the advantage lay.

"My good boy!" The Director wheeled sharply round on him.



"Can't you see? Can't you see?" He raised a hand; his expression was solemn. "Bokanovsky's Process is one of the major instruments of social stability!"

*Major instruments of social stability.*

Standard men and women; in uniform batches. The whole of a small factory staffed with the products of a single bokanovskified egg.

"Ninety-six identical twins working ninety-six identical machines!" The voice was almost tremulous with enthusiasm. "You really know where you are. For the first time in history." He quoted the planetary motto. "Community, Identity, Stability." Grand words. "If we could bokanovskify indefinitely the whole problem would be solved."

Solved by standard Gammas, unvarying Deltas, uniform Epsilons. Millions of identical twins. The principle of mass production at last applied to biology.

"But, alas," the Director shook his head, "we *can't* bokanovskify indefinitely."

Ninety-six seemed to be the limit; seventy-two a good average. From the same ovary and with gametes of the same male to manufacture as many batches of identical twins as possible—that was the best (sadly a second best) that they could do. And even that was difficult.

"For in nature it takes thirty years for two hundred eggs to reach maturity. But our business is to stabilize the population at this moment, here and now. Dribbling out twins over a quarter of a century—what would be the use of that?"

Obviously, no use at all. But Podsnap's Technique had immensely accelerated the process of ripening. They could make sure of at least a hundred and fifty mature eggs within two years. Fertilize and bokanovskify—in other words, multiply by seventy-two—and you get an average of nearly eleven thousand brothers and sisters in a hundred and fifty batches of identical twins, all within two years of the same age.

"And in exceptional cases we can make one ovary yield us over fifteen thousand adult individuals."

Beckoning to a fair-haired, ruddy young man who happened to be passing at the moment, "Mr. Foster," he called. The ruddy young man approached. "Can you tell us the record for a single ovary, Mr. Foster?"

"Sixteen thousand and twelve in this Centre," Mr. Foster replied without hesitation. He spoke very quickly, had a vivacious blue eye, and took an evident pleasure in quoting figures. "Sixteen thousand

and twelve; in one hundred and eighty-nine batches of identicals. But of course they've done much better," he rattled on, "in some of the tropical Centres. Singapore has often produced over sixteen thousand five hundred; and Mombasa has actually touched the seventeen thousand mark. But then they have unfair advantages. You should see the way a negro ovary responds to pituitary! It's quite astonishing, when you're used to working with European material. Still," he added, with a laugh (but the light of combat was in his eyes and the lift of his chin was challenging), "still, we mean to beat them if we can. I'm working on a wonderful Delta-Minus ovary at this moment. Only just eighteen months old. Over twelve thousand seven hundred children already, either decanted or in embryo. And still going strong. We'll beat them yet."

"That's the spirit I like!" cried the Director, and clapped Mr. Foster on the shoulder. "Come along with us and give these boys the benefit of your expert knowledge."

Mr. Foster smiled modestly. "With pleasure." They went.

In the Bottling Room all was harmonious bustle and ordered activity. Flaps of fresh sow's peritoneum ready cut to the proper size came shooting up in little lifts from the Organ Store in the sub-basement. Whizz and then, click! the lift-hatches flew open; the bottle-liner had only to reach out a hand, take the flap, insert, smooth-down, and before the lined bottle had had time to travel out of reach along the endless band, whizz, click! another flap of peritoneum had shot up from the depths, ready to be slipped into yet another bottle, the next of that slow interminable procession on the band.

Next to the Liners stood the Matriculators. The procession advanced; one by one the eggs were transferred from their test-tubes to the larger containers; deftly, the peritoneal lining was slit, the morula dropped into place, the saline solution poured in . . . and already the bottle had passed, and it was the turn of the labellers. Heredity, date of fertilization, membership of Bokanovsky Group—details were transferred from test-tube to bottle. No longer anonymous, but named, identified, the procession marched slowly on; on through an opening in the wall, slowly on into the Social Predestination Room.

"Eighty-eight cubic metres of card-index," said Mr. Foster with relish, as they entered.

"Containing *all* the relevant information," added the Director.

"Brought up to date every morning."

"And co-ordinated every afternoon."

"On the basis of which they make their calculations."

"So many individuals, of such and such quality," said Mr. Foster.

"Distributed in such and such quantities."

"The optimum Decanting Rate at any given moment."

"Unforeseen wastages promptly made good."

"Promptly," repeated Mr. Foster. "If you knew the amount of overtime I had to put in after the last Japanese earthquake!" He laughed good-humouredly and shook his head.

"The Predestinators send in their figures to the Fertilizers."

"Who give them the embryos they ask for."

"And the bottles come in here to be predestinated in detail."

"After which they are sent down to the Embryo Store."

"Where we now proceed ourselves."

And opening a door Mr. Foster led the way down a staircase into the basement.

The temperature was still tropical. They descended into a thickening twilight. Two doors and a passage with a double turn insured the cellar against any possible infiltration of the day.

"Embryos are like photograph film," said Mr. Foster waggishly, as he pushed open the second door. "They can only stand red light."

And in effect the sultry darkness into which the students now followed him was visible and crimson, like the darkness of closed eyes on a summer's afternoon. The bulging flanks of row on receding row and tier above tier of bottles glistened with innumerable rubies, and among the rubies moved the dim red spectres of men and women with purple eyes and all the symptoms of lupus. The hum and rattle of machinery faintly stirred the air.

"Give them a few figures, Mr. Foster," said the Director, who was tired of talking.

Mr. Foster was only too happy to give them a few figures.

Two hundred and twenty metres long, two hundred wide, ten high. He pointed upwards. Like children drinking, the students lifted their eyes towards the distant ceiling.

Three tiers of racks: ground floor level, first gallery, second gallery.

The spidery steel-work of gallery above gallery faded away in all directions into the dark. Near them three red ghosts were busily unloading demijohns from a moving staircase.

The escalator from the Social Predestination Room.

Each bottle could be placed on one of fifteen racks, each rack,

though you couldn't see it, was a conveyor travelling at the rate of thirty-three and a third centimetres an hour. Two hundred and sixty-seven days at eight metres a day. Two thousand one hundred and thirty-six metres in all. One circuit of the cellar at ground level, one on the first gallery, half on the second, and on the two hundred and sixty-seventh morning, daylight in the Decanting Room. Independent existence—so called.

"But in the interval," Mr. Foster concluded, "we've managed to do a lot to them. Oh, a very great deal." His laugh was knowing and triumphant.

"That's the spirit I like," said the Director once more. "Let's walk round. You tell them everything, Mr. Foster."

Mr. Foster duly told them.

Told them of the growing embryo on its bed of peritoneum. Made them taste the rich blood surrogate on which it fed. Explained why it had to be stimulated with placentin and thyroxin. Told them of the *corpus luteum* extract. Showed them the jets through which at every twelfth metre from zero to two thousand forty it was automatically injected. Spoke of those gradually increasing doses of pituitary administered during the final ninety-six metres of their course. Described the artificial maternal circulation installed on every bottle at Metre 112; showed them the reservoir of blood surrogate, the centrifugal pump that kept the liquid moving over the placenta and drove it through the synthetic lung and waste-product filter. Referred to the embryo's troublesome tendency to anaemia, to the massive doses of hog's stomach extract and foetal foal's liver with which, in consequence, it had to be supplied.

Showed them the simple mechanism by means of which, during the last two metres out of every eight, all the embryos were simultaneously shaken into familiarity with movement. Hinted at the gravity of the so-called "trauma of decanting," and enumerated the precautions taken to minimize, by a suitable training of the bottled embryo, that dangerous shock. Told them of the tests for sex carried out in the neighbourhood of Metre 200. Explained the system of labelling—a T for the males, a circle for the females, and for those who were destined to become freemartins a question mark, black on a white ground.

"For of course," said Mr. Foster, "in the vast majority of cases, fertility is merely a nuisance. One fertile ovary in twelve hundred—that would really be quite sufficient for our purposes. But we want to have a good choice. And of course one must always leave an enor-

mous margin of safety. So we allow as many as thirty per cent of the female embryos to develop normally. The others get a dose of male sex-hormone every twenty-four metres for the rest of the course. Result: they're decanted as freemartins—structurally quite normal (except," he had to admit, "that they *do* have just the slightest tendency to grow beards), but sterile. Guaranteed sterile. Which brings us at last," continued Mr. Foster, "out of the realm of mere slavish imitation of nature into the much more interesting world of human invention."

He rubbed his hands. For of course, they didn't content themselves with merely hatching out embryos: any cow could do that.

"We also predestine and condition. We decant our babies as socialized human beings, as Alphas or Epsilons, as future sewage workers or future . . ." He was going to say "future World controllers," but correcting himself, said "future Directors of Hatcheries," instead.

The D.H.C. acknowledged the compliment with a smile.

They were passing Metre 320 on Rack 11. A young Beta-Minus mechanic was busy with screwdriver and spanner on the blood-surrogate pump of a passing bottle. The hum of the electric motor deepened by fractions of a tone as he turned the nuts. Down, down . . . a final twist, a glance at the revolution counter, and he was done. He moved two paces down the line and began the same process on the next pump.

"Reducing the number of revolutions per minute," Mr. Foster explained. "The surrogate goes round slower; therefore passes through the lung at longer intervals; therefore gives the embryo less oxygen. Nothing like oxygen-shortage for keeping an embryo below par." Again he rubbed his hands.

"But why do you want to keep the embryo below par?" asked an ingenuous student.

"Ass!" said the Director, breaking a long silence. "Hasn't it occurred to you that an Epsilon embryo must have an Epsilon environment as well as an Epsilon heredity?"

It evidently hadn't occurred to him. He was covered with confusion.

"The lower the caste," said Mr. Foster, "the shorter the oxygen." The first organ affected was the brain. After that the skeleton. At seventy per cent of normal oxygen you got dwarfs. At less than seventy eyeless monsters.

"Who are no use at all," concluded Mr. Foster.

Whereas (his voice became confidential and eager), if they could

discover a technique for shortening the period of maturation, what a triumph, what a benefaction to Society!

"Consider the horse."

They considered it.

Mature at six; the elephant at ten. Whereas at thirteen a man is not yet sexually mature; and is only full grown at twenty. Hence, of course, that fruit of delayed development, the human intelligence.

"But in Epsilons," said Mr. Foster very justly, "we don't need human intelligence."

Didn't need and didn't get it. But though the Epsilon mind was mature at ten, the Epsilon body was not fit to work till eighteen. Long years of superfluous and wasted immaturity. If the physical development could be speeded up till it was as quick, say, as a cow's, what an enormous saving to the Community!

"Enormous!" murmured the students. Mr. Foster's enthusiasm was infectious.

He became rather technical; spoke of the abnormal endocrine co-ordination which made man grow so slowly; postulated a germinal mutation to account for it. Could the effects of this germinal mutation be undone? Could the individual Epsilon embryo be made a revert, by a suitable technique, to the normality of dogs and cows? That was the problem. And it was all but solved.

Pilkington at Mombasa had produced individuals who were sexually mature at four and full grown at six and a half. A scientific triumph. But socially useless. Six-year-old men and women were too stupid to do even Epsilon work. And the process was an all-or-nothing one; either you failed to modify at all, or else you modified the whole way. They were still trying to find the ideal compromise between adults of twenty and adults of six. So far without success. Mr. Foster sighed and shook his head.

Their wanderings through the crimson twilight had brought them to the neighbourhood of Metre 170 on Rack 9. From this point onwards Rack 9 was enclosed and the bottles performed the remainder of their journey in a kind of tunnel, interrupted here and there by openings two or three metres wide.

"Heat conditioning," said Mr. Foster.

Hot tunnels alternated with cool tunnels. Coolness was wedded to discomfort in the form of hard X-rays. By the time they were decanted the embryos had a horror of cold. They were predestined to emigrate to the tropics, to be miners and acetate silk spinners and steel workers. Later on their minds would be made to endorse the

judgment of their bodies. "We condition them to thrive on heat," concluded Mr. Foster. "Our colleagues upstairs will teach them to love it."

"And that," put in the Director sententiously, "that is the secret of happiness and virtue—liking what you've got to do. All conditioning aims at that: making people like their inescapable social destiny."

In a gap between two tunnels, a nurse was delicately probing with a long fine syringe into the gelatinous contents of a passing bottle. The students and their guides stood watching her for a few moments in silence.

"Well, Lenina," said Mr. Foster, when at last she withdrew the syringe and straightened herself up, "what are you giving them?"

"Oh, the usual typhoid and sleeping sickness."

"Tropical workers start being inoculated at Metre 150," Mr. Foster explained to the students. "The embryos still have gills. We immunize the fish against the future man's diseases."

On Rack 10 rows of next generation's chemical workers were being trained in the toleration of lead, caustic soda, tar, chlorine. The first of a batch of two hundred and fifty embryonic rocket-plane engineers was just passing the eleven hundred metre mark on Rack 3. A special mechanism kept their containers in constant rotation. "To improve their sense of balance," Mr. Foster explained. "Doing repairs on the outside of a rocket in mid-air is a ticklish job. We slacken off the circulation when they're right way up, so that they're half starved, and double the flow of surrogate when they're upside down. They learn to associate topsy-turvydom with well-being; in fact, they're only truly happy when they're standing on their heads.

"And now," Mr. Foster went on, "I'd like to show you some very interesting conditioning for Alpha Plus Intellectuals. We have a big batch of them on Rack 5. First Gallery level," he called to two boys who had started to go down to the ground floor.

"They're round about Metre 900," he explained. "You can't really do any useful intellectual conditioning till the foetuses have lost their tails. Follow me."

But the Director had looked at his watch. "Ten to three," he said. "No time for the intellectual embryos, I'm afraid. We must go up to the Nurseries before the children have finished their afternoon sleep."

Mr. Foster was disappointed. "At least one glance at the Decanting Room," he pleaded.

"Very well then." The Director smiled indulgently. "Just one glance."

II

Mr. Foster was left in the Decanting Room. The D.H.C. and his students stepped into the nearest lift and were carried up to the fifth floor.

INFANT NURSERIES. NEO-PAVLOVIAN CONDITIONING ROOMS, announced the notice board.

The Director opened a door. They were in a large bare room, very bright and sunny; for the whole of the southern wall was a single window. Half a dozen nurses, trousered and jacketed in the regulation white viscose-linen uniform, their hair aseptically hidden under white caps, were engaged in setting out bowls of roses in a long row across the floor. Big bowls, packed tight with blossom. Thousands of petals, ripe blown and silkily smooth, like the cheeks of innumerable little cherubs, but of cherubs, in that bright light, not exclusively pink and Aryan, but also luminously Chinese, also Mexican, also apoplectic with too much blowing of celestial trumpets, also pale as death, pale with the posthumous whiteness of marble.

The nurses stiffened to attention as the D.H.C. came in.

"Set out the books," he said curtly.

In silence the nurses obeyed his command. Between the rose bowls the books were duly set out—a row of nursery quartos opened invitingly each at some gaily coloured image of beast or fish or bird.

"Now bring in the children."

They hurried out of the room and returned in a minute or two, each pushing a kind of tall dumb-waiter laden, on all its four wire-netted shelves, with eight-month-old babies, all exactly alike (a Bokanovsky Group, it was evident) and all (since their caste was Delta) dressed in khaki.

"Put them down on the floor."

The infants were unloaded.

"Now turn them so that they can see the flowers and books."

Turned, the babies at once fell silent, then began to crawl towards those clusters of sleek colours, those shapes so gay and brilliant on the white pages. As they approached, the sun came out of a momentary eclipse behind a cloud. The roses flamed up as though with a sudden passion from within; a new and profound significance seemed to suffuse the shining pages of the books. From the ranks of



the crawling babies came little squeals of excitement, gurgles and twitterings of pleasure.

The Director rubbed his hands. "Excellent!" he said. "It might almost have been done on purpose."

The swiftest crawlers were already at their goal. Small hands reached out uncertainly, touched, grasped, unpetalling the transfigured roses, crumpling the illuminated pages of the books. The Director waited until all were happily busy. Then, "Watch carefully," he said. And lifting his hand, he gave the signal.

The Head Nurse, who was standing by a switchboard at the other end of the room, pressed down a little lever.

There was a violent explosion. Shriller and even shriller, a siren shrieked. Alarm bells maddeningly sounded.

The children started, screamed; their faces were distorted with terror.

"And now," the Director shouted (for the noise was deafening), "now we proceed to rub in the lesson with a mild electric shock."

He waved his hand again, and the Head Nurse pressed a second lever. The screaming of the babies suddenly changed its tone. There was something desperate, almost insane, about the sharp spasmodic yelps to which they now gave utterance. Their little bodies twitched and stiffened; their limbs moved jerkily as if to the tug of unseen wires.

"We can electrify that whole strip of floor," bawled the Director in explanation. "But that's enough," he signalled to the nurse.

The explosions ceased, the bells stopped ringing, the shriek of the siren died down from tone to tone into silence. The stiffly twitching bodies relaxed, and what had become the sob and yelp of infant maniacs broadened out once more into a normal howl of ordinary terror.

"Offer them the flowers and the books again."

The nurses obeyed; but at the approach of the roses, at the mere sight of those gaily-coloured images of pussy and cock-a-doodle-doo and baa-baa black sheep, the infants shrank away in horror; the volume of their howling suddenly increased.

"Observe," said the Director triumphantly, "observe."

Books and loud noises, flowers and electric shocks—already in the infant mind these couples were compromisingly linked; and after two hundred repetitions of the same or a similar lesson would be wedded indissolubly. What man has joined, nature is powerless to put asunder.

"They'll grow up with what the psychologists used to call an 'instinctive' hatred of books and flowers. Reflexes unalterably conditioned. They'll be safe from books and botany all their lives." The Director turned to his nurses. "Take them away again."

Still yelling, the khaki babies were loaded on to their dumb-waiters and wheeled out, leaving behind them the smell of sour milk and a most welcome silence.

One of the students held up his hand; and though he could see quite well why you couldn't have lower-caste people wasting the Community's time over books, and that there was always the risk of their reading something which might undesirably decondition one of their reflexes, yet . . . well, he couldn't understand about the flowers. Why go to the trouble of making it psychologically impossible for Deltas to like flowers?

Patiently the D.H.C. explained. If the children were made to scream at the sight of a rose, that was on grounds of high economic policy. Not so very long ago (a century or thereabouts), Gammas, Deltas, even Epsilons, had been conditioned to like flowers—flowers in particular and wild nature in general. The idea was to make them want to be going out into the country at every available opportunity, and so compel them to consume transport.

"And didn't they consume transport?" asked the student.

"Quite a lot," the D.H.C. replied. "But nothing else."

Primroses and landscapes, he pointed out, have one grave defect: they are gratuitous. A love of nature keeps no factories busy. It was decided to abolish the love of nature, at any rate among the lower classes; to abolish the love of nature, but *not* the tendency to consume transport. For of course it was essential that they should keep on going to the country, even though they hated it. The problem was to find an economically sounder reason for consuming transport than a mere affection for primroses and landscapes. It was duly found.

"We condition the masses to hate the country," concluded the Director. "But simultaneously we condition them to love all country sports. At the same time, we see to it that all country sports shall entail the use of elaborate apparatus. So that they consume manufactured articles as well as transport. Hence those electric shocks."

"I see," said the student, and was silent, lost in admiration.

There was a silence; then, clearing his throat, "Once upon a time," the Director began, "while our Ford was still on earth, there was a little boy called Reuben Rabinovitch. Reuben was the child of Polish-

speaking parents." The Director interrupted himself. "You know what Polish is, I suppose?"

"A dead language."

"Like French and German," added another student, officiously showing off his learning.

"And 'parent'?" questioned the D.H.C.

There was an uneasy silence. Several of the boys blushed. They had not yet learned to draw the significant but often very fine distinction between smut and pure science. One, at last, had the courage to raise a hand.

"Human beings used to be . . ." he hesitated; the blood rushed to his cheeks. "Well, they used to be viviparous."

"Quite right." The Director nodded approvingly.

"And when the babies were decanted . . ."

"'Born,' " came the correction.

"Well, then they were the parents—I mean, not the babies, of course; the other ones." The poor boy was overwhelmed with confusion.

"In brief," the Director summed up, "the parents were the father and the mother." The smut that was really science fell with a crash into the boys' eye-avoiding silence. "Mother," he repeated loudly rubbing in the science; and, leaning back in his chair, "These," he said gravely, "are unpleasant facts; I know it. But then most historical facts *are* unpleasant."

He returned to Little Reuben—to Little Reuben, in whose room, one evening, by an oversight, his father and mother (crash, crash!) happened to leave the radio turned on.

("For you must remember that in those days of gross viviparous reproduction, children were always brought up by their parents and not in State Conditioning Centres.")

While the child was asleep, a broadcast programme from London suddenly started to come through; and the next morning, to the astonishment of his crash and crash (the more daring of the boys ventured to grin at one another), Little Reuben woke up repeating word for word a long lecture by that curious old writer ("one of the very few whose works have been permitted to come down to us"), George Bernard Shaw, who was speaking, according to a well-authenticated tradition, about his own genius. To Little Reuben's wink and snigger, this lecture was, of course, perfectly incomprehensible and, imagining that their child had suddenly gone mad, they

sent for a doctor. He, fortunately, understood English, recognized the discourse as that which Shaw had broadcasted the previous evening, realized the significance of what had happened, and sent a letter to the medical press about it.

"The principle of sleep-teaching, or hypnopaedia, had been discovered." The D.H.C. made an impressive pause.

The principle had been discovered; but many, many years were to elapse before that principle was usefully applied.

"The case of Little Reuben occurred only twenty-three years after Our Ford's first T-Model was put on the market." (Here the Director made a sign of the T on his stomach and all the students reverently followed suit.) "And yet . . ."

Furiously the students scribbled. "*Hypnopaedia, first used officially in A.F. 214. Why not before? Two reasons. (a) . . .*"

"These early experimenters," the D.H.C. was saying, "were on the wrong track. They thought that hypnopaedia could be made an instrument of intellectual education . . ."

(A small boy asleep on his right side, the right arm stuck out, the right hand hanging limp over the edge of the bed. Through a round grating in the side of a box a voice speaks softly.

"The Nile is the longest river in Africa and the second in length of all the rivers of the globe. Although falling short of the length of the Mississippi-Missouri, the Nile is at the head of all rivers as regards the length of its basin, which extends through thirty-five degrees of latitude . . ."

At breakfast the next morning, "Tommy," some one says, "do you know which is the longest river in Africa?" A shaking of the head. "But don't you remember something that begins: The Nile is the . . ."

"The-Nile-is-the-longest-river-in-Africa-and-the-second-in-length-of-all-the-rivers-of-the-globe . . ." The words come rushing out. "Although-falling-short-of . . ."

"Well now, which is the longest river in Africa?"

The eyes are blank. "I don't know."

"But the Nile, Tommy."

"The-Nile-is-the-longest-river-in-Africa-and-second . . ."

"Then which river is the longest, Tommy?"

Tommy bursts into tears. "I don't know," he howls.)

That howl, the Director made it plain, discouraged the earliest investigators. The experiments were abandoned. No further attempt

was made to teach children the length of the Nile in their sleep. Quite rightly. You can't learn a science unless you know what it's all about.

"Whereas, if they'd only started on *moral* education," said the Director, leading the way towards the door. The students followed him, desperately scribbling as they walked and all the way up in the lift. "Moral education, which ought never, in any circumstances, to be rational."

"Silence, silence," whispered a loud speaker as they stepped out at the fourteenth floor, and "Silence, silence," the trumpet mouths indefatigably repeated at intervals down every corridor. The students and even the Director himself rose automatically to the tips of their toes. They were Alphas, of course; but even Alphas have been well conditioned. "Silence, silence." All the air of the fourteenth floor was sibilant with the categorical imperative.

Fifty yards of tiptoeing brought them to a door which the Director cautiously opened. They stepped over the threshold into the twilight of a shuttered dormitory. Eighty cots stood in a row against the wall. There was a sound of light regular breathing and a continuous murmur, as of very faint voices remotely whispering.

A nurse rose as they entered and came to attention before the Director.

"What's the lesson this afternoon?" he asked.

"We had Elementary Sex for the first forty minutes," she answered. "But now it's switched over to Elementary Class Consciousness."

The Director walked slowly down the long line of cots. Rosy and relaxed with sleep, eighty little boys and girls lay softly breathing. There was a whisper under every pillow. The D.H.C. halted and, bending over one of the little beds, listened attentively.

"Elementary Class Consciousness, did you say? Let's have it repeated a little louder by the trumpet."

At the end of the room a loud speaker projected from the wall. The Director walked up to it and pressed a switch.

". . . all wear green," said a soft but very distinct voice, beginning in the middle of a sentence, "and Delta children wear khaki. Oh, no, I don't want to play with Delta children. And Epsilons are still worse. They're too stupid to be able to read or write. Besides they wear black, which is such a beastly colour. I'm so glad I'm a Beta."

There was a pause; then the voice began again.

"Alpha children wear grey. They work much harder than we do,

because they're so frightfully clever. I'm really awfully glad I'm a Beta, because I don't work so hard. And then we are much better than the Gammas and Deltas. Gammas are stupid. They all wear green, and Delta children wear khaki. Oh no, I *don't* want to play with Delta children. And Epsilons are still worse. They're too stupid to be able . . ."

The Director pushed back the switch. The voice was silent. Only its thin ghost continued to mutter from beneath the eighty pillows.

"They'll have that repeated forty or fifty times more before they wake; then again on Thursday, and again on Saturday. A hundred and twenty times three times a week for thirty months. After which they go on to a more advanced lesson."

Roses and electric shocks, the khaki of Deltas and a whiff of asafoetida—wedded indissolubly before the child can speak. But wordless conditioning is crude and wholesale; cannot bring home the finer distinctions, cannot inculcate the more complex courses of behaviour. For that there must be words, but words without reason. In brief, hypnopaedia.

"The greatest moralizing and socializing force of all time."

The students took it down in their little books. Straight from the horse's mouth.

Once more the Director touched the switch.

". . . so frightfully clever," the soft, insinuating, indefatigable voice was saying. "I'm really awfully glad I'm a Beta, because . . ."

Not so much like drops of water, though water, it is true, can wear holes in the hardest granite; rather, drops of liquid sealing-wax, drops that adhere, incrust, incorporate themselves with what they fall on, till finally the rock is all one scarlet blob.

"Till at last the child's mind *is* these suggestions, and the sum of the suggestions *is* the child's mind. And not the child's mind only. The adult's mind too—all his life long. The mind that judges and desires and decides—made up of these suggestions. But all these suggestions are *our* suggestions!" The Director almost shouted in his triumph. "Suggestions from the State." He banged the nearest table. "It therefore follows . . ."

A noise made him turn round.

"Oh, Ford!" he said in another tone, "I've gone and woken the children."

Outside, in the garden, it was playtime. Naked in the warm June sunshine, six or seven hundred little boys and girls were running with

shrill yells over the lawns, or playing ball games, or squatting silently in twos and threes among the flowering shrubs. The roses were in bloom, two nightingales soliloquized in the boskage, a cuckoo was just going out of tune among the lime trees. The air was drowsy with the murmur of bees and helicopters.

The Director and his students stood for a short time watching a game of Centrifugal Bumble-puppy. Twenty children were grouped in a circle round a chrome steel tower. A ball thrown up so as to land on the platform at the top of the tower rolled down into the interior, fell on a rapidly revolving disk, was hurled through one or other of the numerous apertures pierced in the cylindrical casing, and had to be caught.

"Strange," mused the Director, as they turned away, "strange to think that even in Our Ford's day most games were played without more apparatus than a ball or two and a few sticks and perhaps a bit of netting. Imagine the folly of allowing people to play elaborate games which do nothing whatever to increase consumption. It's madness. Nowadays the Controllers won't approve of any new game unless it can be shown that it requires at least as much apparatus as the most complicated of existing games." He interrupted himself.

"That's a charming little group," he said, pointing.

In a little grassy bay between tall clumps of Mediterranean heather, two children, a little boy of about seven and a little girl who might have been a year older, were playing, very gravely and with all the focussed attention of scientists intent on a labour of discovery, a rudimentary sexual game.

"Charming, charming!" the D.H.C. repeated sentimentally.

"Charming," the boys politely agreed. But their smile was rather patronizing. They had put aside similar childish amusements too recently to be able to watch them now without a touch of contempt. Charming? but it was just a pair of kids fooling about; that was all. Just kids.

"I always think," the Director was continuing in the same rather maudlin tone, when he was interrupted by a loud boo-hooing.

From a neighbouring shrubbery emerged a nurse, leading by the hand a small boy, who howled as he went. An anxious-looking little girl trotted at her heels.

"What's the matter?" asked the Director.

The nurse shrugged her shoulders. "Nothing much," she answered. "It's just that this little boy seems rather reluctant to join in the or-

dinary erotic play. I'd noticed it once or twice before. And now again today. He started yelling just now . . ."

"Honestly," put in the anxious-looking little girl, "I didn't mean to hurt him or anything. Honestly."

"Of course you didn't, dear," said the nurse reassuringly. "And so," she went on, turning back to the Director, "I'm taking him in to see the Assistant Superintendent of Psychology. Just to see if anything's at all abnormal."

"Quite right," said the Director. "Take him in. You stay here, little girl," he added, as the nurse moved away with her still howling charge. "What's your name?"

"Polly Trotsky."

"And a very good name, too," said the Director. "Run away now and see if you can find some other little boy to play with."

The child scampered off into the bushes and was lost to sight.

## ERRAND BOY

by William Tenn

**Y**ES, I'm the Malcolm Blyn who phoned you from the village. Mind if I come in and take a seat—I won't take up much of your time? Thanks. Now, here's the story, and if you're the man I've been tearing the country apart for, there's a million in it—

No, please! I'm not selling gold mine stocks or a patent for an internal combustion atomic engine: I'm not selling anything. I'm a salesman all right—been one all my life and I know I look like a salesman right down to my bottom adjective—but today I'm not selling anything.

Today I'm buying.

If you have the stuff, that is. The stuff the errand boy said you or someone with you— Listen! I'm not crazy, believe me till you hear it all! Please sit down and listen. He wasn't an ordinary errand boy; he was an errand boy like Einstein is an accountant. The errands he ran! But you must understand . . . here, have a cigar.

Here's my card. *Blyn's Wholesale Paints and Painters' Supplies*—that's me—*Any Quantity of Any Paint Delivered Anywhere at Any*



*Time.* Of course, by "anywhere" we mean the continental United States only. But it looks good on the card. Salesmanship.

That's me, a salesman. Give me something to sell: an improvement, a service or a brand-new crazy novelty gimmick—I guarantee to get people tearing the lining out of their pants pockets. I've always kept Emerson's famous wisecrack framed on my office wall, you know: "If a man can write a better book, preach a better sermon, or make a better mousetrap than his neighbor, though he builds his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door." Solid stuff. And I'm the guy that gets them interested in beating a path in the first place.

I'm good. I want you to understand that. I can put it over, whatever it is you've got—if only you're the guy that's got it. But I must have something to put over, something good. No hot air. No, I'm not accusing you of putting out the hot air. I don't know yet what you put out—raise chickens, mostly? Yeah. So listen.

Five weeks ago this coming Wednesday, we had a rush job. Three hundred gallons of flat white to the Expando Construction Corporation, an outfit I'd been trying to sell ever since they started up after the war. Eleven o'clock, and they wanted it delivered to their new development over in north Jersey by noon, so their men could start slapping it on the walls right after lunch.

I was out on the floor of the warehouse lighting a fire under Hennessey, my foreman, so he'd light a fire under his crew. Cans of paint were being stacked and shipped as fast as the bank says no to an extension of your loan, men were rolling this way, guys were hustling that way—when I heard Hennessey make a crack.

"Hey, that new errand boy's been gone a long time. Kid must have given up." About a dozen men stopped working and laughed for a while. They could see it was supposed to be funny—Hennessey was their boss.

"Since when do we have a new errand boy?" I stopped Hennessey in his tracks. "I do all the hiring and firing around here. Any new personnel have to go on the books—a dozen different ones these days. Do you want to get me into trouble? Haven't you ever heard of Social Security? Child Labor Laws? How old is the kid?"

"Aw, Mr. Blyn, how should I know? They all look alike to me. Maybe nine, maybe ten, eleven. A lot thinner than most kids I've seen, but a lot healthier. Looks—sorta rich."

"Well, if he's that young, he's got no business in the warehouse

district this early in a weekday. Probably on the hook. I'll have the New York Board of Education on my neck as well as the working papers people. Don't I have enough trouble, Hennessey, with two road-happy truck drivers who use a Pennsylvania map to get lost in New Jersey, without—"

"I didn't hire him, honest. He come around here asking for a job in that funny voice like kid stars have in the movies. He says he's willing to start at the bottom and prove himself, he feels he's bound to rise, he's got the will to win, all he wants is a chance. I tell him the way business has been lately, we wouldn't hire Alexander Graham Bell to run our switchboard. He says he doesn't care; he wants to get a foot on the ladder of success. He'll work for nothing."

"So?"

"So, I make out I'm thinking—at ten this morning, things were slow on the floor—and finally I say I'll give him a crack at trying out for errand boy. I hand him an empty can and say I want it filled with green paint—it should have orange polka dots. I'm testing him, see? He grabs the can and takes off. He won't bother us any more. You shoulda seen the guys after he left, Mr. Blyn: they fit to died."

"Hold me up," I said. "I'm getting weak myself. Almost as funny as the time you locked Whalen in the washroom with a stink bomb. That reminds me—you'll be taking orders from Whalen if your crew doesn't get that truck loaded and out of here in ten minutes."

He wiped his hands on his overalls and started to say something. Then he changed his mind and began yelling up and down the warehouse. He asked his men if they didn't think it was time to crawl out of their coffins, he told them to get their mass behind every dolly that wasn't being used, he got the place hissing where before it was only humming.

One thing about Hennessey: he might have been a practical joker from way back when he found all the amusing things you could do with diapers; but he was one crackerjack foreman. The way he made those monkeys hustle reminded me of the way I fit a fountain pen in a customer's hand just before he begins to purse his lips.

Then the kid walked in.

"Hey, Ernest," somebody yelled. "Look. Ernest's back."

Work stopped. The kid walked in, breathing hard, and set the can down in front of Hennessey. He was dressed in a white blouse, patched corduroy pants and high-laced brown shoes. But I'd never seen corduroy like that before, or that kind of white broadcloth in

a shirt. The material seemed to be very thin—and, well, rich somehow. That's the only way to describe it. Like imitation iron.

"Glad you're back, kid," Hennessey told him. "I've been needing a left-handed paintbrush. Shop around and see if you can pick one up for me. But it must be left-handed."

A couple of characters on the loading platform started to chuckle. The kid started out. He turned at the big sliding doors.

"I'll try, sir," he said in a voice like he had a flute in his throat. "I'll do my best. But this paint—I couldn't find any green paint with orange polka dots. This only has red polka dots. I hope it will do." Then he left.

For a moment we all stared at the patch of sidewalk where he'd been standing. Then I laughed; in a second the roars were bouncing off the second-story ceiling. The men just stood there with dollies and paint stacked on them, laughing their heads off.

"Hennessey, the wise guy!" someone yelled.

"All I could find was green paint with red polka dots!"

"Please, sir, I hope it will do. Wow!"

"Did that kid let you have it!"

"Poor Hennessey!"

Hennessey stood there, his great big fists hanging at his sides and no one to use them on. Suddenly he noticed the can of paint. He drew his right leg back and came tearing at it with a kick that would have sent it into Long Island Sound. Only he missed it. He just touched a corner of the can—rocking it enough to spill a drop—missed his footing and came smashing down on his sitting apparatus. The roars got louder as he scrambled to his feet.

In a second, the laughter had stopped cold and everyone and his brother was hustling again. Not a man in that warehouse wanted to attract Hennessey's attention after his joke had backfired.

Still chuckling, I strolled over and looked at the can. I wanted to see what junk the kid had used to fill it. Looked like water. The liquid in the can was mostly transparent, with little brown flecks floating around. Not paint, certainly—no kind I knew.

I glanced at the floor where a drop had been spilled when my foreman tried to kick the can.

I began strangling on a howl.

The junk the kid had used to fill the can—the junk had been green paint with red polka dots. *Red polka dots!*

No doubt at all: a little oval puddle dripped up to the side of the can; the warehouse floor now had a spot painted green with red polka

dots. And this kid—this errand boy—this Ernest—had found it somewhere.

One thing I told you I can tell. Salability. I can tell the salable something in somebody else's dream at night when I'm sleeping on the other side of town. I can sniff it—but, you know all that. But do you know how salable that kind of paint would be? Sell it as a sure-fire novelty to manufacturers, sell it as a gimmick to guys who putter around their own home, sell it as a brand-new idea in design to interior decorators. It's a natural; it's a gold mine.

But I had to move fast. I picked up the can by the wire handle; I scuffed the paint spot carelessly with my foot. Luckily, it seemed to take a long time to dry: it mixed with the dust on the floor and lost its color. I walked out into the street where Hennessey was standing near the truck watching his crew load.

"What did you say that kid's name was? Ernest?"

He looked up. "Yeah," he brooded. "Ernest. Didn't give me his last name. But if he ever shows his wise puss around here—"

"O.K. I have an important business appointment. Take over until I get back and get that flat white out." I turned and started in the direction the kid had gone. I knew Hennessey was staring at the can of paint I carried swinging from my left hand. He was wondering what I wanted with it, with the kid. Let him wonder, I told myself. Give Hennessey the curiosity; I'll take the profit.

I caught sight of the kid about three blocks away; he was going east, in the direction of the park. He stopped in front of a hardware store, thought a moment, walked in. By the time he came out again, I'd caught up with him. He was shaking his head unhappily.

We walked side by side for a while before he noticed me. I couldn't get over those clothes of his. Even the old-fashioned high shoes he was wearing weren't made out of anything I'd ever seen; the material hugged his foot like another layer of skin; it wasn't leather, I was sure of that.

"No luck?" I asked.

He jumped and stared a bit. Then he seemed to recognize the face as one of those that had been staring at him a while ago. "No. No . . . er, luck. The distributor said he was very sorry but he was just this moment fresh out of left-handed paintbrushes. Exactly what they all said when I asked them for the paint with the polka dots. I don't mean any offense, but . . . but this is an inefficient method of circulating goods."

I watched his face while he said that. Really meant every word of it. What a kid! I stopped and scratched my head. Should I come right out and ask him where he'd found the paint, or should I let him talk into the secret as most people will usually do?

He had turned pale and then began blushing. I didn't like to see that in a boy. That musical soprano voice was bad enough, his thinness for a kid his size—he was almost as tall as me—I could take; but a boy who blushed had evidently never met a real school bully.

"Look, Ernest," I began. I reached out and put my hand on his shoulder, you know, fatherly-like. "Ernest, I—"

Zing! He jumped backwards as if I'd gone to work on his neck with a can opener. And blush! Reminded me of a bride who'd led a full life and was doing her rosy best to convince the groom's mother at the altar that she hadn't.

"Don't do that," he said, shaking himself all over.

Better change the subject. "Nice outfit you've got there. Where did you get it?" Subtle, you know. Catch him off guard.

He looked down complacently. "It was my costume in the school play. Of course, it was a little off-period, but I thought—"

His voice trailed away awkwardly like he'd just realized he was breaking a lodge secret. This thing had angles, all right.

"Where do you live?" I shot at him fast.

"Brooks," he came right back.

I thought that over. No, it couldn't be. "Brooks?"

"Yes, you know—Brooks. Or maybe it's Brooklyn?"

I stroked my chin, trying to work it out. He was shuddering again.

"Please," he said in that high voice. "Please. Do you have to skinge?"

"Do I have to what?"

"Skinge. Touch your body with your hands. In a public place, too. Spitting and belching are bad enough—though most of your people avoid it. But everyone—everyone is always skinging!"

I took a deep breath and promised him I wouldn't skinge. But if I wanted to see his hole card, I'd have to flip mine over first. "Look, Ernest, what I wanted to say . . . well, I'm Malcolm Blyn. I—"

His eyes widened. "The robber baron of the warehouse!"

"The *what?*"

"You own Blyn's Paints. I saw your name on the door." He nodded to himself. "I've read all the adventure stories. Dumas . . . no, Dumas isn't right . . . Alger, Sinclair, Capon. Capon's 'The Sixteen Salesmen,' there's one fully conscious book! I read it five times.

But you wouldn't know Capon, would you? He wasn't published until—"

"Until when?"

"Until . . . until . . . oh, I can tell you. You're one of the ruling powers: you own a warehouse. I don't come from here."

"No? Where do you come from?" I had my own ideas on that. Some overeducated rich kid—a refugee, maybe, to account for his accent and slenderness.

"From the future. I shouldn't have done it; it may mean my being set back a whole responsibility group, but I just had to see the robber barons with my own eyes. Wolf bait! I wanted to see them forming pools, freezing out competitors, getting a corner on—"

"Hold the economics, Jackson! From the *future*, did you say?" This kid was getting too big for his corduroy britches. *Corduroy* britches?

"Yes. According to the calendar of this time . . . let me see, and this part of the world, it would be . . . oh, the year 5930. No, that's still another calendar. According to *your* calendar I came from 2169 A.D. Or is it 2170? 2169, I think."

I was glad he'd settled the point to his satisfaction. I told him so, and he thanked me. And all the time, I was thinking: if this kid's crazy, or if he's lying, how come paint that brushes out green with red polka dots? And how come his clothes? They hadn't been made in any factories I'd ever heard of. Check.

"This paint . . . that come from the future . . . from your time?"

"Well, the shops were all out of it, and I wanted to prove myself to Hennessy . . . he's a real swashbuckler, isn't he? I went home and probed the spirillix, and finally I found—"

"What's this spirillix deal?"

"The spirillix—the rounded usicon, you know. Your American scientist Wenceslaus invented it just about this time. I *think* it was just about this time—I remember reading of the trouble he had getting it financed. Or was it this time? Yes, I think—"

He was starting another of those debates with himself. I stalled him off. "O.K. What's the difference, a hundred years more or less. This paint: do you know how it's made, what's in it?"

"How it's made." He swung a high-booted foot around in a little circle and studied it. "Well, it's hydrofluoric acid, of course. Triple-blasted. Although the container didn't mention the number of

times it had been blasted. I *assume* it was triple-blasted, though—”

“Sure, sure. What do you mean—blasted, triple-blasted?”

A mouthful of perfect white teeth flashed out as he laughed right up and down the scale. “I wouldn’t know that! It’s all part of the Schmootz Dejector Process—my conditioning is two whole responsibility groups behind the Schmootz Process. I may never even reach it if I do well enough in self-expression. And I like self-expression better than conditioning; I only have two hours now, but—”

He raved on and on about how he was persuading some committee or other to give him more self-expression; I concentrated on worrying. This wasn’t so good. I couldn’t expect to import much more of the paint from this kid’s hunting ground; my only hope was analysis of the sample he’d given me. And with this hydrofluoric acid and triple-blasting deal that didn’t look so good.

Figure it out. Man has had steel for a long time now. But take some heat-treated steel from the best factory in Gary or Pittsburgh back to the time of that chemist character Priestley. Even if he had a modern lab available and knew how to use the equipment in it, he wouldn’t be able to find much useful information. He’d know it was steel maybe, and he might even be able to tell how much carbon, manganese, sulphur, phosphorus and silicon it contained in addition to iron—if someone gave him a briefing on modern elementary chemistry, that is. But how it had acquired its properties, where its elasticity and tensile strength came from—the poor guy wouldn’t know from nothing. Tell him “heat-treatment,” “inward combustion of the carbon,” and all he’d be able to do is open and close his mouth like a fish in Fulton Market wondering what happened to all the water.

Or spun glass. They had glass way back in ancient Egypt. Shove some of that shiny fabric we have at them, though, even say it’s *spun* glass. They’d say, “Yah, sure. Have another piece of pie.”

So I had the paint. One can of it hanging from my sweaty little palm. But it looked like a one-shot proposition unless I could be foxy grandpa himself—or, considering the kid, foxy great-great-great-grandpa.

Standing in front of me was the greatest errand boy a greedy businessman ever saw. And let me tell you I’m greedy; I admit it. But only for money.

How to swing it? How to turn this kid’s errands into nice, bulging mounds of green paper with lots and lots of zeros on them? I didn’t

want him to get suspicious or upset; I didn't want him to feel I was using him as the tool I intended using him as.

I had to be a salesman; I had to sell him a bill of goods. I had to get him running the errands right, with a maximum of profit to all concerned, especially me.

Carelessly, I started walking in the direction he'd been going. He swung along beside me. "Where's your time machine, Ernest?"

"Time machine?" His delicate face wrinkled. "I don't have any time ma— Oh! You mean the chondromos. Time machine—what a thought! No, I sunk a small chondromos for my own personal use. My favorite father is an assistant engineer on the main chondromos—the one they use for field trips? I wanted to go unsupervised for this once, no carnuplicators or anything. I wanted to see the ragged but determined newsboys rising steadily to riches. I wanted to see the great, arrogant robber barons like yourself—perhaps, I thought, I might even come across a real economic royalist! And I might get involved in some great intrigue, some market manipulation where millions of small investors are closed down and lose their last shred of . . . what is it again? . . . margin?"

"Yeah, they lose all their margin. Where did you sink this . . . this chondromos?"

"Not where—*when*. I sank it after school. I'm supposed to be having self-expression now, so it doesn't make much difference. But I hope I can get back before a Census Keeper winds a total."

"Sure you can. I wouldn't worry about it. Uh . . . can I use this chondromos of yours?"

He laughed his scorn at my foolishness. "How can you? You have no conditioning, not even responsibility group two. No, you wouldn't know how to begin to unstable. I'll be glad to get back. Not that I haven't enjoyed myself. Wolf bait! To think I met a robber baron! This has been one fully conscious experience."

I dug into my tweed jacket and lit a baronial cigarette. "Guess you wouldn't have much trouble finding a left-handed paintbrush."

"Well, it might be difficult. I've never heard of one before."

"One thing I was wondering." I flicked ashes elaborately onto the sidewalk. "Do you have anything that sees ahead in time?"

"A revolving distingulatrix, you mean? There's one at the main chondromos. I don't know how it works; they don't allow anyone from responsibility group four near it—you have to be at least six or seven."



Nasty. It had looked good. I might be able to persuade the kid to ferry back and forth with a couple of more cans of paint—but it would never amount to much. Especially if I couldn't get an analysis that would enable me to produce the stuff with present day methods. But if I could get a gadget from the future—something I wouldn't have to sell, something I could make a million out of just by using it myself— Like a dingus for seeing into the future: predict rare results, elections, sweepstake winners.

The dingus was there all right. This revolving dstringulatrix. But the kid couldn't lay his hands on it. Nasty, I tell you.

"What about books? Got any books lying around the house: chemistry books, physics texts, pamphlets on industrial methods?"

"I don't live in a house. And I don't study from books. Not chemistry or physics anyway. That's all handled by conditioning. I had six hours of conditioning last night—examinations are coming, you know."

My tongue knotted with the frustration of it. Millions of bucks walking next to me and I didn't know how to turn it into cash. Ernest had evidently seen all he wanted to see of the present, at least temporarily—hadn't he seen a real, live, robber baron?—and he was heading home to mama and self-expression.

There must be an angle, somewhere!

"Where'd you plant your chondromos? I mean, where's its other end come out?"

He waved ahead. "Behind a big rock in Center Park."

"Central Park, you mean. Mind if I tag along, watch you leave?"

He didn't. We padded across Central Park West and turned up a little unpaved path. I pulled a dry bough off a tree and switched it across my ankles; I just had to think of something before he took off. I began to hate the can of paint; it was light enough, but it looked like such a puny item to get out of the whole deal. Especially if it couldn't be analyzed.

Keep the kid talking. Something would turn up.

"What kind of government do you have? Democracy, monarchy—"

There he went laughing at me again! It was all I could do not to smash him across the face with the switch. Here I was losing fortunes right and left, and he thought I was making like a comic!

"Democracy! But you would think in political terms, wouldn't you? You have to consider your sick individuals, your pressure

groups, your— No, we passed that stage long before I was born. Let me see, the last president they manufactured was a reversibilist. So I imagine you could say we are living in a reversibilism. An unfulfilled one, though.”

That helped a lot. Solved everything. I sort of dropped down into a moony yearning for an idea, any kind of an idea. Ernest skipped along chattering about things with unpronounceable names that did unbelievable deeds. I thought unprintable words.

“—I get in responsibility group five. Then there are the examinations, not at all easy this time. Even the trendicle may not help.”

I cocked an ear at him. “What’s with this trendicle? What does it give out?”

“It analyzes trends. Trends and developing situations. It’s really a statistical analyzer, portable and a little primitive. I use it to determine the questions I’ll be asked in the examinations. Oh, I forgot—you probably have the scholarship superstitions of your period. You don’t believe that the young should anticipate questions based on the latest rearrangements in the world, on the individual curiosities of their instructors. There it is!”

High up on a little wooded hill was a gray and careless rock formation. And, even at that distance, I could see a transparent, shimmering blue haze behind the largest rock.

Ernest beat it off the road and scurried up the hill. I choked after him. There wasn’t much time; I had to think it out fast—this trendicle looked like the goods.

I caught up to him just as he reached the large rock. “Ernest,” I wheezed, “how does your trendicle go?”

“Oh, it’s simple. You punch all available facts into it—regular keyboard, you know—it analyzes them and states the only possible result or shows the trend the facts indicate. Built-in Skeebee power system. Well, good-by, Mr. Blyn.”

He started for the blue haze where it was thickest on the ground. I wrapped my paw around his chest and pulled him back.

“There you go again. Skinging!” he wailed.

“Sorry, kid. The last time. How would you like to be in on a really big deal? Before you go back, you might like to see me get control of an international trust. I’ve been planning it for some time—one of the biggest bull markets. Wall Street has never seen my secret gilt-edged because I have a broker planted in Chicago futures. I’ll hurry it along and do it today, just so you can see how we robber barons operate. The only thing is, this trendicle deal will make it

sure-fire and I'll be able to do the whole thing much faster. What a spectacle! Hundreds of banks failing, I get a corner on synthetic rubber, the gold standard crashes, small investors frozen and down to their bottom margin! You'll see it all. And if you get the trendicle for me, why I'd let you handle the capitalization."

His eyes shone like brand-new dimes. "That would be fully conscious! Think of my getting involved in financial battle like that! But it's so risky! If a Census Keeper winds a total and finds I've been subtracted— If my guide catches me using a chondromos illegally—"

I'm a salesman, I told you. I know how to handle people. "Suit yourself," I said, turning away and stepping on my cigarette. "I just thought I'd offer you the chance because you're a nice kid, a bright boy; I think you'll go far. We robber barons have a lot of pride, you know. It isn't every errand boy I'd trust with anything as important as capitalization." I made as if to walk away.

"Oh, please, Mr. Blyn!" He sprinted around in front of me. "I appreciate your offer. If only it weren't so dangerous— But danger—that's the breath of life to you, isn't it? I'll do it. I'll get you the trendicle. We'll rip the market open together. Will you wait?"

"Only if you hurry," I said. "I have a lot of manipulating to do before the sun goes down. Take off." I set the can of paint on the grass and crossed my arms. I swished the dry bough back and forth like the widget kings go in for—scepters.

He nodded, turned and ran into the blue haze just behind the rock. His body sort of turned blue and hazy, too, as he hit it; then he was gone.

What an angle! I mean, *what an angle*. You get it, don't you? This trendicle—if it was anything like the kid described it—could practically be used the way I said I was going to use it, in that fast double-talk shuffle I'd handed him. Predict movements of the stock market up and down—sideways even!; anticipate business cycles and industrial trends; prophesy war, peace and new bond issues. All I'd have to do would be to sock the facts into it—all the financial news let's say of the daily paper—and out would come multitudes of moolah. Was I set!

I threw my head back and winked at a treetop. Honestly, I felt drunk. I must have been drunk. Because I'd stopped figuring. Just shows—never stop figuring. Never!

I wandered up to the shimmering blue haze and put my hand out toward it. Just like a stone wall. The kid had been giving me the straight goods on this conditioning deal.

He was a nice kid. Ernest. Nice name.  
Nice.

The haze parted and Ernest ran out. He was carrying a long, gray box with a cluster of white keys set in one end. Looked like an adding machine that had been stretched.

I plucked it away from him. "How does it work?"

He was breathing hard. "My guide . . . she saw me . . . she called me . . . I hope she didn't see me go into the chondromos . . . first time I've disobeyed her . . . illegal use of chondromos—"

"Sure," I said. "Sure. Very sad. How does it work?"

"The keys. You punch the facts out on the keys. Like the ancient—like your typewriter. The resultant trend appears on the small scanner."

"Pretty small. And it'll take a terrifically long time to type out a couple of pages of financial news. Those stock listings, especially. Don't you people have anything that you just show the paper to and it burps out the result?"

Ernest looked puzzled. Then, "Oh, you mean an *open* trendicle. My guide has one. But it's only for adults. I won't get an open trendicle until responsibility group seven. With good leanings toward self-expression."

There he went on that self-expression gag. "Then that's what we need, Ernest. Suppose you trot back and pick up your guide's trendicle."

I've never seen so much shock on anyone's face in my life. He looked as if I'd told him to shoot the president. The one they just manufactured.

"But I told you! It isn't mine—it's my guide's!"

"You want to be in charge of capitalization, don't you? You want to see the greatest coup ever pulled in Wall Street—lambs fleeced, bears skinned, bulls broken? Go back to your guide—"

"You are discussing me?" A very sweet, very high voice.

Ernest twisted around. "Wolf bait! My guide," he fluted.

A little old lady in a nutty kind of twisted green dress was standing just outside the haze. She was smiling sadly at Ernest and shaking her head at me. I could tell the difference.

"I hope you are satisfied, Ernest, that this period of high adventure was in reality very ugly and peopled by individuals infinitely small. We've become a little impatient with the duration of your un-stabling, however. It's time you returned."

"You don't mean—the Census Keepers didn't *know* all along that I was illegally using a chondromos? They allowed me to do it?"

"Of course. You stand very high in self-expression; an exception had to be made in your case. Your involved and slightly retarded concepts of the romantic aspects of this era made it necessary to expose you to its harshness. We couldn't pass you into responsibility group five until you had readjusted. Come, now."

It was about time for me to break into the conversation. Between Ernest and the old lady, it sounded like a duet with fife and piccolo. Such voices!

"Just stay unstabled a second," I said. "Where do I come into all this?"

She turned hostile eyes to me. "I'm afraid you don't. We are removing it from you. The various items you have received from our time . . . you should never have gone so far, Ernest . . . will also be removed."

"I don't see it that way." I reached out and grabbed Ernest. He struggled, he had muscles in the strangest places; but I had no trouble holding on to him. I lifted the bough threateningly over his head.

"If you don't do just as I tell you, I'll hurt the boy. I'll . . . I'll skinge all over him!" Then I had an inspiration. "I'll demobilize him! I'll fragisticate every last bone in his body."

"Just what do you want?" she asked very quietly in that thin voice.

"That trendicle you have. The one without keys."

"I'll be back shortly." She turned with a tinkle of the green dress and faded back into the chondromos. Just like that.

One of the neatest deals I'd ever swung. Just like that! And guys work for a living.

Ernest writhed and twisted and shuddered, but I held him. I wasn't letting him go, no sir! He represented millions of dollars.

The blue haze shimmered again and the old lady stepped out. She carried a circular black thing with a handle in the center.

"Now, that's more like—" I started to say as she pulled the handle.

And that was all. I couldn't move. I couldn't even wiggle the hairs in my nose. I felt like my own headstone.

The kid darted away. He picked up the small trendicle where I'd dropped it on the grass and ran to the old lady. She reached up with her free hand. She was speaking to him:

"A definite pattern, Ernest. Selfishness, cruelty, little wisdom. Avarice without the faintest signs of a social—" Her hand came down and the blue haze disappeared. I bounded forward, but there was empty air behind the rock. As if they'd never been there.

Not quite.

The can of paint still sat on the ground where I'd parked it. I chuckled and reached for it. There was a sudden flicker of blue.

The can disappeared. A musical voice said, "Ooops. Sorry!"

I whirled. Nobody there. But the can was gone.

For the next half hour, I almost went crazy. All that stuff I could have had. All the questions I could have asked and didn't. All the information—money-making information—I had missed.

Information. Then I remembered. Wenceslaus. The kid had said someone named Wenceslaus had invented the spirillix about this time; had a lot of trouble financing it. I don't know what it is: maybe it stuffs ballot boxes; maybe it enables you to scratch your left elbow with your left hand. But whatever it is, I made up my mind right then, I'm going to find it and sink every penny I have into it. All I know about it is that it's some sort of gimmick; it does things—and it does them good.

I got back to my office and began hiring detectives. You see, I'd already figured that it wouldn't be enough to check phone listings—my Wenceslaus of the spirillix might not have a phone. He might not even call the gadget a spirillix; that could be the name Ernest's people fastened on it.

Well, I didn't go into detail with the detectives. I just told them to find me people named Wenceslaus or close to it, anywhere in the country. I interview them myself. I have to tell them the whole story, so they'll get the feel of the thing, so they'll be able to recognize the spirillix if they've invented it.

That's where you come in, Mr. Wantzilotz. Anyone with a name so close can't be missed. Maybe I didn't hear Ernest right; maybe the name was changed, later.

Now you've heard the story. Think, Mr. Wantzilotz. Are you working on anything besides raising chickens? Are you inventing anything, improving on anything—

No, I don't think a homemade mousetrap is quite what I want. Have you written a book, maybe? Thinking of writing one? Developing a new historical or economic theory—the spirillix might be anything! You haven't.

Well. I'll be going. You don't have any relatives of the same name who fool around with tools and stuff—no? I've got a lot of people to visit. You'd be amazed at the number of Wenceslauses and variations there are—

Wait a minute. Did you say you'd made—you'd invented a new mousetrap? Hm-m-m.

Here, have another cigar. Sit down. Now tell me, this mousetrap of yours—just how does it work? It catches mice, yes. But what does it *do*?

## NIGHTMARE FOR FUTURE REFERENCE

by *Stephen Vincent Benét*

**T**HAT WAS the second year of the Third World War,  
The one between Us and Them.

Well we've gotten used.

We don't talk much about it, queerly enough.

There was all sorts of talk the first years after the Peace,

A million theories, a million wild suppositions,

A million hopeful explanations and plans,

But we don't talk about it now. We don't even ask.

We might do the wrong thing. I don't guess you'd understand that.

But you're eighteen, now. You can take it. You'd better know.

You see, you were born just before the war broke out.

Who started it? Oh, they said it was Us or Them

And it looked like it at the time. You don't know what that's like.

But anyhow, it started and there it was,

Just a little worse, of course, than the one before,

But mankind was used to that. We didn't take notice.

They bombed our capital and we bombed theirs.

You've been to the Broken Towns? Yes, they take you there.

They show you the look of the tormented earth.

But they can't show the smell or the gas or the death

Or how it felt to be there, and a part of it.

But we didn't know. I swear that we didn't know.

\* \* \*

I remember the first faint hint there was something wrong,  
Something beyond all wars and bigger and strange,  
Something you couldn't explain.

I was back on leave—

Strange, as you felt on leave, as you always felt—  
But I went to see the Chief at the hospital  
And there he was, in the same old laboratory,  
A little older, with some white in his hair  
But the same eyes that went through you and the same tongue.  
They hadn't been able to touch him—not the bombs  
Nor the ruin of his life's work nor anything.  
He blinked at me from behind his spectacles  
And said, "Huh. It's you. They won't let me have guinea pigs  
Except for the war work, but I steal a few.  
And they've made me a colonel—expect me to salute.  
Damn fools. A damn-fool business. I don't know how.  
Have you heard what Erickson's done with the ductless glands?  
The journals are four months late. Sit down and smoke."  
And I did and it was like home.

He was a great man.

You might remember that—and I'd worked with him.  
Well, finally he said to me, "How's your boy?"  
"Oh—healthy," I said. "We're lucky."

"Yes," he said,

And a frown went over his face. "He might even grow up,  
Though the intervals between wars are getting shorter.  
I wonder if it wouldn't simplify things  
To declare mankind in a permanent state of siege.  
It might knock some sense in their heads."

"You're cheerful," I said.

"Oh, I'm always cheerful," he said. "Seen these, by the way?"  
He tapped some charts on a table.

"Seen what?" I said.

"Oh," he said, with that devilish, sidelong grin of his,  
"Just the normal city statistics—death and birth.  
You're a soldier now. You wouldn't be interested.  
But the birth rate's dropping—"

"Well, really, sir," I said,

"We know that it's always dropped, in every war."

\* \* \*



“Not like this,” he said. “I can show you the curve. It looks like the side of a mountain, going down. And faster, the last three months—yes, a good deal faster. I showed it to Lobenheim and he was puzzled. It makes a neat problem—yes?” He looked at me.

“They’d better make peace,” he said. “They’d better make peace.”

“Well, sir,” I said, “if we break through, in the spring—”

“Break through?” he said. “What’s that? They’d better make peace. The stars may be tired of us. No, I’m not a mystic. I leave that to the big scientists in bad novels. But I never saw such a queer maternity curve. I wish I could get to Ehrens, on their side. He’d tell me the truth. But the fools won’t let me do it.”

His eyes looked tired as he stared at the careful charts. “Suppose there are no more babies?” he said. “What then? It’s one way of solving the problem.”

“But, sir—” I said.

“But, sir!” he said. “Will you tell me, please, what is life? Why it’s given, why it’s taken away? Oh, I know—we make a jelly inside a test tube, We keep a cock’s heart living inside a jar. We know a great many things and what do we know? We think we know what finished the dinosaurs, But do we? Maybe they were given a chance And then it was taken back. There are other beasts That only kill for their food. No, I’m not a mystic, But there’s a certain pattern in nature, you know, And we’re upsetting it daily. Eat and mate And go back to the earth after that, and that’s all right. But now we’re blasting and sickening earth itself. She’s been very patient with us. I wonder how long.”

Well, I thought the Chief had gone crazy, just at first, And then I remembered the look of no man’s land, That bitter landscape, pockmarked like the moon, Lifeless as the moon’s face and horrible, The thing we’d made with the guns.

If it were earth,  
It looked as though it hated.  
“Well?” I said,  
And my voice was a little thin. He looked hard at me.  
“Oh—ask the women,” he grunted. “Don’t ask me.  
Ask them what they think about it.”

I didn’t ask them,  
Not even your mother—she was strange, those days—  
But, two weeks later, I was back in the lines  
And somebody sent me a paper—  
Encouragement for the troops and all of that—  
All about the fall of Their birth rate on Their side.

I guess you know, now. There was still a day when we fought  
And the next day, the women knew. I don’t know how they knew,  
But they smashed every government in the world  
Like a heap of broken china, within two days,  
And we’d stopped firing by then. And we looked at each other.

We didn’t talk much, those first weeks. You couldn’t talk.  
We started in rebuilding and that was all,  
And at first, nobody would even touch the guns,  
Not even to melt them up. They just stood there, silent,  
Pointing the way they had and nobody there.  
And there was a kind of madness in the air,  
A quiet, bewildered madness, strange and shy.  
You’d pass a man who was muttering to himself  
And you’d know what he was muttering, and why.  
I remember coming home and your mother there.  
She looked at me, at first didn’t speak at all,  
And then she said, “Burn those clothes. Take them off and burn  
them  
Or I’ll never touch you or speak to you again.”  
And then I knew I was still in my uniform.

Well, I’ve told you, now. They tell you now at eighteen.  
There’s no use telling before.

Do you understand?  
That’s why we have the Ritual of the Earth,  
The Day of Sorrow, the other ceremonies.  
Oh yes, at first people hated the animals

Because they still bred, but we've gotten over that.  
Perhaps they can work it better, when it's their turn,  
If it's their turn—I don't know. I don't know at all.  
You can call it a virus, of course, if you like the word,  
But we haven't been able to find it. Not yet. No.  
It isn't as if it had happened all at once.  
There were a few children born in the last six months  
Before the end of the war, so there's still some hope.  
But they're almost grown. That's the trouble. They're almost grown.  
Well, we had a long run. That's something. At first they thought  
There might be a nation somewhere—a savage tribe.  
But we were all in it, even the Eskimos,  
And we keep the toys in the stores, and the colored books,  
And people marry and plan and the rest of it,  
But, you see, there aren't any children. They aren't born.

## About the Editor

*“William Tenn” is the pseudonym under which a young writer named Philip Klass has become known to readers of science fiction as one of the very best authors in the field.*

*Born in England in 1920, he came to this country at the age of two and has lived in New York City almost ever since. His first story, Alexander the Bait, appeared in Astounding Science Fiction in 1946; since that time he has been a highly regarded regular contributor to the top “s-f” and fantasy magazines. He reports that the idea for Children of Wonder “has been in my mind for years, and I’ve been collecting stories for it almost constantly; the contents of this book represent only a fraction of the impossibly long list of excellent stories on this theme that I first shoved at the publishers.”*

*William Tenn’s stories and novelettes have appeared in numerous anthologies. His most celebrated story is undoubtedly a grimly humorous bit of irony entitled Child’s Play (which is not about children and which has no connection with another writer’s story, coincidentally bearing the same title, to be found in this collection); Clifton Fadiman calls it a “masterpiece of its kind.” Tenn is presently at work on his first full-length science fiction novel.*











