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The Children's Hour

Henry Kuttner

He sat on a bench in the little grove in front of Administration, watching the clock over the provost marshal's door jerk its long hand toward seven. Presently, when the hour struck, he would be going in that door, and up one flight of stairs, and down the corridor to the room where Lieutenant Dyke sat waiting, as he had waited so many evenings before.

Tonight might be the night that would end it. Lessing thought perhaps it would be. Something was stirring behind the intangible locks of his mind, and tonight that door might open which had resisted the skilled manipulations of hypnosis for so long. The door might swing wide tonight at last, and let the secret out which not even Lessing knew.

Lessing was a good hypnosis subject. Lieutenant Dyke had discovered that early in their class experiments in psychonamics-that astonishing means by which a soldier can learn to desensitize his own body and feel neither pain nor hunger, when pain or hunger would otherwise be intolerable. In the process of learning, dim and untrodden corridors of the mind are sometimes laid bare. But seldom in any mind was such a thing to be encountered as that block in Lessing's.

He responded well to all the usual tests. Immobility and desensitization, the trick of warping the balance center, the familiar routine of posthypnotic commands, all these succeeded without a hitch, as they had succeeded with so many others. But in Lessing's brain one barrier stood up immovable. Three months in his life were locked and sealed behind adamant walls-under hypnosis.

That was the strangest thing of all, for waking, he remembered those three months clearly. Under hypnosis-they did not exist. Under hypnosis he had no recollection that in June, July and August of two years ago he had been living a perfectly normal existence. He was in New York, a civilian then, working in an advertising office and living the patterned life that still existed for a time after December 7, 1941. Nothing had happened to make his hypnotized memory blank out with such stubborn vehemence when asked to remember.

And so began the long sessions of searching, probing, delicately manipulating Lessing's mind as a complicated machine is readjusted, or as muscles wasted and atrophied are gently massaged back to life.

Up to now, the dam had resisted. Tonight-

The first stroke of seven vibrated upon the evening air. Lessing got up slowly, conscious of an unaccustomed touch of panic in his mind. This was the night, he thought. There was a stirring deep down in the roots of his subconscious. He would know the truth tonight-he would look again upon the memory his mind had refused to retain-and he was illogically just a

little afraid to face it. He had no idea why.

In the doorway he paused for a moment, looking back. Only the twilight was out there, gathering luminously over the camp, blurring the outlines of barracks, the bulk of the hospital distantly rising. Somewhere a train hooted toward New York an hour away. New York that held mysteriously the memory his mind rejected.

"Good evening, sergeant," said Lieutenant Dyke, looking up from behind his desk.

Lessing looked at him a little uneasily. Dyke was a small, tight, blond man, sharp with nervous vigor, put together with taut wires. He had shown intense interest in the phenomenon of Lessing's memory, and Lessing had felt a bewildered sort of gratitude until this moment. Now he was not sure.

"Evening, sir," he said automatically.

"Sit down. Cigarette? Nervous, Lessing?"

"I don't know." He took the cigarette without knowing he had done it. This was the flood tide, he thought, and he had no mind for any other awareness than that. The dam was beginning to crumble, and behind it what flood waters, pent up in darkness, waited for release? There were almost inaudible little clicks in his mind as the bolts subconsciously, automatically clicked open. Conditioned reflex by -now. His brain, responsive to Dyke's hypnotic probing, was preparing itself.

A bare light swung above Dyke's desk. His eyes turned to it, and everything else began to darken. This, too, was reflexive by now. Dyke, behind him, traced a finger back along his scalp. And Lessing went under very quickly. He heard Dyke's voice, and that changed from a sound to a strong, even suction pulling somewhere in darkness. An indefinable force that drew, and guided as it drew. The dam began to go almost at once. The gates of memory quivered, and Lessing was afraid.

"Go back. Go back. Back to the summer of '41. Summer. You are in New York. When I count ten you will remember. One. Two-" At ten Dyke's voice dropped.

Then again. And again. Until the long, difficult preparation for this moment proved itself, and James Lessing went back through time and.

And saw a face, white against the dark, blazing like a flame in the emptiness of the swift temporal current. Whose face? He did not know, but he knew there was a shadow behind it, darker than the blackness, shapeless and watchful.

The shadow grew, looming, leaning over him. A tinkling rhythm beat out. Words fitted themselves to it.

Between the dark and the daylight

When the night is beginning to lower

Comes a pause in the day's occupation

That is known as the children's hour-

It meant nothing. He groped through blindness, searching for reason. And then it began to come back to him, the thing he had forgotten. A minor thing, something hardly worth remembering, surely. Something . . . no, someone- And not quite so minor, after all. Someone rather important. Someone he had met casually in a place he could not quite remember-a bar, or in the park, or at a party somewhere-very casually. Someone-yes, it had been in the park-but who? He could remember now a flickering of green around them, leaves twinkling in sunshine and grass underfoot. A fountain where they had stopped to drink. He could remember the water, clear and colorless, trickling musically away, but he could not quite remember who had . . . who it was- Everything else was coming clear except the person. Forgetfulness clung stubbornly around that figure at his side. That slender figure, smaller than himself-dark? Fair? No, dark.

"Stabbed by a white wench's black eyes."

He caught his breath suddenly, in a violent physical wrench, as memory deluged back with appalling violence. Clarissa! How could he have forgotten? How could he? How could even amnesia have erased her? He sat stunned, the shining flood all but blinding him. And somewhere under that pouring brightness was grief-but he would not let that break the surface yet.

Clarissa. What words were there to get all that vivid color into speech? When the barrier went down, it collapsed with such a blast of sudden glory that . . . that-

They had walked in the park above the Hudson, blue water marbled with deeper blue and twinkling in the sun, sliding away below them. Clear water in the fountain, tinkling down over pebbles wet and brown in the dappled shadows beneath the trees. And everything as vivid at Creation's first morning, because of Clarissa walking beside him under the shining leaves. Clarissa-and he had forgotten.

It was like looking back into a world a little brighter than human. Everything shone, everything glistened, every sound was sweeter and clearer; there was a sort of glory over all he saw and felt and heard. Childhood had been like that, when the newness of the world invested every commonplace with particular glamour. Glamour-yes, that was the word for Clarissa.

Not sveltness and slickness, but glamour, the old word for enchantment. When he was with her it had been like stepping back into childhood and seeing everything with an almost intolerable fresh clarity.

But as for Clarissa herself-who had she been? What had she looked like? And above all, how could he have forgotten?

He groped backward into the shapeless fog of the past. What phrase was it that had suddenly ripped the curtain? Shock had all but erased it from his mind. It was like a lightning-flash forking through the darkness and vanishing again. Darkness-blackness-black eyes-yes, that was it. "Stabbed by a white wench's black eyes." A quotation, of course, but from what?

More groping. Shakespeare? Yes, "Romeo and Juliet." Why, wasn't that what-Mercutio?-had said to Romeo about Romeo's first love? The girl he loved before he met Juliet. The girl he forgot so completely- -

Forgot!

Lessing sat back in his chair, letting everything else slide away for a moment in sheer amazement at the complexity of the subconscious. Something had wiped out all recollection of Clarissa from level below level of his memory, but far down in the dark, memory had clung on, disguised, distorted; hiding behind analogy and allegory, behind a phrase written by a wandering playwright three hundred years before.

So it had been impossible, after all, to erase Clarissa entirely -from his mind. She had struck so deep, she had glowed so vividly, that nothing at all could quite smudge her out. And yet only Lieutenant Dyke's skill and the chance unburial of a phrase had resurrected the memory. (For one appalling moment he wondered with a shaken mind what other memories lay hidden and shivering behind other allegorical words and phrases and innocent pictures, deep in the submarine gulfs.)

So he had defeated them after all-the bodiless, voiceless people who had stood between them. The jealous god-the shadowy guardians- For a moment the glare of showering gold flashed in his mind's eye blindingly. He was, in that one shutter-flash, aware of strangers in rich garments moving against confused and unfamiliar backgrounds. Then the door slammed in his face again and he sat there blinking.

Them? Defeated them? Who? He had no idea. Even in that one magical glimpse before memory blanked out again he thought he had not been sure who they were. That much, perhaps, had been a mystery never solved. But somewhere back in the darkness of his mind incredible things lay hidden. Gods and showering gold, and people in bright clothing that blew upon a wind not-surely not-of this earth-

Bright, bright-brighter than normal eyes ever perceive the world. That was Clarissa and all that surrounded her. It had been a stronger glamour than the sheer enchantment of first love. He felt sure about that now. He who walked with Clarissa shared actual magic that shed a luster on all they passed. Lovely Clarissa, glorious world as clear-as clarissima indeed-as a child's new, shining world. But between himself and her, the shadowy people-

Wait. Clarissa's-aunt? Had there been an . . . an aunt? A tall, dark, silent woman who damped the glory whenever she was near? He could not remember her face; she was no more than a shadow behind Clarissa's shining presence, a faceless, voiceless nonentity glowering in the background.

His memory faltered, and into the gap flowed the despair which he had been fighting subconsciously since the lustrous flood first broke upon him. Clarissa, Clarissa-where was she now, with the glory around her?

"Tell me," said Lieutenant Dyke.

"There was a girl," Lessing began futilely. "I met her in a park-"

Clarissa on a glittering June morning, tall and dark and slim, with the waters of the Hudson pouring past beyond her in a smooth, blue, glassy current. Stabbed by a white wench's black eyes. Yes, very black eyes, bright and starry with blackness, and set wide apart in a grave face that had the remoteness and thoughtfulness of a child's. And from the moment he met that grave, bright glance they knew one another. He had been stabbed indeed-stabbed awake after a lifetime of drowsiness. (Stabbed-like Romeo, who lost both his loves. . .)

"Hello," said Clarissa.

"It didn't last very long.. . I think," he told Dyke, speaking distractedly. "Long enough to find out there was something very Itrange about Clarissa. . . very wonderful.. . but not long enough to find out what it was. . . I think."

(And yet they had been days of glory, even after the shadows began to fall about them. For there were always shadows, just at her elbow. And he thought they had centered about the aunt who lived with her, that grim nonentity whose face he could not remember.)

"She didn't like me," he explained, frowning with the effort of remembering. "Well, no, not quite that. But there was something in the. . . in the air when she was with us. In a minute I may remember- I wish I could think what she looked like."

It probably didn't matter. They had not seen her often.. They had met, Clarissa and he, in so many places in New York, and each place acquired a brilliance of its own once her presence made it clarissima for him. There was no sensible explanation for that glory about her, so that street noises clarified to music and dust turned golden while they were together. It was as if he saw the world through her eyes when they were together, and as if she saw it with vision clearer-or perhaps less clear-than human.

"I knew so little about her," he said. (She might almost have sprung into existence in that first moment by the river. And so far as he would ever know, now, she had- vanished back into oblivion in that other moment in the dim apartment, when the aunt said-now what was it the aunt had said?)

This was the moment he had been avoiding ever since memory began to come back. But he must think of it now. Perhaps it was the most important moment in the whole strange sequence, the moment that had shut him off so sharply from Clarissa and her shining, unreal, better than normal world. .

What had the woman said to him?

He sat very still, thinking. He shut his eyes and turned his mind inward and backward to that strangely clouded hour, groping among shadows that slid smoothly away at his touch.

"I can't-" he said, scowling, his eyes still closed. "I can't. They were. . .

negative. . . words, I think, but- No, it's no use."

"Try the aunt again," suggested Dyke. "What did she look like?"

Lessing put his hands over his eyes and thought hard. Tall? Dark, like Clarissa? Gum, certainly-or had that only been the connotation of her words? He could not remember. He slumped down in his chair, grimacing with the effort. She had stood before the mirrors, hadn't she, looking down? Had she? What were her outlines against the light? She had no outlines. She had never existed. Her image seemed to slide behind furniture or slip deftly around corners whenever his persistent memory followed it through the apartment. Here, quite clearly, the memory block was complete.

"I don't think I ever can have seen her," he said, looking up at Dyke with strained, incredulous eyes. "She just isn't there."

Yet it was her shadow between him and Clarissa in the last moment before . . . before . . . what was it that cut off all memory between that hour and this? What happened? Well, say before forgetfulness began, then. Before-Lethe.

This much he remembered-Clarissa's face in the shadowed room, grief and despair upon it, her eyes almost unbearably bright with tears, her arms still extended, the fingers curved as they had slipped from his. He could remember the warmth and softness of them in that last handclasp. And then Lethe had poured between them.

"That was it," said Lessing in a bewildered voice. He looked up. "Those were the highlights. None of them mean anything."

Dyke drew on his cigarette, his eyes narrow above its glow. "Somewhere we've missed the point," he said. "The real truth's still hidden, even deeper than all this was. Hard to know yet, just where to begin probing. Clarissa, do you think?"

Lessing shook his head. "I don't think she knew." (She had walked through all those enchanted days, gravely and aloofly, a perfectly normal girl except for- What had happened? He could not quite remember yet, but that which did happen had not been normal. Something shocking, something terrible, buried deep down under the commonplaces. Something glorious, glimmering far beneath the surface.)

"Try the aunt again," said Dyke.

Lessing shut his eyes. That faceless, bodiless, voiceless woman who maneuvered through his memories so deftly that he began to despair of ever catching her full-face. . .

"Go back, then," Dyke told him. "Back to the very beginning. When did you first realize that something out of the ordinary was happening?"

Lessing's mind fumbled backward through those unnaturally empty spaces of the past.

He had not even been aware, at the outset, of the one strangeness he could remember now-that wonderful clarifying of the world in Clarissa's

presence. It had to come slowly, through many meetings, as if by a sort of induced magnetism he became sensitized to her and aware as she was aware. He had known only that it was delightful simply to breathe the same air as she, and walk the same streets.

The same streets? Yes, something curious had happened on a street somewhere. Street noises, loud voices shouting- An accident. The collision just outside the Central Park entrance at Seventy-second Street. It was coming back clearly now, and with a swelling awareness of terror. They had been strolling up by the winding walk under the trellises toward the street. And as they neared it, the scieam of brakes and the hollow, reverberant crash of metal against metal, and then voices rising.

Lessing had been holding Clarissa's hand. At the sudden noise he felt a tremor quiver along her arm, and then very softly, and with a curiously shocking deftness, her hand slipped out of his. Their fingers had been interlocked, and his did not relax, but somehow her hand was smoothly withdrawn. He turned to look.

His mind shrank from the memory. But he knew it had happened. He knew he had seen the circle of shaken air ring her luminously about, like a circle in water from a dropped stone. It was very like the spreading rings in water, except that these rings did not expand, but contracted. And as they contracted, Clarissa moved farther away. She was drawn down a rapidly diminishing tunnel of shining circles, with the park distorted in focus beyond them. And she was not looking at Lessing or at anything around him. Her eyes were downcast and that look of thoughtful quiet on her face shut out the world.

He stood perfectly still, too stunned even for surprise.

The luminous, concentric rings drew together in a dazzle, and when he looked again she was not there. People were running up the slope toward the street now, and the voices beyond the wall had risen to a babble. No one had been near enough to see-or perhaps only Lessing himself could have seen an aberration of his own mind. Perhaps he was suddenly mad. Panic was rising wildly in him, but it had not broken the surface yet. There hadn't been time.

And before the full, stunning realization could burst over him, he saw Clarissa again. She was coming leisurely up the hill around a clump of bushes. She was not looking at him. He stood quite still in the middle of the path, his heart thudding so hard that the whole park shook around him. Not until she reached his side did she look up, smiling, and take his hand again.

And that was the first thing that happened.

"I couldn't talk to her about it," Lessing told Dyke miserably. "I knew I couldn't from the first look at her face I got. Because she didn't know. To her it hadn't happened. And then I thought I'd imagined it, of course-but I knew I couldn't have imagined such a thing unless there was something too wrong with me to talk about. Later, I began to figure out a theory." He laughed nervously. "Anything, you know, to keep from admitting that I might

have. . . well, had hallucinations."

"Go on." Dyke said again. He was leaning forward across the desk, his eyes piercing upon Lessing's. "Then what? It happened again?"

"Not that, no."

Not that? How did he know? He could not quite remember yet. The memories came in flashes, each complete even to its interlocking foreshadow of events to come, but the events themselves still lay hidden.

Had those shining rings been sheer hallucination? He would have believed so, he was sure, if nothing further had happened. As the impossible recedes into distance we convince ourselves, because we must, that it never really could have been. But Lessing was not allowed to forget. . .

The memories were unraveling now, tumbling one after another through his mind. He had caught the thread. He relaxed in his chair, his face smoothing out from its scowl of deep concentration. Deep beneath the surface that discovery lay whose astonishing gleam shone up through the murk of forgetfulness, tantalizing, still eluding him, but there to be grasped when he reached it. If he wanted to grasp it. If he dared. He hurried on, not ready yet to think of that.

What had the next thing been?

The park again. Curious how memory-haunted the parks of New York were for him now. This time there had been rain, and something-alarming-had happened. What was it? He did not know. He had to grope back step by step toward a climax of impossibility that his mind shied away from touching.

Rain. A sudden thunderstorm that caught them at the edge of the lake. Cold wind ruffling the water, raindrops spattering down big and noisy around them. And himself saying, "Hurry, we can make it back to the summerhouse."

They ran hand in hand along the shore, laughing, Clarissa clutching her big hat and matching her steps to his, long, easy, running strides so that they moved as smoothly as dancers over the grass.

The summerhouse was dingy from many winters upon the rocks. It stood in a little niche in the black stone of the hillside overlooking the lake, a dusty gray refuge from the spattering drops as they ran laughing up the slope of the rock.

But it never sheltered them. The summerhouse did not wait. -

Looking incredulously up the black hills, Lessing saw it glimmer and go in a luminous blurring-out, like a picture on a trick ifim that faded as he watched.

"Not the way Clarissa disappeared," he told Dyke carefully. "That happened quite clearly, in concentric diminishing rings. This time - the thing just blurred and melted. One minute it was there, the next-" He made an expunging gesture in the air.

Dyke had not moved. His clear, piercing gaze dwelt unwavering upon Lessing. -

"What did Clarissa say this time?"

Lessing rubbed his chin, frowning. "She saw it happen. I . . . I think she just said something like, 'Well, we're in for it now. Never mind, I like walking in the rain, don't you?' As if she were used to things like that. Of course, maybe she was- It didn't surprise her."

"And you didn't comment this time either?"

"I couldn't. Not when she took it so calmly. It was a relief to know that she'd seen it too. That meant I hadn't just imagined the thing. Not this time, anyhow. But by now-"

Suddenly Lessing paused. Up to this moment he had been too absorbed in the recapture of elusive memory to look objectively at what he was remembering. Now the incredible reality of what he had just been saying struck him without warning and he stared at Dyke with real terror in his eyes. How could there be any explanation for these imaginings, except actual madness? All this could not possibly have happened in the lost months which his conscious mind had remembered so clearly. It was incredible enough that he could have forgotten, but as for what he had forgotten, as for the unbelievable theory he had been about to explain to Dyke, and quite matter-of-factly, drawn from hypotheses of sheer miracle-

"Go on," Dyke said quietly. "By now-what?"

Lessing took a long, unsteady breath.

"By now . . . I think. . . I began to discard the idea I was having hallucinations." He paused again, unable to continue with such obvious impossibilities.

Dyke urged him gently. "Go on, Lessing. You've got to go on until we can get hold of something to work from. There must be an explanation somewhere. Keep digging. Why did you decide you weren't subject to hallucinations?"

"Because . . . well, I suppose it seemed too easy an explanation," Lessing said doggedly. It was ridiculous to argue so solidly from a basis of insanity, but he searched through his mind again and came out -with an answer of very tenuous logic. "Somehow madness seemed the wrong answer," he said. "As I remember now, I think I felt there was a reason behind what had happened. Clarissa didn't know, but I'd begun to see."

"A reason? What?"

He frowned with concentration. In spite of himself the fascination of the still unknown was renewing its spell and he groped through the murk of amnesia for the answer he had grasped once, years ago, and let slip again.

"It was so natural - to her that she didn't even notice. A nuisance, but something to accept with philosophy. You were meant to get wet if you got caught in the rain away from shelter, and if the shelter were miraculously

removed-well, that only emphasized the fact that you were meant to get a soaking. Meant to, you see." He paused, not at all sure just where this thread was leading, but his memory, dredging among the flotsam, had come up with that one phrase that all but dripped with significance when he saw it in full light. Revelations hovered just beyond the next thought.

"She did get wet," he went on slowly. "I remember now. She went home dripping, and caught cold, and had a high fever for several days-" , -

His mind moved swiftly along the chain of thoughts, drawing incredible conclusions. Was something, somehow, ruling Clarissa's life with a hand so powerful it could violate every law of nature to keep her in the path its whim selected? Had something snatched her away through a tiny section of time and space to keep the street accident from her? But she had been meant to have that drenching and that fever, so-let the summerhouse be erased. Let it never have been. Let it vanish as naturally as the rain came down, so that Clarissa might have her fever. . .

Lessing shut his eyes again and ground his palms hard over them. Did he want to remember much farther? What morasses of implausibility was his memory leading him into? Vanishing summerhouses and vanishing girls and. . . and.. . intervention from-outside? He took one horrified mental glance at that thought and then covered it up quickly and went on. Deep down in the murk the gleam of that amazing discovery still drew him on, but he went more slowly now, not at all certain that he wanted to plumb the depths and see it clearly.

Dyke's voice broke in as his mind began to let go and fall slack.

"She had a fever? Go on, what came next?"

"I didn't see her for a couple of weeks. And the . . . the colors began to go out of everything-"

It had to be renewed, then, by her presence, that strange glamour that heightened every color, sharpened every outline, made every sound musical when they were together. He began to crave the stimulus as he felt it fade. Looking back now, he remembered the intolerable dullness of that period. It was then, probably, that he first began to realize he had fallen in love.

And Clarissa, in the interval, had discovered it too. Yes, he was remembering. He had seen it shining in her enormous black eyes on the first day he visited her again. A brilliance almost too strong to look upon, as if bright stars were interlacing their rays there until her eyes were a blaze of blackness more dazzling than any light.

He had seen her, alone, in that first meeting after her illness. Where had the aunt been? Not there, at any rate. The strange, windowless apartment was empty except for themselves. Windowless? He looked back curiously. It was true-there had been no windows. But there were many mirrors. And the carpets were very deep and dark. That was his dominant impression of the place, walking upon softness and silence, with the glimmer of reflecting distances all around.

He had sat beside Clarissa, holding her hand, talking in a low voice. Her

smile had been tremulous, and her eyes so bright they were almost frightening. They were very happy that afternoon. He glowed a little, even now, remembering how happy they had been. He would not remember, just yet, that nothing was to come of it but grief.

The wonderful clarity of perception came back around him by degrees as they sat there talking, so that everything in the world had seemed gloriously right. The room was the center of a perfect universe, beautiful and ordered, and the spheres sang together as they turned around it.

"I was closer to Clarissa then," he thought to himself, "than I ever came again. That was Clarissa's world, beautiful and peaceful, and very bright. You could almost hear the music of the machinery, singing in its perfection as it worked. Life was always like that to her. No, I never came so close again."

Machinery- Why did that image occur to him?

There was only one thing wrong with the apartment. He kept thinking that eyes were upon him, watching all he thought and did. It was probably only the mirrors, but it made him uncomfortable. He asked Clarissa why there were so many. She laughed.

"All the better to see you in, my darling." But then she paused as if some thought had come to her unexpectedly, and glanced around the reflecting walls at her own face seen from so many angles, looking puzzled. Lessing was used by then to seeing reactions upon her face that had no real origin in the normal cause-and-effect sequence of familiar life, and he did not pursue the matter. She was a strange creature, Clarissa, in so many, many ways. Two and two, he thought with sudden affectionate amusement, seldom made less, than six to her, and she fell so often into such disproportionately deep and thoughtful silences over the most trivial things. He had learned early in their acquaintance how futile it was to question her about them.

"By now," he said, almost to himself, "I wasn't questioning anything. I didn't dare. I lived on the fringes of a world that wasn't quite normal, but it was Clarissa's world and I didn't ask questions."

Clarissa's serene, bright, immeasurably orderly little universe. So orderly that the stars in their courses might be forced out of pattern, if need be, to maintain her in her serenity. The smooth machinery singing in its motion as it violated possibility to spare her a street accident, or annihilating matter that she might have her drenching and her fever. . .

The fever served a purpose. Nothing happened to Clarissa,, he was fairly sure now, except things with a purpose. Chance had no place in that little world that circled her in. The fever brought delirium, and in the delirium with its strange, abnormal clarity of vision-suppose she had glimpsed the truth? Or was there a truth? He could not guess. But her eyes were unnaturally bright now, as if the brilliance of fever had lingered or as if . . . as if she were looking ahead into a future so incredibly shining that its reflections glittered constantly in her eyes, with a blackness brighter than light.

He was sure by now that she did not suspect life was at all different for her, that everyone did not watch miracles happen or walk in the same glory clarissima. (And once or twice the world reversed itself and he wondered wildly if she could be right and he wrong, if everyone did but himself.)

They moved in a particular little glory of their own during those days. She did love him; he had no doubt of it. But her subtle exaltation went beyond that. Something wonderful -was to come, her manner constantly implied, but the most -curious thing was - that he thought she herself did not know what. He was reminded of a child waking on Christmas morning and lying there in a delicious state of drowsiness, remembering only that something wonderful waits him when he comes fully awake.

"She never spoke of it?" Dyke asked.

Lessing shook his head. "It was all just beneath the surface. And if I tried to ask questions they . . . they -seemed to slide right off. She wasn't consciously evading me. It was more as if she hadn't quite understood-" He paused. "Arid then things went wrong," he said slowly. "Something-"

It was hard to recapture this part. The bad memories were submerged perhaps a little - deeper than the good ones, shut off behind additional layers of mental scar tissue. What had happened? He knew Clarissa loved him; they talked of marriage plans. The pattern of happiness had surely been set out clearly for them to follow.

"The aunt," he said doubtfully. "I think she must have interfered. I think . . . Clarissa seemed to slip out of my hands. She'd be busy when I phoned, or the aunt would say she was out. I was fairly sure she was lying, but what could I do?"

When she did see him, Clarissa had denied her neglect, reassuring him with shining glances and delicate, grave caresses. But she was so preoccupied. She did so little, really, and yet she seemed always absorbingly busy.

"If she was only watching a sparrow pick up crumbs," he told Dyke, "or two men arguing on the street, she gave all her attention to them and had none left over for me. So after awhile-I think about a week had gone by without my even seeing her-I decided to have it out with the aunt,"

There were gaps- He remembered clearly only standing in the white hallway outside the apartment door and knocking. He remembered the door creaking softly open a -little way. Only a little way. The chain had been on it, and it hung open only that narrow width, the chain glinting slightly from light within. It had been dim inside, light reflecting from wall to wall in the many mirrors, but from no source he could see. He could see, though, that someone was moving about inside, a figure distorted by the mirrors, multiplied by them, flickering quietly as it went about its own enigmatic business within, paying no attention to his ring at the door.

"Hello," he called. "Is that you, 'Clarissa?'"

No answer. Nothing but the silent motion inside, visible now and then in the reflecting walls. He had called the aunt by name, then.

"Is it you, Mrs. -" What name? He had no idea, now. But he had called her again and again, getting angrier as the motion flickered on heedlessly. "I can see you," he remembered saying, his face against the jamb. "I know you can hear me. Why don't you answer?"

Still nothing. The motion vanished inside for a moment or two, then wavered twice and was still again. He could not see what figure cast the reflection. Someone dark, moving silently over the thick dark carpets, paying no attention to the voice at the door. What a very odd sort of person the aunt must be. . .

Abruptly he was struck with the unreality of the situation; that dim, fitting shape in the next room, and the unsatisfactory figure he cut, hesitating there on the threshold calling through the door. Why the devil did the woman insist on this mystery? She was too dominant. Sudden unexpected reaction. Clarissa's life to please herself-

Hot anger rose in him, a violent, sudden, unexpected reaction. "Clarissa!" he called. Then, as dim motion flickered in the mirrors again, he put his shoulder to the yielding panel, pushing hard.

The safety latch must have been flimsy. It gave with a crackling snap, and Lessing, off balance, staggered forward. The room with its many dark mirrors whirled vertiginously. He did not see Clarissa's aunt except as a swift, enigmatic movement in the glass, but quite suddenly he faced the inexplicable.

Gravity had shifted, both in direction and in force. His motion continued and he fell with nightmare slowness- Alice down the Rabbit Hole-in a spiraling, expanding orbit; it was like anaesthesia in its unlikeliness and the fact that it did not surprise him. The curious quality of the motion pushed everything else out of his mind for the moment. There was no one in the room with him; there were no mirrors; there was no room. Bodiless, an equation, a simplified ego, he fell toward-

There was Clarissa. Then he saw a burst of golden light flaming and faffing against the white dark. A golden shower that enveloped Clarissa and carried her away.

Distantly, with the underbeat of his mind, he knew he should be surprised. But it was like half-sleep. It was too easy to accept things as they came, and he was too lazy to make the effort of awakening. He saw Clarissa again, moving against backgrounds sometimes only a little unfamiliar, at other times-he thought-wildly impossible-

Then an armored man was dropping down through warm sunlit air to the terrace, and the background was a park, with mountains rising far away. A woman was shrinking from him, two men had moved in front of her. Clarissa was there too. He could understand the language, though he did not know how he understood it. The armored man had a weapon of some sort lifted, and was crying, "Get back, Highness! I can't fire-too close-"

A young man in a long, belted robe of barbaric colors skipped backward, tugging at the coiled scarlet whip which was his belt. But neither of them seemed quite ready to make any aggressive moves, astonishment blanking

their faces and staring eyes as they gaped at Lessing. Behind them the tall woman with the commanding, discontented face stood frozen by the same surprise. Lessing glanced around in bewilderment, meeting the incredulous stares of the girls flocking behind her. Clarissa was among them, and beyond her-beyond her-someone he could not quite remember. A dark figure, enigmatic, a little stooped. . .

All of them stood transfixed. (All but Clarissa, perhaps. and perhaps the figure at her elbow-) The armored man's-weapon was poised half lifted, the young robed man's whip unslung - but trailing. They wore fantastic garments of a style and period Lessing had never heard of, and all their faces were strained and unhappy beneath the blankness of surprise, as if they had been living under some long-standing pressure of anxiety. He never knew what it was.

Only Clarissa looked as serene as always. And only she showed no surprise. Her black eyes under a strange, elaborate coiffure met his with the familiar twinling of many lights, and she smiled without saying anything.

A buzzing of excitement rose among the girls. The armored man said uncertainly, "Who are you? Where did you come from? Stand back or I'll-"

"-Out of thin air!" the robed young man gasped, and gave the crimson whip a flick that made it writhe along the grass.

Lessing opened his mouth to say-well, something. The whip looked dangerous. But Clarissa shook her head, still smiling.

"Never mind," she said. "Don't bother explaining. They'll forget, you know."

If he had meant to say anything, that robbed him of all coherent thought again. It was too fantastically like . . . like. . . something familiar. Alice, that was it. Alice again, in Looking Glass Land, at the Duchess' garden party. The bright, strange costumes, the bright green grass, the same air of latent menace. In a moment someone would scream, "Off with his head!"

The robed man stepped back and braced his feet against the- weight of the whip as he swung its long coil up. Lessing watched the scarlet tongue arch against the sky. ("Serpents! Serpents! There's no pLessing them!" he thought wildly.) And then the whole world was spinning with the spin of the whip. The garden was a top, whirling faster and faster under that crimson lash. He lost his footing on the moving grass and centrifugal force flung him off into unconsciousness.

His head ached.

He got up off the hail floor slowly, pushing against the wall to steady' himself. The walls were still spinning, but they slowed to a stop as he stood there swaying and feeling the bump on his forehead. His mind took a little longer to stop spinning, but once it came under control again he could see quite clearly what 'had happened. That chain had never broken at all. He had not fallen into the dark, mirrored room within, where the shadow of the aunt flitted quietly to and fro. The door, actually, had never been opened at all. At least, it was not open now. And the position of the doormat and the long, dark scrape on the floor made it obvious that he had

fried to force the door and had slipped. His head must have cracked hard against the knob.

He wondered if such a blow could send hallucinations forward as well as backward through time from the moment of collision. Because he knew he had dreamed—he must have dreamed—that the door was open and the silent shadow moving inside.

When he called Clarissa that night he was fully determined to talk to her this time if he had to threaten the guardian aunt with violence or arrest or whatever seemed, on the spur of the moment, most effective. He knew how humiliatingly futile such threats would sound, but he could think of no other alternative. And the need to see Clarissa was desperate now, after that curious Wonderland dream. He meant to tell her about it, and he thought the story would have some effect. Almost, in his bewilderment, he expected her to remember the part she herself had played, though he knew how idiotic the expectation was.

It was a little disconcerting, after his fiery resolution, to hear not the aunt's voice but Clarissa's on the telephone.

"I'm coming over," he said flatly, frustrated defiance making the statement a challenge.

"Why, of course," Clarissa sounded as if they had parted only a few hours ago.

His eagerness made the trip across town seem very long. He was rehearsing the story he would tell her as soon as they were alone. The dream had been so real and vivid, though it must have passed in the flash of a second between the time his head struck the doorknob and the time his knees struck the floor. What would she say about it? He did not know why at all, but he thought she could give him an answer to his questions, if he told her.

He rang the doorbell impatiently. As before, there was no sound from within. He rang again. No answer. Feeling eerily as if he had stepped back in time, to relive that curious dream all over again, he tried the knob, and was surprised to find the door opening to his push. No chain fastened it this time. He was looking into familiar, many-mirrored dimness as the door swung wide. While he hesitated on the threshold, not sure whether to call out or try the bell again, he saw something moving far back in the apartment, visible only in the mirrors.

For a moment the conviction that he was reliving the past made his head swim. Then he saw that it was Clarissa this time. Clarissa standing quite still and looking up with a glow of shining anticipation upon her face. It was that Christmas morning look he had caught glimpses of before, but never so dearly as now. What she looked at he could not see, but the expression was unmistakable. Something glorious was about to happen, the lovely look implied. Something very glorious, very near, very soon—

About her the air shimmered. Lessing blinked. The air turned golden and began to shower down around her in sparkling rain. This was the dream, then, he thought wildly. He had seen it all before. Clarissa standing quietly

beneath the golden shower, her face lifted, letting that shining waterfall pour over her slowly. But if it were the dream again, nothing further was to happen. He waited for the floor to spin underfoot-

No, it was real. He was watching another miracle take place, silently and gloriously, in the quiet apartment.

He had seen it in a dream; now it happened before his eyes. Clarissa in a shower of . . . of stars? Standing like Danae in a shower of gold-

Like Danae in her brazen tower, shut away from the world. Her likeness to Danae struck him with sudden violence. And that impossible rain of gold, and her look of rapt delight. What was it that poured down the shining torrent upon her? What was responsible for setting Clarissa so definitely apart from the rest of humanity, sheltering her at the cost of outraging natural laws, keeping the smooth machinery that protected her humming along its inaudible, omnipotent course? Omnipotent-yes, omnipotent as Zeus once was, who descended upon his chosen in that fabulous rain of gold.

Standing perfectly still and staring at the distant reflection in the glass, Lessing let his mind flash swifter and swifter along a chain of reasoning that left him at once gasping with incredulity and stunned with impossible conviction. For he thought at last he had the answer. The wildly improbable answer.

He could no longer doubt that somehow, somewhere, Clarissa's life impinged upon some other world than his. And wherever the two clashed, that other world took effortless precedence. It was difficult to believe that some dispassionate force had focused so solicitously upon her. He thought the few glimpses he had been allowed to catch spoke more of some individual intelligence watching everything she did. Some one being who understood humanity as perfectly as if it were itself very nearly human. Someone in the role of literal guardian angel, shepherding Clarissa along a path toward-what?

Certainly Someone had not wanted Clarissa to see the street accident, and had snatched her back through space and time to a safe distance, keeping the veil about her so that she did not even guess it had happened. Someone had meant her to experience the delirium of fever, and had erased the summerhouse. Someone, he began to realize, was leading her almost literally by the hand through her quiet, thoughtful, shining days and nights, casting glamour about her so heavily that it enveloped anyone who came intimately into its range. In her long moments of absorption, when she watched such trivial things so intently, whose voice whispered inaudibly in her ear, repeating what unguessable lessons. . .

And how did Lessing himself fit into the pattern? Perhaps, he thought dizzily, he had a part to play in it, trivial, but in its way essential. Someone let the two of them amuse themselves harmlessly together, except when that omnipotent hand had to stretch out and push them gently back into their proper course, Clarissa's course, not Lessing's. Indeed, when anything outré had to happen, it was Clarissa who was protected. She did not guess the hiatus at the time of the street accident; she had scarcely noticed the

disappearance of the summerhouse. Lessing did know. Lessing was shocked and stunned. But-Lessing was to forget.

At what point in her life, then, had Clarissa stepped into this mirrored prison with the strange aunt for jailor, and turned unknowing and unguessing into the path that Someone had laid out for her? Who whispered in her ear as she went so dreamily about her days, who poured down in a golden torrent about this Danae when she stood alone in her glass-walled tower?

No one could answer that. There might be as many answers as the mind could imagine, and many more beyond imagination. How could any man guess the answer to a question entirely without precedent in human experience? Well- no precedent but one.

There was Danae.

It was ridiculous, Lessing told himself at this point, to imagine any connection at all in this chance likeness. And yet- how had the legend of Danae started? Had some interloper like himself, two thousand years ago, unwittingly glimpsed another Clarissa standing rapt and ecstatic under another shower of stars? And if that were possible, what right had Lessing to assume arbitrarily that the first of the Danae legend had been as true as what he was watching, and the last of it wholly false? There were so many, many legends of mortals whom the gods desired. Some of them must have had obvious explanations, but the Greeks were not a naive people, and there might, he thought, have been some basis of fact existing behind the allegory. There must have been some basis, to explain those countless stories, pointing so insistently to some definite rock of reality beyond the fantasy.

But why this long preparation which Clarissa was undergoing? He wondered, and then unbidden into his mind leaped the legend of Semele, who saw her Olympian lover in the unveiled glory of his godhood, and died of that terrible sight. Could this long, slow preparation be designed for no other purpose than to spare Clarissa from Semele's fate? Was she being led gently, inexorably from knowledge to knowledge, so that when the god came down to her in his violence and his splendor, she could endure the glory of her destiny? Was this the answer behind that look of shining anticipation he had seen so often on her face?

Sudden, scalding jealousy enveloped him. Clarissa, glimpsing already and without guessing it, the splendor to come in which he himself could have no part. . .

Lessing struck the door a resounding blow and called, "Clarissa!"

In the mirror he saw her start a little and turn. The shower wavered about her. Then she moved out of sight, except for a golden flickering among the mirrors, as she approached the door.

Lessing stood there, shaking and sweating with intolerable confusion. He knew his deductions were ridiculous and impossible. He did not really believe them. He was leaping to conclusions too wild to credit, from premises too arbitrary to consider in any sane moment. Granted that

inexplicable things were happening, still he had no logical reason to assume a divine lover's presence. But someone, Someone stood behind the events he had just been rehearsing, and of that Someone, whoever and whatever it might be, Lessing was agonizingly jealous. For those plans did not include himself. He knew they never could. He knew-

"Hello," said Clarissa softly. "Did I keep you waiting? The bell must be out of order-I didn't hear you ring. Come on m.

He stared. Her face was as serene as always. Perhaps a little glow of rapture still shone in her eyes, but the shower of gold was gone and she gave no outward sign of remembering it.

"What were you doing?" he asked, his voice slightly unsteady.

"Nothing," said Clarissa.

"But I saw you!" he burst out. "In the mirrors-I saw you! Clarissa, what-"

Gently and softly a-a hand?-was laid across his mouth. Nothing tangible, nothing real. But the words did not come through. It was silence itself, a thick gag of it, pressing against his lips. There was one appalling, mind-shaking moment of that gag, and then Lessing knew that Someone was right, that he must not speak, that it would be cruel and wrong to say what he had meant to say.

It was all over in an instant, so suddenly that afterward he was not sure whether a gag had actually touched his lips, or whether a subtler gag of the mind had silenced him. But he knew he must say nothing, neither of this nor of that strange, vivid dream in which he had met Clarissa. She did not guess. She must not know-yet.

He could feel the sweat rolling down his forehead, and his knees felt shaky and his head light. He said, from a long way off,

"I. . . I don't feel well, Clarissa. I think I'd better go-"

The light above Dyke's desk swung gently in a breeze from the shaded window. Outside a distant train's hooting floated in across the post grounds, made immeasurably more distant by the darkness. Lessing straightened in his chair and looked around a little dizzily, startled at the abrupt transition from vivid memory to reality. Dyke leaned forward above his crossed arms on the desk. and said gently,

"And did you go?"

Lessing nodded. He was far beyond any feeling now of incredulity or reluctance to accept his own memories. The things he was remembering were more real than this desk or the soft-voiced- man behind it.

"Yes. I had to get away from her and straighten my mind Out. It was so important that she should understand what was happening to her, and yet I couldn't tell her about it She was-asleep. But she had to be wakened before it was too late. I thought she had a right to know what was coming, and I had a right to have her know, let her make her choice between me and-it. Him. I kept feeling the choice would have to be made soon, or it would be

too late. He didn't want her to know, of course. He meant to come at the right moment and find her unquestioning, prepared for him. It was up to me to rouse her and make her understand before that moment."

"You thought it was near then?"

"Very near."

"What did you do?"

Lessing's eyes went unfocused in remembrance. "I took her out dancing." he said, "the next night . . ."

She sat across from - him at a table beside a little dance floor, slowly twirling a glass of sherry and bitters and listening to the noises of a bad orchestra echoing in the small, smoky room. Lessing was not quite sure why he had brought her here, after all. Perhaps he hoped that though he could not speak to her in words of all he suspected and feared, he could rouse her enough out of her serene absorption so that she might notice for herself how far her own world differed from the normal one. Here in this small, enclosed space shaking with savage rhythms, crowded by people who were deliberately giving themselves up to the music and the liquor, might not that serene and shining armor be pierced a little, enough to show what lay inside?

Lessing was tinkling the ice in his third Collins and enjoying the pleasant haze that just enough alcohol lent to the particular, shining haze that always surrounded Clarissa. He would not, he told himself, have any more. He was far from drunk, certainly, but there was intoxication in the air tonight, even in this little, noisy, second-rate nightclub. The soaring music had a hint of marijuana delirium in it; the dancers on the hot, crowded floor exhaled excitement.

And Clarissa was responding. Her great black eyes shone with unbearable brightness, and her laughter was bright and spontaneous too. They danced in the jostling mob, not feeling jostled at all because of the way the music caught them up on its rhythms. Clarissa was talking much more than usual this evening, very gayly, her body resilient in his arms.

As for himself - yes, he was drunk after all, whether on the three drinks or on some subtler, more powerful intoxication he did not know. But all his values were shifting deliciously toward the irresponsible, and his ears rang with inaudible music. Now nothing could overpower him. He was not afraid of anything or anyone at all. He would take Clarissa away - clear away from New York and her jailor aunt, and that shining Someone who drew nearer with every breath.

There began to be gaps in his memory after awhile. He could not remember how they had got out of the nightclub and into his car, or just where they intended to go, but presently they were driving up the Henry Hudson Parkway with the river sliding darkly below and, the lights of Jersey lying in wreaths upon the Palisades.

They were defying the - the pattern. He thought both of them knew that. There was no place in the pattern for this wild and dizzying flight up the

Hudson, with the cross-streets reeling past like spokes in a shining wheel. Clarissa, leaning back in the bend of his free arm, was in her way as drunk as he, on nothing more than two sherries and the savage rhythms of the music, the savage excitement of this strange night. The intoxication of defiance, perhaps, because they were running away. From something-from Someone. (That was impossible, of course. Even in his drunkenness he knew that. But they could try-)

"Faster," Clarissa urged, moving her head in the crook of his arm. She was glitteringly alive tonight as he had never seen her before. Very nearly awake, he thought in the haze of his reeling mind. Very nearly ready to be told what it was he must tell her. The warning-

Once he pulled up deliberately beneath a street light and took her in-his arms. Her eyes and her voice and her laughter flashed and sparkled tonight, and Lessing knew that if he thought he had loved her before, this new Clarissa was so enchanting that. . . that. . . yes, even a god might lean out from Olympus to desire her. He kissed her with an ardor that made the city whirl solemnly around them. It was delightful to be drunk and in love, and kissing Clarissa under the eyes of the jealous gods. . .

There was a feeling of. . . of wrongness in the air as they drove on. The pattern strove to right itself, to force them back into their ordained path. He could feel its calm power pressing against his mind. He was aware of traffic imperceptibly edging him into streets that led back toward the apartment they had left. He had to wrench himself out of it, and then presently the northbound way would be closed off for repairs, and a detour went off along other streets that took them south again. Time after time he found himself driving past descending street numbers toward downtown New York, and swung around the block in bewildered determination not to return.,

The pattern must be broken. It must be. Hazily he thought that if he could snap one thread of it, defy that smooth, quiet power in even so small a way as this, he would have accomplished his purpose. But alone he could not have done it. The omnipotent machinery humming in its course would have been irresistible-he would have obeyed it without knowing he obeyed-had not Clarissa shared his defiance tonight. There seemed to be a power in her akin to the power of that omnipotence, as if she had absorbed some of it from long nearness to the source.

Or was it that Someone stayed his hand rather than strike her forcibly back to her place in the pattern, rather than let her guess-yet-the extent of his power?

"Turn," said Clarissa. "Turn around, We're going wrong again."

He struggled with the wheel. "I can't. . . I can't," he told her, almost breathless. She gave him a dazzling dark glance and leaned over to take the wheel herself.

Even for her it was hard. But slowly she turned the car, while traffic blared irritably behind them, and slowly they broke out of the pattern's grip again and rounded another corner, heading north, the lights of Jersey swimming

unfocused in the haze of their delirium.

This was no normal drunkenness. It was increasing by leaps and bounds. This, thought Lessing dimly, is His next step. He won't let her see what he's doing, but he knows he's got to stop- us now, or we'll break the pattern and prove our independence.

The tall, narrow buildings shouldering together along the streets were like tall trees in a forest, with windows for motionless leaves. No two windows on the same level, or quite alike. Infinite variety with infinitesimal differences, all of them interlacing and glimmering as they drove on and on through the stony forest. Now Lessing could see among the trees, and between them, not transparently but as if through some new dimension. He could see the streets that marked --off this forest into squares and oblongs, and his dazed mind. remembered another forest, checkered into squares-Looking Glass Land.

He was going south again through the forest.

"Clarissa-help me," he said distantly, wrestling again with the wheel. Her small white hands came out of the dark to cover his.

A shower of light from a flickering window poured down upon them, enveloping Clarissa as Zeus enveloped Danae. The jealous god, the jealous god- Lessing laughed and smacked the wheel in senseless triumph.

There was a light glimmering ahead through the trees. He would have to go softly, he warned himself, and tiptoed forward over the. . . the cobbled road. Without surprise he saw that he was moving on foot through a forest in darkness, quite alone. He was still drunk. Drunker than ever, he thought with mild pride, drunker, probably, than any mortal ever was before. Any mortal. The gods, now-

People were moving through the trees ahead. He knew they must not see him. It would shock them considerably if they did; he remembered the garishly dressed people of his other dream, and the young man with the whip. No, it would be better to stay hidden this time if he could. The forest was wheeling and dipping around him behind a haze of obscurity, and nothing had very much coherence. The ringing in his ears was probably intoxication, not actual sound.

The people were somberly clad in black, with black hoods that covered their hair and framed pale, intolerant faces. They were moving in a long cohnnn through the trees. Lessing watched them go by for what seemed a long while. Some of the women. canied work bags over their arms and knitted as they walked. A few of the men read from small books and stumbled now and then on the cobblestones. There was no laughter.

Clarissa came among the last. She had a gay little face beneath the black cap, gayer and more careless than he had ever seen her in this . . . this world. She walked lightly, breaking into something like a dance step occasionally that called down upon her the frowns of those who walked behind. She did not seem to care.

Lessing wanted to call to her. He wanted to call so badly that it seemed to

him she sensed it, for she began to fall behind, letting first one group pass her and then another, until she walked at the very end of the column. Several girls in a cluster looked back a few times and giggled a little, but said nothing. She fell farther back. Presently the procession turned a corner and Clarissa stopped in the middle of the road, watching them go. Then she laughed and performed a solemn little pirouette on one toe, her black skirts swinging wide around her.

Lessing stepped from behind his tree and took a step toward her, ready to speak her name. But he was too late. Someone else was already nearer than he. Someone else- Clarissa called out gayly in a language he did not know, and then there was a flash of crimson through the trees and a figure cloaked from head to heels in bright red came up to her and took her into its embrace, the red folds swinging forward to infold them both. Clarissa's happy laughter was smothered beneath the stooping hood.

Lessing stood perfectly still. It might be another woman, he told himself fiercely. It might be a sister or an aunt. But it was probably a man. Or-

He squinted slightly-nothing focused very well in his present state, and things tended to slip sidewise when he tried to fix his eyes upon them-but this time he was almost sure of what he saw. He was almost sure that upon Clarissa's lifted face in the dimness of the woods a light was falling softly-from the hood above her. A light, glowing from within the hood. A shower of light. Danae, in her shower of gold.

The woods tilted steeply and turned end for end. Lessing was beyond surprise as he fell away, spinning and whirling through darkness, falling farther and farther from Clarissa in the woods. Leaving Clarissa alone in the embrace of her god.

When the spinning stopped he was sitting in his car again, with traffic pouring 'noisily past on the left. He was parked, somewhere. Double-parked, with the motor running. He blinked.

"I'll get out here," Clarissa told him matter-of-factly. "No, don't bother. You'll never find a parking place, and I'm so sleepy. Good night, darling. Phone me in the morning."

He could do nothing but blink. The dazzle of her eyes and her smile was a little blinding, and that haze still diffused all his efforts to focus upon her face. But he could see enough. They were exactly where they had started, at the curb before her apartment house.

"Good night," said Clarissa again, and the door closed behind her.

There was silence in the office after Lessing's last words. Dyke sat waiting quietly, his eyes on Lessing's face, his shadow moving a little on the desktop under the swinging light. After a moment Lessing said, almost defiantly,

"Well?"

Dyke smiled slightly, stirring in his chair. "Well?" he echoed.

"What are you thinking?"

Dyke shook his head. "I'm not thinking at all. It isn't time yet for that-unless the story ends there. It doesn't, does it?"

Lessing looked thoughtful. "No. Not quite. We met once more."

"Only once?" Dyke's eyes brightened. "That must be when your memory went, then. That's the most interesting scene of all. Go on-what happened?"

Lessing closed his eyes. His voice came slowly, as if he were remembering bit by bit each episode of the story he told.

"The phone woke me next morning," he said. "It was Clarissa. As soon as I heard her voice I knew the time had come to settle things once and for all-if I could. If I were allowed. I didn't think-He-would let me talk it out with her, but I knew I'd have to try. She sounded upset on the phone. Wouldn't say why. She wanted me to come over right away."

She was at the door when he came out of the elevator, holding it open for him against a background of mirrors in which no motion stirred. She looked fresh and lovely, and Lessing marveled again, as he had marveled on waking, that the extraordinary drunkenness of last night had left no ill effects with either of them this morning. But she looked troubled, too; her eyes were too bright, with a blinding blackness that dazzled him, and the sweet serenity was gone from her face. He exulted at that. She was awakening, then, from the long, long dream.

The first thing he said as he followed her into the apartment was, "Where's your aunt?"

Clarissa glanced vaguely around. "Oh, out, I suppose. Never mind her. Jim, tell-me-did we do something wrong last night? Do you remember what happened? Everything?"

"Why I. . . I think so." He was temporizing, not ready yet in spite of his decision to plunge into these deep waters.

"What happened, then? Why does it worry me so? Why can't I remember?" Her troubled eyes searched his face anxiously. He took her hands. They were cold and trembling a little.

"Come over here," he said. "Sit down. What's the matter, darling? Nothing's wrong. We had a few drinks and took a long ride, don't you remember? And then I brought you back here and you said good night and went in."

"That isn't all," she said, with conviction. "We were-fighting something. It was wrong to fight-I never did before. I never knew it was there until I fought it last night. But now I do know. What was it, Jim?"

He looked down at her gravely, a tremendous excitement beginning to well up inside him. Perhaps, somehow, they had succeeded last night in breaking the spell. Perhaps His grip had been loosened after all, when they defied the pattern even as briefly as they did.

But this was no time for temporizing. Now, while the bonds were slack, was the moment to strike hard and sever them if he could. Tomorrow she might have slipped back again into the old distraction that shut him out. He must tell her now- Together they might yet shake off the tightening coils that had been closing so gently, so inexorably about her.

"Clarissa," he said, and turned on the sofa to face her. "Clarissa, I think I'd better tell you something." Then a sudden, unreasoning doubt seized him and he said irrelevantly, "Are you sure you love me?" It was foolishly important to be reassured just then. He did not know why.

Clarissa smiled and leaned forward into his arms, putting her cheek against his shoulder. From there, unseen, she murmured, "I'll always love you, dear."

For a long moment he did not speak. Then, holding her in one arm, not watching her face, he began.

"Ever since we met, Clarissa darling, things have been happening that-worried me. About you. I'm going to tell you if I can. I think there's something, or someone, very powerful, watching over you and forcing you into some course, toward some end I can't do more than guess at. I'm going to try to tell you exactly why I think so, and if I have to stop without finishing, you'll know I don't stop on purpose. I'll have been stopped."

Lessing paused, a little awed at his own daring in defying that Someone whose powerful hand he had felt hushing him before. But no pad of silence was pressed against his lips this time and he went on wonderingly, expecting each word he spoke to be the last. Clarissa lay silent against his shoulder, breathing quietly, not moving much. He could not see her face.

And so he told her the story, very simply and without references -to his own bewilderment or to the wild conclusions he had reached. He told her about the moment in the park when she had been drawn away down a funnel of luminous rings. He reminded her of the vanishment of the summerhouse. He told of the dreamlike episode on the hallway here, when he called irrationally into the mirrored dimness, or thought he called. He told her of their strange, bemused ride uptown the night before, and how the pattern swung the streets around under their wheels. He told her of his two vivid dreams through which she-yet not she-had moved so assuredly. And then, without drawing any conclusions aloud, he asked her what she was thinking.

She lay still a moment longer in his arms. Then she sat up slowly, pushing back the smooth dark hair and meeting his eyes with the feverish brilliance that had by now become natural to her.

"So that's it," she said dreamily, and was silent.

"What is?" he asked almost irritably, yet suffused now with a sense of triumph because the Someone had not silenced him after all, had slipped this once and let the whole s-tory come out into open air at last. Now at last he thought he might learn the truth.

"Then I was right," Clarissa went on. "I was fighting something last night.

It's odd, but I never even knew it was there until the moment I began to fight it. Now I know it's always been there. I wonder-

When she did not go on, Lessing said bluntly, "Have you ever realized that . . . that things were different for you? Tell me, Clarissa, what is it you think of when you . . . when you stand and look at something trivial so long?"

She turned her head and gave him a long, grave look that told him more plainly than words that the whole spell was not yet dissolved. She made no answer to the question, but she said, "For some reason I keep remembering a fairy story my aunt used to tell me when I was small. I've never forgotten it, though it certainly isn't much of a story. You see-

She paused again, and her eyes brightened as he looked, almost as if lights had gone on behind them in a dark room full of mirrors. The look of expectancy which he knew so well tightened the lines of her face for a moment, and she smiled delightedly, without apparent reason and not really seeming to know she smiled.

"Yes," she went on.. "I remember it well. Once upon a time, in a -ldngdom in the- middle of the forest; a little girl was born. All the people in the country were blind. The sun shone so brightly that none of them could see. So the little girl went about with her eyes shut too, and didn't even guess that such a thing as sight existed.

"One day as she walked alone in' the woods she heard a voice beside her. 'Who are you?' she asked the voice, and the voice replied, 'I am your guardian.' The little girl said, 'But I don't need a guardian. I know these woods very well. I was born here.' The voice said, 'Ah, you were born here, yes, but you don't belong here, child. You are not blind like the others.' And the little girl exclaimed, 'Blind? What's that?'

"I can't tell you yet,' the voice answered, 'but you must know that you are a king's daughter, born among these humble people as our king's children sometimes are. My duty is to watch over you and help you to open your eyes when the time comes. But the time is not yet. You are too young- the sun would blind you. So go on about your business, child, and remember I am always here beside you. The day will come when you open your eyes and see."

Clarissa paused. Lessing said impatiently, "Well, did she?"

Clarissa sighed. "My aunt never would finish the story. Maybe that's why I've always remembered it."

Lessing started to speak. "I don't think-" But something in Clarissa's face stopped him. An exalted and enchanted look, that Christmas-morning expression carried to fulfillment, as if the child were awake and remembering what many-lighted, silver-spangled glory awaited him downstairs. She said in a small, clear voice.

"It's true. Of course it's true! All you've said, and the fairy tale too. Why; I'm the king's child. Of course I am!" And she put both hands to her eyes in a sudden childish gesture, as if half expecting the allegory of blindness to

be literal.

"Clarissa!" Lessing said.

She looked at him with wide, dazzled eyes that scarcely knew him. And for a moment a strange memory came unbidden into his mind and brought terror with it. Alice, walking with the Fawn in the enchanted woods where nothing has a name, walking in friendship with her arm about the Fawn's neck. And the Fawn's words when they came to the edge of the woods and memory returned to them both. How it started away from her, shaking off the arm, wildness returning to the eyes that had looked as serenely into Alice's as Clarissa had looked into his. "Why- I'm a Fawn," it said in astonishment. "And you're a Human Child!"

Alien species.

-

"I wonder why am I not a bit surprised?" murmured Clarissa. "I must have known it all along, really. Oh, I wonder what comes next?"

Lessing stared at her, appalled. She was very like a child now, too enraptured by the prospect of-of what?-to think of any possible consequences. It frightened him to see how sure she was of splendor to come, and of nothing but good in that splendor. He hated to mar the look of lovely anticipation on her face, but - he must. He had wanted her to help him fight this monstrous possibility if she could bring herself to accept it at all. He had not expected instant acceptance and instant rapture. She must fight it-

"Clarissa," he said, "think! If it's true. . . and we may be wrong. . . don't you see what it means? He. . . they . . . won't let us be together, Clarissa. We can't be married."

Her luminous eyes turned to him joyously.

"Of course we'll be married, darling. They're only looking after me, don't you see? Not hurting me, just watching. I'm sure they'd never do anything to hurt me. Why darling, for all we know you may be one of us, too. I wonder if you are. It almost stands to reason, don't you think? Or why would They have let us fall in love? Oh, darling-"

Suddenly he knew, that someone was standing behind him. Someone- For one heart-stopping moment he wondered if the jealous god himself had come down to claim Clarissa, and he dared not turn his head. But when Clarissa's shining eyes lifted to the face beyond his, and showed no surprise, he felt a little reassurance.

He sat perfectly still. He knew he could not have turned if he wanted. He could only watch Clarissa, and though no words were spoken in that silence, he saw her expression change. The rapturous joy drained slowly out of it. She shook her head, bewilderment and disbelief blurring the ecstasy of a moment before.

"No?" she said to that standing someone behind him. "But I thought- Oh,

no, you mustn't! You wouldn't! It isn't fair!" And the dazzling dark eyes flooded with sudden tears that doubled their shining. "You can't, you can't!" sobbed Clarissa, and flung herself forward upon Lessing, her arms claspng his neck hard as she wept incoherent protest upon his shoulder.

His arms closed automatically around her while his mind spun desperately to regain its balance. What had happened? Who-

Someone brushed by him. The aunt. He knew that, but with no sense of relief even though he had half-expected that more awesome Someone at whose existence he could still only guess.

The aunt was bending over them, pulling gently at Clarissa's shaking shoulder. And after a moment Clarissa's grip on his neck loosened and she sat up obediently, though still catching her breath in long, uneven sobs that wrung Lessing's heart. He wanted desperately to do or say whatever would comfort her most quickly, but his mind and his body were both oddly slowed, as if there were some force at work in the room which he could not understand. As if he were moving against the momentum of that singing machinery he had fancied he sensed so often-moving against It, while the other two were carried effortlessly on.

Clarissa let herself be pulled away. She moved as bonelessly as a child, utterly given up to her grief, careless of everything but that. The teari streaked her cheeks and her body drooped forlornly. She held Lessing's hands until the last, but when he felt her fingers slipping from his the loss of contact told him, queerly, as nothing else quite had power to tell, that this was a final parting. They stood apart over a few feet of carpet, as if inexorable miles lay between them. Miles that widened with every passing second. Clarissa looked at him through her tears, her eyes unbearably bright, her lips quivering, her hands still outstretched and curved from the pressure of his clasp.

This is all. You have served your purpose-now go. Go and forget.

He did not know what voice had said it, or exactly in what words, but the meaning came back to him clearly now. Go and forget.

There was strong music in the air. For one last moment. he stood in a world that glittered with beauty and color because it was Clarissa's, glittered even in this dark apartment -with its many, many mirrors. All about him he could see reflecting Clarissas from every angle of grief and parting, moving confusedly as she let her hands begin to drop. He saw -a score of Clarissas dropping their curved hands-but he never saw them fall. One last look at Clarissa's tears, and then . . . and then-

Lethe.

Dyke let his breath out in a long sigh. He leaned back in his creaking chair and looked at Lessing without expression under his light eyebrows. Lessing blinked stupidly back. An instant ago he had stood in Clarissa's apartment; the touch of her fingers was still warm in his hands. He could hear her caught breath and see the reflections moving confusedly in the mirrors around them-

"Wait a minute," he said. "Reflections-Clarissa-I almost remembered something just then-" He sat up and stared at Dyke without seeing him, his brow furrowed. "Reflections," he said again. "Clarissa-lots of Clarissas-but no aunt! I was looking at two women in the mirror, but I didn't see the aunt! I never saw her-not once! And yet I . . . wait . . . the answer's there, you know . . . right there, just in reach, if I could only-"

Then it came to him in a burst of clarity. Clarissa had seen it before him; the whole answer lay in that legend she had told. The Country of the Blind! How could those sightless natives hope to see the king's messenger who watched over the princess as she- walked that enchanted wood? How could he remember what his mind had never been strong enough to comprehend? How could he have seen that guardian except as a presence without shape, a voice without words, moving through its own bright sphere beyond the sight of the blind?

"Cigarette?" said Dyke, creaking his chair forward.

Lessing reached automatically across the desk. There was no further sound but the rustle of paper and the scratch of a match, for a little while. They smoked in silence, eying one another. Outside feet went by upon gravel. Men's voices called distantly, muffled by the night. Crickets were chirping, omnipresent in the dark.

Presently Dyke let down the front legs of his chair with a thump and reached forward to grind out his unfinished cigarette.

"All right," he said. "Now-are you still too dose, or can you look at it objectively?"

Lessing shrugged. "I can try."

"Well, first we can take it as understood-at least for the moment-that such things as these just don't happen. The story's full of holes, of course. We could tear it to pieces in ten minutes if we tried."

Lessing looked stubborn. "Maybe you think-"

"I haven't begun to think yet. We haven't got to the bottom of the thing, naturally. I don't believe it really happened exactly as you remember. Man, how could it? The whole story's still dressed up in a sort of allegory, and we'll have to dig deeper still to uncover the bare facts. But just as it stands-what a problem! Now I wonder-"

His voice died. He shook out another cigarette and scratched a match abstractedly. Through the first cloud of exhaled smoke he went on.

"Take it all as read, just for a minute. Unravel the allegory in the allegory-the king's daughter born in the Country of the Blind. You know, Lessing, one thing strikes me that you haven't noticed yet. Ever think how completely childish Clarissa seems? Her absorption in trivial things, for instance. Her assumption that the forces at work about her must be protective, parental. Yes, even that glow you spoke of that affected everything you saw and heard when you were with her. A child's world is like that. Strong, clear colors. Nothing's ugly because they have no basis for

comparison. Beauty and ugliness mean nothing to a child. I can remember a bit from my own childhood-that peculiar enchantment over whatever interested me. Wordsworth, you know-'Heaven lies about us in our infancy,' and all the rest. And yet she was adult enough, wasn't she? Past twenty, say?"

He paused, eyeing the tip of his cigarette. "You know," he said, "it sounds like a simple case of arrested development, doesn't it? Now, now, wait a minute! I only said sounds like it. You've got sense enough to recognize a moron when you see one. I don't say Clarissa was anything like that. I'm just getting at something-.

"I'm thinking about my own little boy. He's eleven now, and getting adjusted, but when he first started school he had an I. Q. way above the rest of the class, and they bored him. He didn't want to play with the other kids. Got to hanging around the house reading until my wife and I realized something had to be done about it. High I. Q. or not, a kid needs other kids to play with. He'll never learn to make the necessary social adjustments unless he leans young. Can't grow up psychically quite straight unless he grows up with his own kind. Later on a high I. Q. will be a fine thing, but right now it's almost a handicap to the kid." He paused. "Well, see what I mean?"

Lessing shook his head. "I can't see anything. I'm still dizzy."

"Clarissa," said Dyke slowly, "might-in the allegory, mind you, not in any real sense-be the king's daughter. She might have been born of . . . well, call it royal blood . . . into a race of inferiors, and never guess it until she began to develop beyond their level. Maybe the . . . the king felt the same as I did about my own child-she needed the company of inferiors. . . of children-while she was growing up. She couldn't develop properly among-adults. Adults, you see, so far developed beyond anything we know that when they're in the same room with you, you can't even remember what they looked like."

It took Lessing a good minute after Dyke stopped speaking to realize just what he meant. Then he sat up abruptly and said, "Oh, no! It can't be that. Why, I'd have known-"

"You ought," Dyke remarked abstractedly, "to watch my kid play baseball. While he's playing, it's the most important thing in life. The other kids never guess he has thoughts that go beyond, the game."

"But. . . but the shower of gold, for instance," protested Lessing. "The presence of the god . . . even the-"

"Wait a minute! Just wait, now. You remember yourself that you jumped at conclusions about the god. Made him up completely out of a glimpse of what looked like a golden shower, and the memory of the Danae legend, and the feeling of a presence and a purpose behind what happened. If you'd seen what looked like a burning bush instead of a shower, you'd have come up with a completely different theory involving Moses, maybe. As for the - presence and the visions-" Dyke paused and gave him a narrowed look. He hesitated a moment. "I'm going to suggest something about those

later on. You won't like it. First, though, I want to follow this . . . this allegory on through. I want to explain fully what might lie beyond this obvious theory on Clarissa. Remember, I don't take it seriously, But neither do I want to leave it dangling. It's fascinating, just as it stands. It seems very clearly to indicate-in the allegory-the existence of homo superior, here and now, right among us."

"Supermen?" Lessing echoed. With an obvious effort he forced his mind into focus and sat up straighter, looking at Dyke with a thoughtful frown. "Maybe. Or maybe- Lieutenant, do you ever read Cabell? In one of his books somewhere I think he has a character refer to a sort of super-race that Impinges on ours with only one. . . one facet He uses the analogy of geometry, and suggests that the other race might be represented by cubes that show up as squares on the plane geometric surface of our world, though in their own they have a cubic mass we never guess." He frowned more deeply, and was silent.

Dyke nodded. "Something like that, maybe. Fourth dimension stuff-people restricting themselves into our world temporarily, and for a purpose." He pulled at his lower lip and then repeated, "For a purpose. That's humiliating! I'm glad I don't really believe it's true. Even considering the thing academically is embarrassing enough. Homo superior, sending his children among us-to play."

He laughed. "Run along, children! I wonder if you see what I'm driving at. I'm not sure myself, really. It's too vague. My mind's human, so it's limited. I'm set in patterns of anthropomorphic thinking, and my habit-patterns handicap me. We have to feel important. That's a psychological truism. That's why Mephistopheles was always supposed to be interested in buying human souls. He wouldn't have wanted them, really-impalpable, intangibles, no use at all to a demon with a demon's powers."

"Where do the demons come in?"

"Nowhere. I'm just talking. Homo superior would be another race without any human touching points at all-as adults. Demons, in literature, were given human emotions and traits. Why? Muddy thinking. They wouldn't have them, any more than a superman would. Tools!" Dyke said significantly, and sat staring at nothing.

"Tools?" -

"This. . . this world." He gestured. "What the devil do we know about it? We've made atom-smashers and, microscopes. And other things. Kid stuff, toys. My boy can use a microscope and see bugs in creek water. A doctor can take the same microscope, use stains, isolate a germ and do something about it That's maturity. All this -world, all this-matter-. around us, might be simply tools that we're using like kids. A super race-"

"By definition, wouldn't it be too super to understand?"

"In tote. A child can't completely comprehend an adult.

But a child can more or less understand another child- which is reduced to the same equation as his own, or at least the same common denominator.

A superman would have to grow. He wouldn't start out mature. Say the adult human is expressed by x. The adult superman is xy. A superchild-undeveloped, immature-is . Or in other words, the equivalent of a mature specimen of homo sapiens. Sapiens reaches senility and dies. Superior goes on to maturity, the true superman. And that maturity-

They were silent for awhile.

"They might impinge on us a little, while taking care of their own young," Dyke went on presently. "They might impose amnesia on anyone who came too close, as you did- might have done. Remember Charles Fort? Mysterious disappearances, balls of light, spaceships, Jersey devils. That's a side issue. The point is, a superchild could live with us, right here and now, unsuspected. It would appear to be an ordinary adult human. Or if not quite ordinary-certain precautions might be taken." Again he fell silent, twirling a pencil on the desk.

"Of course, it's inconceivable," he went on at last. "All pure theory. I've got a much more plausible explanation, though as I warned you, you won't like it."

Lessing smiled faintly. "What is it?"

"Remember Clarissa's fever?"

"Of course. Things were different after that-much more in the open. I thought-maybe she saw things in the delirium for the first time that she couldn't be allowed to see head-on, in normal life. The fever seemed to be a necessity. But of course-

"Wait. Just possibly, you know, you may have the whole thing by the wrong end. Look back, now. You two were caught in a rainstorm, and Clarissa came out of it with a delirium, right? And after that, things got stranger and stranger. Lessing, did it ever occur to you that you were both caught in that storm? Are you perfectly sure that it wasn't yourself who had the delirium?"

Lessing sat quite still, meeting the narrowed gaze. After a long moment he shook himself slightly.

"Yes," he said. "I'm sure."

Dyke. smied. "All right. Just thought I'd ask. It's one possibility, of course." He waited.

Presently Lessing looked up.

"Maybe I did have a fever," he admitted. "Maybe I imagined it all. That still doesn't explain the forgetfulness, but skip that. I know one way to settle at least part of the question," .

Dyke nodded. "I wondered if you'd want to do that I mean, right away."

"Why not? I know the way back I'd know it blindfolded. Why, she. may have been waiting for me all this time! There's nothing to prevent me going back tomorrow."

"There's a little matter of a pass," Dyke said. "I believe I can fix that up. But do you think you want to go so soon, Lessing? Without thinking things over? You know, it's going to be an awful shock if you find no apartment and no Clarissa. And I'll admit I won't be surprised if that's just what you do find. I think this whole thing's an allegory we haven't fathomed yet. We may never fathom it. But-

"I'll have to go," Lessing told him. "Don't you see that? We'll never prove anything until we at least rule out the most obvious possibility. After all, I might be telling the simple truth!"

Dyke laughed and then shrugged faintly.

Lessing stood before the familiar door, his finger hesitating on the bell. So far, his memory had served him with perfect faith. Here was the corridor he knew well. Here was the door. Inside, he was quite sure, lay the arrangement of walls and rooms, where once Clarissa moved. She might not be there any more, of course. He must not be disappointed if a strange face answered the bell. It would disprove nothing. After all, two years had passed.

And Clarissa had been changing rather alarmingly when he saw her last. The fever had seemed to speed things up.

Well, suppose it were all true. Suppose she belonged to the superrace. Suppose she impinged upon Lessing's world with only one facet of her four-dimensional self. With that one facet she had loved him—they had that much of a meeting ground. Let her have a deeper self, then, than he could ever comprehend; still she could not yet be fully developed into her world of solid geometry, and while one facet remained restricted into the planar world which was all he knew, she might, he thought, still love him. He hoped she could. He remembered her tears. He heard again the sweet, shy, ardent voice saying, "I'll always love you—"

Firmly he pressed the bell.

The room was changed. Mirrors still lined it, but not-not as he remembered. They were more than mirrors now. He had no time to analyze the change, for a motion stirred before him.

"Clarissa—" he said. And then, in the one brief instant of awareness that remained to him, he knew at last how wrong he had been.

He had forgotten that four dimensions are not the outermost limits of conceivable scope. Cabell had unwittingly led him astray: there are dimensions in which a cube may have many more than six sides. Clarissa's dimension-Extensions are possible in dimensions not entirely connected with space-or rather, space is merely a medium through which these extensions may be made. And because humans live upon a three-dimensional planet, and because all planets in this continuum are three-dimensional, no psychic tesseract is possible-except by extensions.

That is, a collection of chromosomes and genes, arranged on earth and here conceived, cannot in themselves form the matrix for a superman. Nor can a battery give more than its destined voltage. But if there are three, six, a

dozen batteries of similar size, and if they are connected in series-

Until they are connected, until the linkage is complete, each is an individual. Each has its limitations. There are gropings, guided fumbings through the dark, while those in charge seek to help the scattered organism in fulfilling itself. And therefore the human mind can comprehend the existence of a superbeing up to the point that the connection is made and the batteries become one unit, of enormous potential power.

On earth there was Clarissa and her nominal aunt-who could not be comprehended at all.

On a remote planet in Cygnae Taurus, there was a Clarissa too, but her name there was something like Ezandora, and her mentor was a remote and cryptic being who was accepted by the populace as a godling.

On Seven Million Folk Twenty Eight of Center Galaxy there was Jandav, who carried with her a small crystal through which her guidance came.

In atmospheres of oxygen and halogen, in lands ringed with the shaking blaze of crusted stars beyond the power of our telescopes-beneath water, and in places of cold and darkness and void, the matrix repeated itself, and by the psychic and utterly unimaginable power and science of homo superior, the biological cycle of a race more than human ran and completed itself and began again. Not entirely spontaneously, at the same time, in many worlds, the pattern that was Clarissa was conceived and grew. The batteries strengthened.

Or to use Cabell's allegory, the Clarissa Pattern impinged one facet upon earth, but it was not one facet out of a possible six-but one out of a possible infinity of facets. Upon each face of that unimaginable geometric shape, a form of Clarissa moved and had independent being, and gradually developed. Learned and was taught. Reached out toward the center of the geometric shape that was-or one day would be-the complete Clarissa. One day, when the last mirror-facet sent inward to the center its matured reflection of the whole, when the many Clarissas, so to speak, clasped hands with themselves and fused into perfection.

Thus far we can follow. But not after the separate units become the complete and tremendous being toward which the immaturity of Clarissa on so many worlds was growing. After that, the destiny of homo superior has no common touching point with the understanding of homo sapiens. We knew them as children. And they passed. They put away childish things.

"Clarissa-" he said.

Then he paused, standing motionless in silence, looking across that dark threshold into that mirrory dimness, seeing- what he saw. It was dark on the landing. The staircases went up and down, shadowy and still. There was stasis here, and no movement anywhere in the quiet air. This was power beyond the need for expression of power.

He turned and went slowly down the stairs. The fear and pain and gnawing uneasiness that had troubled him for so long were gone now. Outside, on the curb, he lit a cigarette, hailed a taxi, and considered his next

movements.

A cab swuxtg in. Further along the street, the liquid, shining blackness of the East River glissaded smoothly down to the Sound. The rumble of an El train came from the other direction.

"Where to, sergeant?" the driver asked.

"Downtown," Lessing said. "Where's a good floorshow?"

He relaxed pleasantly on the cushions, his mind quite free from strain or worry now.

This time the memory block was complete. He would go on living out his cycle, complacent and happy as any human ever is, enjoying life to his capacity for enjoyment, using the toys of earth with profound satisfaction.

"Nightclub?" the driver said. "The new Cabana's good-"

Lessing nodded. "O. K. The Cabana." He leaned back, luxuriously inhaling smoke. It was the children's hour.