

THE DIVERSIFAL

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"NO," said the shadowy man who sat high above the floor on the chair of the time-machine, "you can't do that."

"Can't, eh?"

"No!"

"Sorry."

For a second, Bryan was shaken with indecision. This is intolerable, he thought. I'll turn the doorknob. After all, he has no real jurisdiction over any actions. Nor has he, in spite of the stakes involved, any right to meddle in my life the way he has.

His rebel thoughts endured for only that second. His grip loosened on the doorknob, his gloved hand fell away. He actually took a few steps backward, as if he would negate that action which led toward disaster. Then he turned quickly, urged his undernourished body back up the threadbare hall, into his equally threadbare room. Off came his shapeless hat, and overcoat which was ripped at seams and pockets, and he sat down, brain numb, the sensations of his stomach forgotten in the greater hunger.

Where is she? Who is she!

He did not have the courage to meet the cold eyes of the man who sat in shadowy outline amongst nebulous, self-suspended machinery, although that being watched him with merciless inflexibility of purpose. He had only the courage to speak, while his eyes fixed dully on the gingerbreaded metal bed with its sagging mattress.

"The Alpha Group?"

"The Alpha Group," the shadowy man spoke coldly, in agreement, "Punctus four. You would have met her."

"I thought so. I felt it."

"You felt nothing of the sort. You have an exaggerated notion of the perceptive qualities of your psyche."

"I named the Alpha Group," said Bryan wearily.

"Because for the first three or four years of our association, the Alpha Group will predominate. And because you have come to associate certain of my facial expressions and tonal qualities with the group. There was no telepathic pick-up from the girl. She is not aware that you exist. Nor will she ever be aware, as long as you

choose to work in close collaboration with me—and as a humanitarian yourself, you will not refuse to collaborate."

Bryan leaned back in the worn armchair, grinning twistedly, though his heart was lead in his breast. He held the longlashed eyes of the god-like creature with a flickering sidewise glance. "Perhaps you will choose to stop collaborating with me."

The nostrils of the being flared. "No. Never. We will continue—we must continue to work together until the Alpha, Delta, and Gamma groups are exhausted—"

"Or until—"

"Or until I commit suicide as you suggested."

"Yes."

Bryan lost his tensivity, and his fear that he could not bear it, might disobey a command from this creature. Suddenly, he was amused. Bryan was chained to this creature, but no less than this creature was chained to him; chained to him for ten long years, or until he might take his own life.

Creature? Yes'. For certainly any animal that is not homo sapiens is a creature. Even if he be homo superior, of the year Eight-hundred thousand A.D., and has invented a time-machine, and has but one powerful, compelling thought in mind—to save the human race. Or that race of creatures which had stemmed from the human race. That was it. After fighting and imagining, aspiring and succeeding, for a good many millions of years, man was about to be snuffed out. So the shadowy being—homo superior—had told Bryan on that day a week ago when he had appeared in this room. The human race, far in the future, would destroy itself unless—unless Bryan Barret did not do something that he had done; did not become something that he had become.

The thoughts of the creature had impinged on his brain clearly after the first moments of fright. Bryan had listened, and believed.

"So I'm a diversifal," he had muttered. "Bryan Barret, liberal, radical, diversifal."

"You are a diversifal. I can coin no other word for it."

"And she is a diversifal."

"Yes!"

"And, our child would be a mutant."

"Yes."

"I, thought," Bryan had said, his thoughts sinking heavily into a morass of intangibles, "I thought, if one wants to follow the theory to its logical conclusion, that there are an infinite number of probable worlds."

"Are there?" The depthless eyes of the being, looking down at Bryan from his shadowy height above the floor, had been contemptuous with disinterest. "I know of only two. They are the only two with which I am concerned. A thousand years in my future they warred—and humanity destroyed itself. This I know. This I must prevent. From your unborn mutant child my race stems."

"Your race?" Bryan had exclaimed.

"Yes."

"You are seeking to prevent your own world of probability?"

"Yes." The long-lashed eyes flickered. The being leaned forward a little, staring down at Bryan. "Why not, Bryan Barret? Does it matter? It is my world of probability which discovered the manner of traveling to the other world. It is my world which waged the war. It is my world, your world, which is—will be at fault. I am selfless. You know what it is to be selfless. You can understand. And, after all, you are the diversifal—the splitting factor."

Bryan was inwardly shaken. The selfless superman. Or, and this was more likely, the selfless scientist. The picture, in its entirety, had come quite clearly to Bryan Barrett. He was a diversifal, because in him impinged events any of which might lead to the creation of a certain time-branch; a time-branch which must not be created if humanity in a far distant era were to survive. The concept of worlds of if was not new to Bryan, nor was the idea of the, future of man outside his thoughts. He dealt with the future, with the liberation of man from his bondage to tyranny. He was fighting for a future wherein man would know no poverty, no social backwardness; for a time when man could come into his own, blossom forth and make true use of the boundless resources that were possible. Small wonder, then, that he could accept the idea of a man from the far future without trouble, and could decide to give ten years of his life to the cause for which this man from the future was fighting.

But already the first week of that ten years had become a nightmare.

"You've kept me here," he now told the being, "three days, without any food except some stale cakes. Why?"

"Because the events of the Alpha Group are worked around your every probable action like a net. If you left this house before morning, you would meet her." His sharp-pointed face turned hard. "The psychological data I have on her is sketchy. I can control your actions. I cannot control hers, nor guess what they would be. And also, had you left here at any time during the last three days, you would have made an acquaintance whom you would not see again for eight, perhaps nine years."

"The Gamma Group!"

"The Gamma Group. That acquaintance would show up as a probable event in the Gamma Group which would lead to tickets to a musical comedy in a New York—" He

stopped speaking, but Bryan Barret, without knowing it, was watching him with cunning expression. The man from the future sneered. "Your obvious, unconscious desire to trick me would sicken even you, Bryan. Every word I speak is to your unconscious merely a clue to her identity. You must fight that."

Sweat started on Bryan's square, thinning face. He bowed forward, feeling as if he were about to burst. "I can leave here tomorrow morning?" His voice was muffled.

"Yes. And your way of life must change. You will go to Hannicut, editor of The Daily News-Star, and tell him you'd like to take that job he offered you last year."

Bryan came to his feet in a blaze of anger. "No! You know why I didn't take that job!"

"I know why. But it is still necessary for you to lose your integrity if we are to succeed. Go to Hannicut and tell him you're willing to falsify the news either by commission or omission. Also you -will cancel your membership in the so-called radical organization, Freedom For All. And in any other liberal organization you may belong to."

He looked calmly down into Bryan's stricken, agonized face. "I know what those associations mean to you—and to freedom-loving men everywhere. I am truly sorry. I conceive the future to be more important than this present, however. This, Bryan Barrett, is your first step to wealth and power. A financial gulf must be created as an additional precaution between you and her. A gulf that a poverty-stricken person can never cross. She is poor. She will always be poor..."

It was strange the way that nightmarish week turned into a month, that month into a year. Hannicut, editor of The Daily News-Star, performed a blunder from the viewpoint of the man who owned that newspaper and a hundred others throughout the world: He printed a story which told the truth about a recent labor-big business dispute. Hannicut's boss fired him, and in elevating Bryan Barret to the post warned him never to give labor a break, else he'd go the way of Hannicut.

"Take the job," came the cold thoughts of the man from the future, and his name Bryan Barret now knew—Entore.

Bryan got the first damp issue back from the pressroom the next day, and looked at it with sickened eyes. He left the office with his hat pulled low over his eyes. Newsboys were hawking the edition—big scareheads which told of another strike in the coalmines, and never mentioned one word about the strike a certain big business corporation was pulling against the government. Which never said a thing about the filibuster a certain senator had pulled in Congress to defeat a pro-minority bill.

In the second week of Bryan's editorship, he started to leave the office. Back in Bryan's hotel suite, Entore, man from the future, sent another wordless command.

"Do not leave the office now."

"No?" Bryan muttered the word from the graying mustache he now wore.

"No. Two men are waiting downstairs—two rowdies front the Freedom For All League. They are intending to throw bricks."

Bryan's fists clenched. "There are no rowdies in the Freedom For All League. No matter what the newspapers claim."

"These men once knew you, when you fought tyranny together. They are law-abiding men. But something has snapped in them. In their eyes, you are a traitor. They could never punish you by law. They are willing to sacrifice their own lives if they can kill you."

"Thanks."

Bryan sank into a chair in the corner of his office. His head bowed, and he knew there was gray in his hair, gray that the last year had put there. Later Entore spoke again. Bryan left.

He had no sooner reached the street and signaled a taxi than Entore spoke again. "Do not take that taxi. Walk one block left. The Alpha Group. That taxi will have a minor street accident. Among those who gather in the crowd will be she."

Bryan stood with his hand upraised. The taxi was sloping in toward him. His heart thudded. He felt a voiceless, impassioned longing, as if a mind, a human mind, were reaching across distances and touching his without saying anything. Her mind. Then he turned and walked one block left and took another taxi. He sat in the taxi, cold and graying, a man who was rising in power and wealth as the editor of a great metropolitan daily. A man who by all the rules of human conduct was a quisling of the worst sort. Yet, could they, his former friends and fellow fighters, know what hell he was going through now because he was looking farther into the future than they could ever hope to look? They were fighting against the corruptness of present civilization. Someday their fight would bear fruit in a nationwide, and later on a worldwide, Utopia. Bryan Barret had been forced to look farther ahead than that. To and beyond the year 800,000 A.D. They would never understand.

"Turn your head to the right," came the command.

Automatically Bryan turned his head. "Why?" he asked dully.

"The Gamma Group, seven years from now. Had you kept your eyes on the left side of the street, Punchis nineteen of the Gamma group would have occurred. You would have seen a woman who resembled your mother so strongly that later on, this week you would write a letter to her in your hometown, wondering if she had been in New York. She would have answered quickly, wondering why you wrote so seldom, and telling you she hadn't been in New York, but that, come to think of it, she would make the trip to see you. You would have met her in Penn Station, and in the excitement would have lost your billfold. A traveler would have found the billfold,

taken the money, and dropped the billfold in a drawer at his home. Seven years later, his wife, cleaning house, would have found the billfold and returned it to you. You would have rewarded the woman. A few days later, you would meet her on the street; with her, a friend—"

"She!" Bryan interposed huskily.

"Yes," Entore said. "The possibilities of meeting her through the Gamma Group of events are the shadowy ones. One by one I am destroying the possibility of events both in the Delta and the Gamma Groups. But both will be relatively strong long after the Alpha Group no longer exists."

Bryan went back to his hotel suite without eating. Entore was there, staring at him with impersonal, cold glance.

Bryan said, his hand still on the closed door, "I won't be able to stand much more of this."

Entore leaned forward on the console of his machine. "I, too, am sacrificing," he pointed out.

"Are you?" Bryan's eyes and voice tore across at him with sarcasm. "You can disappear back to your own time for an hour, a week, a year, if you choose, and return back to this same second of time without my being aware that you had gone. You have relief from the vigil. I have none. Ten years?" His laugh was brittle. "I'll go crazy!"

Entore said nothing.

Bryan ground out, "You'd want me confined in a sanitarium, Entore. That would be similar to death, as far as destroying the Groups goes. No, thanks. I'll hang on."

He looked back at Entore, as impersonally as Entore was looking at him. Bryan thought, as he looked at the assemblage of machinery. He's shadowy, vague. He has—no real substance in this world. I can see through him and his machinery, a little. But he's partly solid. I've touched the machine. I've had to push hard to get my hand through. Maybe a bullet...

He thrust the thought away, seeing in a flash what horrors it could bring. Kill Entore? Kill him? He who had, with his own science of a far future, assembled groups of event-data which alone could guide Bryan Barret, diversifal, along the path he must take, rather than the path he would normally take? And yet, what if some day, in a burst of rage...?

Bryan Barret planned nothing of that sort. Another year passed, and another. The circulation of The Daily News-Star rose. Bryan could have pointed to Entore, when rich friends pointed to Bryan as one of the great editors of the times. Entore could look around corners, see what was coming from the future. Entore could scoop them all. If a war was going to break out, Bryan could have correspondents on the

spot days before the event. If there was to be a mine explosion, Bryan could, if he wished, write the story ahead of time, himself. His salary rose to a fabulous figure. And he remembered, hollowly, Entore's purpose. A financial gulf must be created between him and her. She would always be poor...

Bryan Barret did not consciously plan to kill Entore. It was merely that events pointed in that direction—events as sure and far-reaching as those events of the Delta and Gamma Groups which now and again Entore forced him to by-pass. There was the instance of the gun. Bryan was passing an alleyway in the fourth year of his association with Entore. Had it not been for the reflection from the store window, Bryan would not have seen the assassin. He ducked as the gun roared. With a continuation of the motion, he hurled himself into the alley, for a long second wrestled mightily with death. He jerked the gun from the man's hands, threw him against the wall. His eyes widened.

"Drake!"

"Okay, Bryan," the shabbily dressed man spat at him. "I'll admit I was out to get you. I'll stay here until the police come. And when they try me, I'll tell things to the courtroom you never would allow to get into your paper. How you and your boss put the pressure to bear, and disbanded the Freedom For All League."

Bryan paled, dropped the gun into his pocket. "Drake," he said, "get moving. Nothing happened. I was acting under my boss' orders when I printed that antileague propaganda. I wouldn't have done it myself. But you wouldn't understand. Go on."

Bryan quickly turned away, walked in the other direction. By the time the crowd formed, both participants in the scene were gone. But something had snapped in Bryan's mind. He walked faster, faster, as fast as his thoughts. An hour later, he burst into his suite, his hand in his pocket around the gun.

"Entore!" he snapped, taking two stiff-legged steps toward the suspended creature. "All day, you've been in communication with me. Yet, as I was coming home from the office, somebody tried to kill me. Why didn't you warn me about that?"

Entore's face remained cold. "Were you killed?"

"What does that matter? It was a lucky accident I wasn't. A matter of a reflection in a window, something even you couldn't have foreseen with your high and mighty science. Entore, you wanted me to die!"

Entore said nothing for awhile, his face a study. Finally, as if admitting something that had only hovered on the fringes of his mind: "Bryan, I suppose we have both at last come to hate each other. But I have never once tried to lead you into any situation that would mean your death."

"Except this evening!"

But already the force of Bryan's rage had died. Entore's logic was indisputable. He

hadn't been killed. He felt the cold, hard mass of the gun in his pocket. He wondered if Entore knew about that. He wondered how deeply Entore could probe into his thoughts.

Entore repeated, with an abstraction that was entirely strange in him, "No, Bryan. No. I have never thought of that, never thought of consciously plotting your death, although it would free me."

His eyes flickered; and Bryan, turning, went with the steps of an old man toward the bedroom. He took off the coat, hung it up. The gun was stilt in the pocket. Bryan tried to force than thought of the gun from his mind, to get the memory of it deep into his unconscious.

The gun stayed there in that coat for three years.

The Alpha Group was now destroyed. The Alpha Group, running thick with events which would have led him to her. And the Delta Group, too, was now so blocked off, and the probabilities of a meeting occurred in such long, involved chains, that Entore could destroy Puncti merely by dictating to Bryan Barret in such small matters as the color of a necktie, or a choice of dessert, or—well, how could the color of a necktie start a chain of events which would lead to her? This way: A tie bought hastily, worn once, disliked; given to the new hotel maid. The maid is making a quilt from old neckties, and several others are given to her. When she completes the quilt, she sells it to a small department store. The department store displays the quilt in the window, the maid informs Bryan, pridefully. On his way from lunch, Bryan feels obliged to stop by and look at the quilt. But he is in somewhat of a hurry, turns, looking at his watch, bumps head-on into her... But Entore prevented Bryan from buying the chartreuse necktie.

In the eighth year, the Delta Group of events ceased to exist. They were now in the shadowy realms of the Gamma Group. Those events which were far-flung echoes of the past.

"There's not much chance, now, eh?" Bryan queried.

"Not much chance."

Bryan sat down. He was forty years of age, and the years had treated him harshly. He was tired, in mind and body. Fine lines had been etched deep in his face; strands of gray ran thickly through his hair. He was tall, and gaunt, and inclined to stoop at the shoulders, as from a physical burden. He moved through life with a slow, firm tread which was not so much an indication of his bodily strength as of his will, which he whipped to action as he would a stubborn animal.

Entore had in no way changed.

"I would like," Bryan muttered, in the voice of a man asleep, "I would like to meet her."

"I know," said Entore.

"Tomorrow night," said Bryan, "I am going incognito to a public meeting of the so-called United Liberty Lovers' League. It is a sham organization, masquerading under a name which indicates its opposite nature. I intend to expose the League in my paper,"

"No," said Entore.

Bryan looked up, his face savage. "Yes! Eight years ago, I deserted every ideal that made me worthy of life. I was in some measure responsible for the disbanding of a league that was fighting corruption—the kind of corruption my newspaper has dealt in. I intend to make one strong bid for my self-respect."

"You will no longer have your position if you print such a story. The man who owns the paper sponsors the organization you intend to expose."

"That's all right," said Bryan still savagely. He rose, pounding one fist with restrained emphasis into the palm of his left hand. "I've never gone against you, Entore. Never. Not in the slightest detail. This time I must. If this is a step that will create a chain of events which is undesirable, there's still a way for you to lead me back to a safe path."

Entore's depthless eyes flickered. His small mouth turned slowly hard. "If you wish," he said coldly. "But you must obey me in small particulars."

Bryan nodded curtly.

Bryan Barrett never reached the meeting hall of the sham organization United Liberty Lovers' League the next night.

"Do not go by way of Columbus Circle," Entore's thoughts came.

Bryan leaned forward, spoke to the taxi driver, giving him another route, a route that led toward death. Bryan saw the moving van coming with ponderous sureness from a side-street, bearing down broadside on the taxi. The driver cramped the wheel hard, screamed. The monster loomed, and Bryan moved, his nerves pulling at his muscles like reins holding the head of a spirited horse. He halfway rolled from the middle of the seat, with one foot kicked the door lever and shoved the door open. He threw himself from the taxi, bit shoulder first in the street, scraped his face on hard pavement. He lay like one dead. When he came to, he arose from the crowd that circled him, pushed his way through like a swimmer breaking water. Somebody tried to stop him, but he went, staggering at first, and then quickly.

He got back in another taxi. Entore did not speak to him once during that trip. He did not speak when Bryan came into the hotel suite. Bryan emptied his mind of coherence. He went into the bedroom, took off his torn coat. He put on another coat, and he tried not to realize that the gun was in that pocket.

Then he came out into the living-room and took a stance looking up at Entore. "You tried to kill me," he said.

Entore said coldly, looking at the blood on his face, "I am ignorant of all events after the taxi changed course. You deliberately closed your mind to me. However, I am glad you didn't go to the League meeting. It would have set in motion a number of puncti which would have been hard to destroy. There now remains a chance—one bare chance that you will ever meet her. Once that Pundus is destroyed, the Gamma Group will have been destroyed. You will be pleased to know—as I will be pleased—that our association can then be disbanded."

Bryan started to shake inwardly. Then the trembling was transmitted to his outward person.

"Entore," he had to whisper, "I know something now I didn't know before, You're a superman, and you're a congenital liar. You can lie with a straight face when you know big events hang on your lies. More, you can convince yourself that your lies are true—and maybe that's a valuable survival characteristic. Because you lied to me when you first appeared to me eight years ago."

He gulped in air, tired to control his trembling. He spoke again.

"Most of what you said was true. I believe most of it. But you just caught yourself up on one big lie. You knew how selfless I could be, because I believed in an ideal. You appealed to my selflessness by putting yourself in the same category. You told me it was your world of probability you were trying to destroy. Put that way, I could do nothing less than promise to collaborate with you completely. However, if by the destruction of one more punchis, the last chance of my meeting her is destroyed, then, in that same instant, your world will be destroyed, and you will be destroyed, too. You will cease to exist. Yet you speak of disbanding our association. If you spoke the truth, it would be disbanded automatically—and you would not have a chance to be pleased or displeased. Entore," said Bryan, reaching into the pocket and taking out the gun, "you have tried to kill me once too often. You won't get another chance."

He fired. He fired point-blank. And in his innermost heart he did not think he would succeed, did not want to succeed.

The bullet struck Entore in the chest.

Entore's passionless eyes widened. The delicate shadowy fingers clasped suddenly at the open hole in his chest that suddenly gushed with pink, barely discernible blood. He choked. Then he fell forward across the console of his machine.

"I am dying!" The hideous, incredulous thought-words ripped at Bryan's brain. He saw Entore's fingers scrambling at buttons on the control of his suspended machinery. The machinery and Entore suddenly disappeared, like smoke dissipated before a breeze. There was emptiness.

The gun dropped from Bryan's fingers, as if it were a serpent which had struck him. He stood frozen for a long moment, icy cold horror pouring along the winding arteries of his body, pervading his brain.

"Entore!" he cried. "Entore! Come back!"

But Entore would not come back. In his last moments, Entore had sent himself spinning back to his own time. Bryan sank, stupefied into a chair,

Bryan left the hotel suite the next morning. He moved slowly, like a blind man who feels he is liable to stumble over the brink of a precipice at any moment. He walked along the street listening for Entore's thought-voice.

Suddenly he stopped' in mid-pace, turned, walked back, and then a block in the other direction. He started to board a bus, then changed his mind.

At breakfast, he ordered mechanically—then, in fright, changed the order completely.

When the day was done, he lay in bed, rigid with nervous exhaustion, knowing he had set himself an impossible task. Two years of this. And his battle against mechanical or impulsive actions was no substitute for Entore's knowledge of puncti.

He thought of Entore, as he lay rigid in darkness. Entore had been a liar. And yet his lie did not matter. The same result, the preservation of humanity in the far distant future, would be achieved whether Entore's world or the other world ceased to have being. The murder of Entore had solved nothing, but had left Bryan in a tangle of complexities from which there was only one straightforward path: suicide.

A month passed. And Bryan suddenly saw that insanity was another way out. He was surely growing insane. He was trying to control the minutiae of his existence, and doing so was like an entity in his own head, ripping his mind to shreds. He looked at his hand—large, bony—and it shook visibly. He looked straight down at the glass-top of his desk, and saw a hollow-cheeked, sunken-eyed specter. He sank back into his chair, closed his eyes wearily. And as he sat thus, he made his decision.

With the decision came a vast, flooding peace, a cauterizing of the disease that was growing in his mind. He opened his eyes as if he were looking on a new world. A world where he, Bryan Barret, did as he pleased without censorship from Entore or from himself. He rose quickly.

On his desk, he heard the rustle of papers. He turned, filled with a drunken elation. The wind was flicking over pages of the rival newspaper on his desk much as a human hand could flick them over. Bryan put a paperweight on each corner, sank gloatingly into his chair. Events were flowing as they should flow, even in the small matter of wind blowing a newspaper.

Small?

Something exploded in his brain like a bell struck violently.

He came to his feet, bent over the newspaper, staring at the advertisement which leaped with smashing impact toward his eyes. An advertisement smugly explaining the virtues of a musical comedy that was in its sixth month.

Years ago, Entore had said something about a musical comedy. Of an acquaintance who would later show up in the Gamma Group with tickets for a musical comedy. Only, Entore had destroyed that possibility by making certain Bryan did not make the acquaintance in the first place.

He reached for the 'phone automatically. The wells of resistance had been pumped dry. That evening he sat in a rear theatre seat, far from the stage. And yet he saw her. Third act, second row, in the middle. Long before the show ended, he was standing at the stage-door, waiting for her to come out. She came soon. She halted in the door. Then she saw him. Without hesitance, she walked toward him and without saying anything, fell into step beside him and they walked down the street.

Their conversation until they sat in the restaurant with the dinner plates cleared away was nothing that either of them would remember. Then it was Bryan who spoke.

"You'd never married?"

"No. And you?"

"Never. We've been kept apart."

"I know," she said quietly. "Entore."

He looked across the table at her, unable to feel the shock of that suddenly imparted information. Her name was Ann. She was small and dainty of body, but the beauty that had been hers was fading into the serene depth of her eyes.

He said at last, "Entore came to you first, did he?"

"He did. And I refused him."

"Why?"

"Because I was living in the present, and eight hundred thousand years from now is eight hundred thousand years."

He struggled with that logic, but there were implications in it which escaped him. "But," he persisted, "the race of man would die. It would end because of us."

She leaned forward a little tensely, a little pleadingly, and the dark eyes flooded their inner beauty over her face so that he caught his breath. She wanted to explain something to him, but she had no words to say it. She sank back, mutely. He sat silently, holding himself in an iron control, and then it was that the barrier leaped up between them. For hours they sat there, talking of other things that neither would

remember.

Finally she rose, quickly, holding her purse with both hands. "I must leave now," she told him. He rose, too. Panic flickered on her face, and her hands—thin fragile hands—wound around the purse. "I have a feeling—as strong as the feeling that your eyes were on me from the audience—that if I leave now, we'll never meet each other again. Do you want it that way. Do you really want it that way?"

"It's the way it must be," he said, and it was as if his Nemesis, Entore had forced the damning words from his lips.

A second after she had turned, walking so quickly that it seemed she was running away, turned and disappeared up the short flight of stairs toward the traffic-roaring street, he could still see the startled, destroying pain that wrenched her face. The incredulity that even the hope of the empty years of her life had been taken from her and left a narrowing memory of near happiness only.

Only a second he stood there, remembering that tortured expression. Then a thunderbolt exploded inside him. This is the present, and eight hundred thousand years is eight hundred thousand years, as long as eternity, as meaningless!

"Ann!" he shouted—screamed the name as he stood on the street. She was not in sight. And he knew he would never see her again. The black, nauseating wind of self-hatred poured madly through his brain, and carried the mocking memory of Entore. The last punctus of the Gamma Group of events had been dissipated. He was truly his own master again. He had the choice of facing straight ahead into the unwelcome future or—of fastening his mind on some more pleasant memory of the past, fastening it there permanently, and assuming the expression of an idiot.