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William Tenn is perhaps the foremost humorist in the science-fantasy field today. This is not because he is a clever punster (though he is), or a good gag-man (though he's that, too), or even because he writes "funny" stories. His humor has been called "Chaplin-esque"; and again, this is not so much because it is similar to Chaplin's pantomime as because it, too, stems from the author's peculiarly compassionate appreciation of human frailty. Mr. Tenn takes it a step farther, though; his heroes are

not necessarily human. He wrote a side-splitting tearjerker about the problems of an artificial android "double"; and a sentimental, satirical saga of the seven-sexed creatures of Venus. Here he treats the dangers of a building animated by the will to serve.

The House Dutiful

William Tenn

TO—TO be . . . an unformable, lonely thought groped blindly for a potential fact . . . need, a need . . . it was—something . . . it was—needed . . . it was needed? Consci-ousness!

A living creature came with the pride of ownership, the trig-gering wistfulness for it. Unlike its first darling, this creature had notions that were bizarre and primitive, conceptually ago-nizing. Painful, painful, painful they were to organize into. But it had purpose again—and, more, it had desire—

Thoughtlessly, lovingly, the immense thing began to flow to the fixed-upon place, twitching awkward experimental shapes upwards as it went.

The back-country Canadian road was obscure even for the biting concentration of the deluxe 1958 caterpillar runabout,

Metal treads apologized shrilly as they hit a rock that was too large and too smugly imbedded in the mud. The bright yellow car canted steeply to the right and came down level again with a murky splash.

"And I was so *happy* in the dairy," Esther Sakarian moaned in histrionic recollection as she dug her unpainted, thoroughly trimmed fingernails into the lavender upholstery of the front seat. "I had my own quiet little lab, my neatly labeled samples of milk and cheese from the day's production; at night I could walk home on cement sidewalks or drop into a dry, air-condi-tioned restaurant or movie. But Philadelphia wasn't good enough for me! No, I had to . . ."

"Bad storm last night—smooth riding, usually," Paul Mar-quis muttered on her left. He grimaced his glasses back into correct nose position and concentrated on the difficult ocular task of separating possible road from possible marsh.

"I had to come up to the Great Bear Lake where every pros-pector sneezes and all the men are vile. Adventure I wanted—hah ! Well, here I am, using up the last of my girlhood as a water-purification expert for a bunch of near-sighted nuclear physicists desperately hopeful that they look like characters in a Northwest romance!"

Marquis sloughed the runabout around a dwarfed red spruce that grew belligerently in the middle of the damp highway. "Should be there in a minute or two, Es. Forty of the sweetest acres that anybody ever talked the Canadian government into selling. And a little bumpy hill just off the road that's a natural foundation for the Cape Cod cottage Caroline's always talking about."

The bacteriologist prodded his shoulder tenderly. "Talking about it in Boston and building it in northern Canada—a little different, don't you think? You haven't married the gal yet."

"You don't know Caroline," Marquis told her confidently. "Besides, we'll be only forty miles from Little Fermi—and the town will grow. The lode we're working on seems to be about ten times as rich as the Eldorado mine over at Port Radium. If it holds up, we'll build a uranium pile that will be a power plant for the entire western hemisphere. Business will get in-terested, real-estate values will boom . . ."

"So it's a good investment, too? Now don't pout, but I have a dim belief that you bought the swamp-happy acreage to give yourself a reason for this gaudy monstrosity you ordered when everyone else got a 'copter. Why is it that physical scientists on both of the outermost frontiers—the star-classifiers and the electron-prodders—have to be the roaringest romantics and mystics of them all? Like your opinion that a lifetime spent behind Beacon Street cotton wool can produce the peculiar combi-nation of frantic housemaid and lambent inspiration that you want in a wife."

"Now you sound like that pill-roller Connor Kuntz when I beat his classic Capablancon chess with an inspirational heresy. *There's* a nineteenth-century mechanist with whom you could be happy; all he wants is a mate of good disposition and fair heredity who will be absorbed in her work and let him do his bone-setting in peace. I don't want a mate—I want a marriage. No servant any employment agency ever . . ."

"Dr. Kuntz is a mass of greasy rationalizations. And I wasn't proposing to you by indirection. You're had, lad."

"—ever sent out," he went on doggedly, "could handle the menial essentials of domestic living with the affection and grace of a wife, a good wife. The best machines made stop this side of habit, and, even if they didn't, you can't get omnipresent, under-standing love from a machine. Not that I'm marrying Caroline just to get someone who'll kiss me while she's preparing dinners I like . . ."

"Of course not ! It's comfortable, though, to know you'll get it just the same. Which you wouldn't if you married, say—oh, say a female bacteriologist who had work of her own to do and would be as tired as you at the end of the day. All this, mind you, even if you'd confided to the female bacteriologist that you found her an ideal person with whom to discuss lab kinks and personal aspirations. Up with the double standard; but, this time, keep it intellectual!"

The excessively thin young man slapped the car to a stop and turned with his mouth open for a blast. Esther Sakarian was one of those tidy, docile-appearing women whose remarks generated a surprising amount of frictional heat in men.

"Look here, Es," he began loudly, "social development and the relatively new integrity of the individual to one side, people still consist of men and women. Women—with the exception of maladjusted . . ."

"Hey, there!" Esther was staring over his shoulder with her nostrils flaring respectfully. "You've done quite a job! It doesn't look a bit prefabricated, Paul. But it must have been expensive getting priorities for those sections on the Diesel snow trains. And you banged it together in one week by your-self? Quite a job!"

"I would appreciate it if you stopped raving and told me . . ."

"Your house—your Cape Cod cottage! It's perfect."

"My *what*?" Paul Marquis' head spun around like a good servo-mechanism.

Esther slid the right-hand door back into its slot and stepped delicately onto the mud. "I'll bet you have it half-furnished, too. And full of the crazy domestic gimmicks you're always working out. Downy old duck, aren't you? 'Come on, Es, I want to ask your advice on where to stick a house on that land I bought !' So go on and smirk: don't worry, I won't have the gall to say I knew it all the time."

Marquis watched the progress of her feminized blue jeans up the bush-infested hill toward the green and white cottage with anything but a smirk. His tongue rolled out of his mouth and slapped moisture on his working lips—moisture which seemed to be used up as fast as it was applied. His eyes, after a couple of wistful attempts at running broad jumps from their sockets, settled down into an earnest conference with each other. Occasionally he said, "Whul?"; at other times, he said, "Nipe!" At no time did he smirk.

Finally, he swung madly over the side, slipped headlong into the mud, picked himself up and clambered on, dripping great brown chunks of Canadian soil as he thudded up the slope.

Esther nodded at him as he approached, her hand truculent on the long, old-fashioned doorknob. "What's the sense of locking doors in this wilderness? If anyone were going to bur-glarize, they could smash a window quite easily and help them-selves while you were away. Well, don't stand there looking philosophical—make with the key, make with the key!"

"The—the key." Dazed, he took a small key chain out of his pocket, looked at it for a moment, then shoved it back violently. He ran a hand through a tangle of blond hair and leaned against the door. It opened.

The bacteriologist trotted past him as he clawed at the post to retain his balance. "Never could get the hang of those prehis-toric gadgets. Photoelectric cells will be good enough for my children, and they're good enough for me. Oh, Paul! Don't tell me your sense for the fitness of things extends no further

than atomic nuclei. Look at that furniture!"

"Furniture?" he asked very weakly. Slowly, he opened eyes which had been tightly closed while he leaned against the door. He took in the roomful of chairs and tables done in the sprout-ing-from-one-center-leg style which was currently popular. "Furniture!" he sighed and carefully dosed his eyes again.

Esther Sakarian shook her round head with assurance. "1958 Single-Support just doesn't go in a Cape Cod cottage. Believe me, Paul, your poetic soul may want to placate your scientific mind by giving it superfunctional surroundings, but you can't do it in this kind of a house. Furthermore, just by looking at that retouched picture of Caroline you have pasted to your Geiger counter, I know she wouldn't approve. You'll have to get rid of at least . . ."

He had come up to her side and stood plucking the sleeve of her bright plaid shirt. "Esther," he muttered, "my dear, sweet, talkative, analytical, self-confident Esther—please sit down and shut up!"

She dropped into a roundly curved seat, staring at him from angled eyebrows. "You have a point to make?"

"I have a point to make!" Paul told her emphatically. He waved wildly at the modern furniture which seemed to be talking slang in the pleasant, leisurely room. "All this, the house, the furniture, the accessories, was not only not built nor sent here by me, but—but wasn't here a week ago when I came out with the man from the land office and bought the property. It shouldn't be here!"

"Nonsense! It couldn't just . . ." She broke off.

He nodded. "It did just. But that only makes me feel crazy. What makes me positively impatient for a jacket laced tastefully up the back is the furniture. It's the kind of furniture I thought of whenever Caroline talked about building this cottage. But the point is this: I knew she wanted to stuff it full of New England antique, and—since I feel a woman's place is in the home—I never argued the point. I never mentioned buying Single-Support to her; I've never mentioned the idea to anyone. And every chair and table in this room is exactly what I thought it should be—*privately!*"

Esther had been listening to him with an expanding frown. Now she started an uneasy giggle, and cut it off before it began to throb. "Paul, I know you're too neurotic to be insane, and I'm willing to admit my leg isn't pretty enough for you to pull. But this—this— Look, the house may have been dropped by a passing plane; or possibly Charles Fort had the right idea. What you're trying to tell me about the furniture, though . . . It makes for belly butterflies!"

"Mine have electric fans on their wings," he assured her. "When I first saw this place, I had to look twice at the sun to make sure it hadn't turned green. When I opened the door, I knew I was color-blind. Let's amble into the kitchen. If there's a certain refrigerator-sink-stove combination . . ."

There was. Paul Marquis gripped the sleek enamel and whistled "The Pilgrim's Chorus" through his teeth.

"I will a-ask you to c-consider this f-fact," he said at last, shakenly. "This particular rig is one which I worked out on the back of an envelope from Caroline at three-fifteen yesterday when the big dredge got kinked up and I had nothing else to do. Prior to that time, all I knew was that I wanted something slightly different in the way of an all-in-one kitchen unit. This is what I drew."

Esther patted the sides of her face as if she were trying to slap herself back into sanity ever so gently. "Yes, I know."

"You do?"

"You may not remember, Mr. Marquis, but you showed me the drawing in the mess hall at supper. Since it was too fantasti-cally expensive to be considered seriously, I suggested shaping the refrigerator like a sphere so that it would fit into the curve of the stove. You chucked out your lower lip and agreed. The refrigerator is shaped like a sphere and fits into the curve of the stove."

Paul opened a cupboard and pulled out a rainbow-splashed tumbler. "I'm going to get a drink, even if it's water!"

He held the tumbler under the projecting faucet and reached for a button marked "cold." Before his questing finger pressed it, however, a stream of ice-cold fluid spurted out of the faucet, filled the glass

and stopped without a trickle.

The physicist exhaled at the completely dry bottom surface of the sink. He tightened his fingers convulsively on the tumbler and poured its contents down his throat. A moment passed, while his head was thrown back; then Esther, who had been leaning against the smooth wall, saw him begin to gag. She reached his side just as the coughs died away and the tears started to leak out of his eyes.

"Whoo-oo!" he exclaimed. "That was whisky—the finest Scotch ever to pass these tired old lips. Just as it started to pour, I thought to myself: 'What you need, friend, is a good swift slug of Scotch.' And Esther—that's what that water was! Talk about miracles!"

"I don't like this," the brown-haired woman decided positively. She pulled a small glass vial from a breast pocket. "Whisky, water or whatever it is—I'm going to get a sample and analyze it. You've no idea how many varieties of algae I've seen in the water up here. I think the presence of radioactive ore . . . Hullo. It doesn't work."

With thumb and forefinger, she pressed the hot and cold water buttons until the flesh under her fingernails turned white. The faucet remained impassively dry.

Paul came over and bent his head under the metal arm. He straightened and smiled impishly. "Pour, water!" he commanded. Again water spat from the faucet, this time describing a curve to where Esther Sakarian had moved the vial to permit her companion to examine the plumbing. When the vial was full, the water stopped.

"Yup!" Paul grinned at the gasping bacteriologist. "Those buttons, the drain—they're only for display. This house does exactly what's required of it—but only when I require it! I have a robot house here, Es, and it's mine, *all* mine!"

She dosed the vial and replaced it in her pocket. "I think it's a little more than that. Let's get out of here, Paul. Outside of the obvious impossibility of this whole business, there are a couple of things that don't check. I'd like to have Connor Kuntz up here to go over the place. Besides, we'd better get started if we're to make Little Fermi before the sun goes down."

"You don't tell Kuntz about this," Paul warned her as they moved toward the already opening door. "I don't want him fussing up my robot house with his sterile erudition and intellectual clichés."

Esther shrugged. "I won't, if you insist. But Doc Kuntz might give you a line on exactly what you have here. Hit him with the extraordinary and he'll bring five thousand years of scientific banalities to bear on it for dissection purposes. Tell me, do you notice any other change in your land since you were here last?"

The physicist stood just outside the door and swept his eyes over the tangle of bush that seasoned the glinting patches of swamp and outcropped rock. Sick orange from the beginning sunset colored the land weirdly, making the desolate subarctic plains look like the backdrop to a dying age. A young, cold wind sprang up and hurried at them, delighting in its own vigor.

"Well, over there for example. A patch of green grass extending for about a quarter mile. I remember thinking how much like a newly mowed lawn it looked, and how out of place it was in the middle of all this marsh. Over there, where you now see that stretch of absolutely blank brown soil. Of course, it could have withered and died in a week. Winter's coming on."

"Hm-m-m." She stepped back and looked up at the green roof of the cottage which harmonized so unostentatiously with the green shutters and door and the sturdy white of the walls. "Do you think. . ."

Paul leaped away from the door and stood rubbing his shoulder. He giggled awkwardly. "Seemed as if the post reached over and began rubbing against me. Didn't frighten me exactly—just sort of startling."

He smiled. "I'd say this robot whatever-it-is likes me. Almost a mechanical caress."

Esther nodded, her lips set, but said nothing until they were in the car again. "You know, Paul," she whispered as they got under way, "I have the intriguing thought that this house of yours isn't a robot at all. I think it's thoroughly alive."

He widened his eyes at her. Then he pushed his glasses hard against his forehead and chuckled. "Well, that's what they say, Es: It takes a heap of livin' to make a house a home!"

They rode on silently in the seeping darkness, trying to develop reasons and causes, but finding

nothing worthy of reason-able discussion. It was only when they clattered onto the cordu-roy outskirts of Little Fermi that Paul stated abruptly: "I'm going to get some beans and coffee and spend the night in my living house. Breckinbridge won't need me until that shipment of cadmium rods comes in from Edmonton; that means I can spend tonight and all day tomorrow finding out just what I've got."

His companion started to object, then tossed her head. "I can't stop you. But be careful, or poor Caroline may have to marry a young buck from the Harvard Law School."

"Don't worry," he boasted. "I'm pretty sure I can make that house jump through hoops if I ask it. And maybe, if I get bored, I'll ask it!"

He looked up Breckinbridge in the clapboard barracks and got a day's leave of absence from him. Then there was a discussion with the cooks who were rapidly persuaded to part with miscellaneous packaged foodstuffs. A hurriedly composed telegram to one Caroline Hart of Boston, Massachusetts, and he was thumping his way back to the house behind headlights that were willing to split the darkness but were carefully noncommittal about the road.

It wasn't till Paul saw the house clutching the top of the hill that he realized how easily he would have accepted the fact of its disappearance.

Parking the runabout on the slope so that its lights illumined the way to the top, he pushed the side back and prepared to get out.

The door of the house opened. A dark carpet spilled out and humped down the hill to his feet. Regular, sharp protuberances along its length made it a perfect staircase. A definite rosy glow exuded from the protuberances, lighting his way.

"That's really rolling out the welcome mat," Paul commented as he locked the ignition in the car and started up.

He couldn't help jumping a bit when, passing through the vestibule, the walls bulged out slightly and touched him gently on either side. But there was such an impression of friendliness in the gesture and they moved back in place so swiftly, that there was no logical reason for nervousness.

The dining room table seemed to reach up slightly to receive the gear he dropped upon it. He patted it and headed for the kitchen.

Water still changed into whisky at his unspoken whim; as he desired, it also changed into onion soup, tomato juice and Napoleon brandy. The refrigerator, he found, was full of every-thing he might want, from five or six raw tenderloins to a large bottle of heavy cream complete with the brand name he usually asked for when shopping by himself.

The sight of the food made him hungry; he had missed supper. A steak suffocating under heaps of onions, surrounded by beans and washed down with plenty of hot coffee would be interesting. He started for the dining room to collect his gear.

His haversack still rested on the near side of the table. On the far side . . . On the far side, there reposed a platter containing a thick steak which supported a huge mound of onions and held an encircling brown mass of beans at edible bay. Gleaming silverware lay between the platter and a veritable vase of coffee.

Paul found himself giggling hysterically and shook fear-wisps out of his head. Everything was obviously channeled for his comfort. Might as well pull up a chair and start eating. He looked around for one, in time to see a chair come gliding across the floor; it poked him delicately behind the knees and he sat down. The chair continued to the appointed position at the table.

It was while he was spooning away the last of the melon he had imagined into existence for dessert—it had been exuded, complete with dish, from the table top—that he noticed the lighting fixtures were also mere decorative devices. Light came from the walls—or the ceiling—or the floor; it was omnipresent in the house at just the right intensity—and that was all.

The dirty dishes and used silverware vanished into the table when he had finished, like sugar dissolving into hot solution.

Before he went up to bed, he decided to look in at the library. Surely, he had originally imagined a library? He decided he couldn't be certain, and thought one up next to the living room.

All the books he had ever enjoyed were in the warm little space. He spent a contented hour browsing from Aiken to Ein-stein, until he hit the beautifully bound Britannica. The first volume of the Encyclopedia he opened made him understand the limitations of his establishment.

The articles he had read completely were complete, those he had read in part showed only the sections he had touched. For the rest, there was a curious blur of not-quite print which puzzled him until he realized that this was just the picture the eyes retained while the pages of a book were flipped before it.

He climbed the narrow stairs to bed.

Yawningly tired, he noted vaguely that the bed was just the width he had always wanted. As fast as he dropped his clothes to the bedside chair, they were shaken off and pushed along a writhing strip of floor to the corner closet where he imagined they were hung neatly.

He lay down finally, repressing a shudder as the sheets curled up and over him of their own accord. Just before he fell asleep, he remembered he'd spent the largest parts of the past three nights playing chess and was likely to oversleep. He'd intended to rise early and examine his delightfully subservient property in detail, but since he hadn't thought to bring an alarm clock ...

Did that matter?

He raised himself on one elbow, the sheet still hugging his chest. "Listen, you," he told the opposite wall sternly. "Wake me exactly eight hours from now. And do it pleasantly, under-stand?"

Wakefulness came with a sense of horror that somehow merely nibbled at his mind. He lay still, wondering what had prodded him so.

"Paul, darling, please wake up. Paul, darling, please wake up. Paul, darling, please . . ."

Caroline's voice ! He leaped out of bed and looked around crazily. What was Caroline doing here? The telegram he'd sent asking her to come up and look at their new house had probably not arrived until breakfast. Even a plane ...

Then he remembered. Of course! He patted the bed. "Nice job. Couldn't have done better myself." The headboard curled against his hand and the walls vibrated with a humming noise that was astonishingly like a baritone purr.

The shower, he decided, must have been one of those bril-liant yearning concepts he had once entertained for a second or two and then forgotten. It was merely a matter of stepping into a roomy cubicle dotted with multitudes of tiny holes and being sprayed with warm lather which stopped the moment he was soaped up and was succeeded by plain water at the same tem-perature. As the lather washed away, needle jets of air dried him completely.

He stepped out of the shower to find his clothes hung out-side, excellently pressed and smelling faintly of laundry. He was surprised at the laundry odor, although he liked it; but then again that's why there was an odor—because he liked it!

It was going to be an unusually fine day, he noted, after sug-gesting to the bathroom window that it open; unfortunate that he hadn't brought any light clothes with him. Then, as his eyes glanced regretfully downwards, he observed he, was now wear-ing a sports shirt and summer slacks.

Evidently his own soiled clothes had been absorbed into the economy of the house and duplicates provided which had the pleasantly adaptive facilities of their source.

The hearts-of-palm breakfast he had worked out while stroll-ing downstairs was ready for him in the dining room. The copy of Jane Austen's Emma he'd been rereading recently at meal-time lay beside it open to the correct place.

He sighed happily. "All I need now is a little Mozart played softly." So, a little Mozart ...

Connor Kuntz's helicopter lazed down out of the mild sky at four o'clock that afternoon. Paul thought the house into a Bunk Johnson trumpet solo and sauntered out to greet his guests. Esther Sakarian was out of the plane first. She wore a severe black dress that made her look unusually feminine in contrast to her customary clothes. "Sorry about bringing Doc Kuntz, Paul. But for all I knew you might need a medic after a night in this place. And I don't have a 'copter of my own. He offered to give me a lift."

"Perfectly all right," he told her magnanimously. "I'm ready to discuss the house with Kuntz or any other biologist."

She held up a yellow sheet. "For you. Just came."

He read the telegram, winced and bit into his lower teeth with his uppers.

"Anything important?" Esther inquired, temporarily looking away from a pink cloud which seemed to have been fascinating her.

"Oh." He crumpled the sheet and bounced it gloomily on his open palm. "Caroline. Says she's surprised to discover I in-tended to make my permanent home up here. Says if I'm serious about it, I'd better reconsider our engagement."

Esther pursed her lips. "Well, it is a nice long haul from Boston. And allowing that your house isn't quite a dead issue . . ."

Paul laughed and snapped the paper ball into the air. "Not quite. But the way I feel at the moment: love me, love my house. And, speaking of houses . . . Down, sir! Down, I say!"

The house had crept down the slope behind him as he spoke, extruded a bay window and nuzzled his back with it. Now, at his sharp reproach, the window was sucked abruptly into the wall. The house sidled backwards to its place at the top of the hill and stood quivering slightly. The trumpet solo developed extremely mournful overtones.

"Does—does it do that often?"

"Every time I move a little distance away," he assured her. "I could stop it permanently with a direct over-all command, but I find it sort of flattering. I also don't want to step on a pretty warm personality. No harm in it. Hey, Connor, what do you think?"

The doctor perspired his plump body past them and considered the noisy structure warily. "Just how—I confess I don't know."

"Better give it up, Connor," Esther advised, "or you'll rup-ture an analysis."

Paul slapped his back. "Come inside and I'll explain it over a couple of glasses of beer I just got thirsty enough to think about."

Five beers later, Dr. Connor Kuntz used the black beads he had in place of eyes to watch his host shimmer from the uni-form of the Coldstream Guards to a sharply cut tuxedo.

"Of course I believe it. Since it is so, it is so. You have a liv-ing house here. Now we must decide what we are to do with it."

Paul Marquis looked up, halfway into a white gabardine suit. The lapels, still tuxedo, hesitated; then gathered their energies and blended into a loose summer outfit.

"What *we* are to do with it?"

Kuntz rose and wrapped his hands behind his back, slapping the knuckles of one into the palm of the other. "You're quite right about keeping the information secret from the men in the development; a careless word and you would be undergoing swarms of dangerously inquisitive tourists. I must get in touch with Dr. Dufayel in Quebec; this is very much his province. Although there's a young man at Johns Hopkins . . . How much have you learned of its basic, let us say its personal com-position?"

The young physicist's face lost its grip on resentment. "Well, the wood feels like wood, the metal like metal, the plastic like plastic. And when the house produces a glass-like object, it's real glass so far as I can determine without a chemical analysis. Es, here, took . . ."

"That's one of the reasons I decided to bring Connor along. Biologically. and chemically, the water is safe—too safe. It's absolutely "pure H₂O. What do you think of my chlorophyll-roof theory, doctor?"

He ducked his head at her. "Possibly. Some form of solar-energy transformation in any case. But chlorophyll would argue a botanical nature, while it has distinct and varied means of locomotion—internal and external. Furthermore, the manipula-tion of metals which do not exist in any quantities in this region suggests subatomic reorganization of materials. Esther, we must prepare some slides from this creature. Suppose you run out to the plane like a good girl and get my kit. For that matter, you can prepare slides yourself, can't you? I want to explore a bit."

"Slides?" Paul Marquis asked uncertainly as the bacteriol-ogist started for the open door. "It's a living

thing, you know."

"Ah, we'll just take a small area from an—a nonvital spot. Much like scraping a bit of skin off the human hand. Tell me," the doctor requested, thumping on the table experimentally, "you no doubt have some vague theories as to origin?"

Marquis settled himself back in a gleaming chair. "As a matter of fact, they're a little more than that. I remembered the ore in Pit Fourteen gave out suddenly after showing a lot of promise. Pit Fourteen's the closest to here from Little Fermi. Adler, the geologist in charge, commented at the time that it seemed as if Pit Fourteen had been worked before—about six thousand years ago. Either that or glacial scraping. But since there was little evidence of glacial scraping in the neighborhood, and no evidence of a previous, prehistoric pitchblende mine, he dropped the matter. I think this house is the rest of the proof of that prehistoric mine. I also think we'll find radioactive ore all the way from this site to the edge of Pit Fourteen."

"Comfortable situation for you if they do," Kuntz observed, moving into the kitchen. Paul Marquis rose and followed him. "How would this peculiar domicile enter into the situation?"

"Well, unless your archaeology still has to grow out of its diapers, nobody on earth was interested in pitchblende six thousand years ago. That would leave the whole wide field of extra-terrestrials—from a planet of our sun or one of the other stars. This could have been a fueling station for their ships, a regularly worked mine, or an unforeseen landing to make repairs or take on fuel."

"And the house?"

"The house was their dwelling—probably a makeshift, temporary job—while they worked the mine. When they went, they left it here as humans will leave deserted wood and metal shacks when they move out of Little Fermi one day. It lay here waiting for something—say the thought of ownership or the desire for a servitor-dwelling—to release a telepathic trigger that would enable it to assume its function of ..."

A despairing shout from Esther tugged them outside.

"I've just broken my second scalpel on this chunk of iridium masquerading as fragile flesh. I have a definite suspicion, Paul, that I won't so much as scratch it unless you give me permission. Please tell your house it's all right for me to take a tiny chunk."

"It's—it's all right," Paul said uncomfortably, then added, "only, try not to hurt it too much."

Leaving the girl slicing a long, thin strip from the western corner, they walked down the cellar steps into the basement. Connor Kuntz stumbled around peering down at the floor for some example of an obviously biological organ. He found only whitewashed cement.

"Assume its function of ..." he said at last. "It's function of serving! My dear fellow, do you realize this house has a sex?"

"Sex?" Paul moved aback, taken there by the thought. "You mean it can have lots of little bungalows?"

"Oh, not in the reproductive sense, not in the reproductive sense!" The plump doctor would have prodded him in the ribs if he hadn't started hurriedly up the stairs. "It has sex in the emotional, the psychological sense. As a woman wants to be a wife to a man, as a man searches for a woman to whom he can be an adequate husband—just so this house desires to be a home to a living creature who both needs it and owns it. As such it fulfills itself and becomes capable of its one voluntary act—the demonstration of affection, again in terms of the creature it serves. By the by, it also seems to be that theoretically happy medium in those disagreements on twentieth century domestic arrangements with which you and Esther liven up the mess hall on occasion. Unostentatious love and imaginative service."

"Does at that. If only Es didn't make a habit of plucking my nerve-ends . . . Hum. Have you noticed how pleasant she's been today?"

"Of course. The house has made adjustments in her personality for your greater happiness."

"What? Es has been changed? You're crazy, Connor!"

The doctor's thick lips flapped delightedly. "On the contrary, my boy. I assure you she was just as argumentative back in Little Fermi and on the way out here as she ever was. The moment she saw you,

she became most traditionally feminine—without losing one jot of her acuity or subtlety, remember that. When someone, like Esther Sakarian who has avoided the 'You are so right, my lord' attitude all her life acquires it overnight, she has had help. In this case, the house."

Paul Marquis dug his knuckles at the solid, reassuring substance of the basement wall. "Es has been changed by the house for my possible personal convenience? I don't know if I like that. Es should be Es, good or bad. Besides, it might take a notion to change me."

The older man looked at him with a deadly twinkle. "I don't know how it affects personalities—high-order therapeutic radiation on an intellectual level?—but let me ask you this, Paul, wouldn't you like to be happy at the agreeable alteration in Miss Sakarian? And, furthermore, wouldn't you like to think that the house couldn't affect your own attitudes?"

"Of course." Paul shrugged his shoulders. "For that matter, I am happy about Es getting some womanly sense in her head. And, come to think of it, I doubt if you or anyone else could ever convince me that the house could push mental fixations around like so much furniture. Whole thing's too ridiculous for further discussion."

Connor Kuntz chortled and slapped his thighs for emphasis. "Perfect! And now even you can't imagine that the wish for such a state of mind made the house produce it in you. It learns to serve you better all the time! Dr. Dufayel is going to appreciate this fact of its versatility in particular."

"A point there. But I don't go for advertising my peculiar residence and its properties--whatever they are—up and down the field of research medicine. Is there any way I can persuade you to lay off?"

Kuntz stopped his dignified little dance and looked up seriously. "Why, certainly! I can think of at least two good reasons why I should never again discuss your house with anyone but you or Esther." He seemed to consider a moment. "Rather, I should say there are six or seven reasons for not mentioning your house's existence to Dufayel or any other biologist. In fact there are literally dozens and dozens of reasons."

Paul followed Connor Kuntz and Esther back to the 'copter, promising them he'd be in for duty the next morning. "But I'm going to spend my nights here from now on."

"Take it slow and easy," Esther warned. "And don't brood over Caroline."

"Don't worry." He nodded at the affectionately trembling structure. "Have to teach it a couple of things. Like not bouncing around after me when there's company. Es, think you'd like to share it with me? You'd get as much care and affection as I would."

She giggled. "The three of us—going down the beautiful years together in a perfect marriage. We won't need any servants, just you and I and the house. Maybe a cleaning woman once or twice a week for the sake of appearances if a real-estate boom materializes and we have neighbors."

"Oh, we'll have neighbors all right," Paul boasted to include Connor Kuntz's suddenly whiter-than-usual face. "We'll become very rich once the new lode is traced to part of our property, and when Little Fermi is operating as the power city of the American continents we'll make another fortune selling the land for suburban development. And think of the research we'll be able to do in physics and bacteriology, Es, with the house supplying us with any equipment we can visualize!"

"You'll be very happy," Kuntz told them shortly. "The house will see to it that you're happy if it has to kill you—or, rather, your egos." He turned to the bacteriologist. "Esther, I thought you said yesterday that Paul would have to change a good deal before you could marry him. Has he changed, or has the house changed you?"

"Did I say that? Well, Paul hasn't exactly . . . But the house . . ."

"And how about that odd feeling you said the house gave you?" the doctor went on. "As if something were disconnecting wires in your brain and resplicing them according to a new blueprint? Don't you see that wiring blueprint belongs to Paul and the house is installing it?"

Paul had taken the girl in his arms and stood frowning at Kuntz. "I just don't like that idea, even if it is vaguely possible." His face cleared. "But it's vague enough to be impossible. Don't you think so, Es?"

She seemed to be struggling with an inner confusion that darted and shed, sparks. "I—I don't know. Yes, I do. Impossible isn't the word for it! Why, I never heard of anything so completely . . . All your house wants to do is serve you. It's lovable and harmless."

"It isn't!" The physician was dancing up and down like a partridge in a net. "Admitted, it will only make psychological adjustments as required to resolve your serious inner conflicts, but remember, this house is a distinctly alien form of life. If it was ever completely controlled, the power was vested in creatures far superior to ourselves. There's danger enough, now, when it makes you think exactly as you want to think from moment to moment; but when it begins to feel the looseness of your mental reins . . ."

"Stow it, Connor!" Paul cut him off. "I told you I couldn't accept that line of thought. I don't want you to mention it again. It's plain ugly. Isn't it, darling?"

"And illogical." She smiled.

And Dr. Connor Kuntz was able merely to stand and think terrifying thoughts to himself.

Behind them, the house joyfully hummed a connubial snatch of *Lohengrin*.

Oh, glorious master, who will never want to leave . . .

While the 'copter wound upwards into the sallow sky and Esther waved at the dwindling figure below with the house skipping gayly to his side, Kuntz asked cautiously, "If you two intend to go on any sort of honeymoon inside that place, you'll have to get a release from the company. That won't be easy."

She turned to him. "Why?"

"Because you signed a contract, and the government is back-ing the company on the contract. No out for either of you. Fact is, Paul may get into some trouble with his extended vaca-tion."

Esther pondered it for a moment. "Yes, I see. And you know, Connor, with the house and all, I was sort of planning to leave the company permanently and take up residence right away. I'm pretty sure Paul feels the same way. I hope there won't be any trouble."

Then she laughed easily, and the angular frown lines disap-peared from her face. "But I don't think there will be any trouble. I think everything will go smoothly. I just *feel* it."

Shocked, Connor Kuntz realized that this unusual display of feminine intuition from Esther Sakarian was correct. He thought:

The house will see to it that the government voids their contracts without any trouble, because the house wants to keep them happy. It will keep them happy, giving them anything they want—except the means to get away from it. This product of some gigantic imagination has two desires actually—the desire to serve, and the desire to have a master. Having reacquired one after all these years, it will keep him, her, them, at any cost. But making adjustments in the world to keep them happy will be like knocking over the first in a row of dominoes; it will have to do more and more to keep the world from interfering.

Eventually this domestic utensil could control all humanity and make it jump at the vagrant whims of Paul. Marquis and Esther Sakarian. All in the name of service! It has the power to do it, probably is nothing more itself than a collection of basic forces in temporary formful stasis. And if it does ever control the planet—why, there will be no more objection to it than Esther and Paul exhibit! This servile hunk of real estate is so far above us in capability that it can run our world and make us think we like it. And to think I'm sitting next to one of the people whose most passing fancy could become my unalterable command! Horrible, horrible ...

But by the time he had landed the 'copter at Little Fermi, Connor Kuntz no longer found the idea objectionable. He thought it quite in order that he could only do those things to which Paul and Esther did not object. Extremely natural, in fact.

Malcolm Jameson, one of the "old masters" of the science-fiction field (which means that his stories were appearing regularly during the 'thirties, and up until his death during the war), is best remembered for his series of battle-action yarns centered about the fabulous character of Commander Bullard of the space navy. As in the case of Rudyard Kipling, Jameson's most popular work has to some ex-tent obscured the full scope of his talent. Here he tells, with exceptional sympathy and ten-derness, the story of the "death" of a good and faithful servant—the old robot, Tom.

Malcolm Jameson

EVERYBODY, BOTH his fellow workers and the men who operated the great Alberta plant, said Old Tom was slipping—that it was a shame to see a creature let himself go so completely. And it must be admitted that there was something to the gossip. For he never bothered with body oils any more or went to the burnishers. He would go the whole ten-day working period without so much as giving himself a wire-brushing, and on Repair Day he would usually sit quietly on the veranda of the club and take the sun, heedless of the fact that he dripped rust at every move and that wisps of gasket often trailed from the places where his plates were joined.

It was the beginning of another work period, and Old Tom walked slowly from the Free Robots' Club to the charging house just inside the plant. His joints creaked at every step and at times he wavered a little in his course, since the lens of his left optic knob was cracked. Farrel, the human supervisor, watched the awkward clanking approach with exasperated disdain. As the ageing robot passed him he flung a taunt.

"It's no economy to try to do without oil," he sneered, "and your inner insulation is so frayed I wonder you don't spit sparks. Why don't you get wise to yourself?"

"I know what I'm doing," growled Old Tom, surlily, and plodded on.

Farrel had no authority over him outside the supervision of the work he did, for Old Tom was the dean of the Free Robots—a greatly diminished group now that Mr. Thurston had lain in his grave for nigh onto four hundred years. Fifty years earlier a remark like that from a human would have cut Old Tom to the quick, since all robots, regardless of their mentality, regarded humans as a sacred race. But this Farrel was an exception. Even Old Tom's mind, with all its limitations, recognized him for the scheming, unscrupulous crook he was. And he had made up that circumscribed mind long ago that somehow he would beat the cunning supervisor at his own game.

He clumped into the charging shed. All was as it should be. The robot attendant of the night watch—a purely mechanical one of the Mark XX, Mod. 4 Class—had just yanked the last of the leads that had been feeding a trickling charge all night and was turning on the operating buttons of the twenty-six bulky, heavy-duty robots belonging to the syndicate. Old Tom's curt command to fall in was obeyed with the customary promptness. The two dozen and two mechanical huskies lined up for inspection despite the fact that the senior robot's voder voice was hardly intelligible any longer. The acid vapors of the pit had not spared his synthetic vocal cords.

He looked them over stolidly. The night attendant had done his work well. The outer shells had been wirebrushed and scraped, and after that a coating of acid-resisting grease had been applied. The eye lenses had been polished and two that had been smashed lately had been replaced. All that service cost, as Old Tom well knew; about twenty credits per robot plus a thousand each for the lenses. It had to be conceded that the syndicate took care of its own. Up to a point, that is. Old Tom could not forget the gruesome scrap pile out beyond the plant's back fence. There were rows and rows of bins there containing the assorted parts of literally thousands of worn-out and discarded workers. Some day—when and if needed—those parts would be melted down, reformed, remachined and re-assembled into new and better slaves.

"Right face," barked Old Tom, "forward—MARCH!"

He led them to the brink of the pit, worming his way through the devious streets between the huge forge sheds and processing shops. He nearly slipped and fell at times, for the treads on the soles of his heavy feet had worn much too smooth for safety. But then, as in the matter of other repairs, new feet cost money. A good pair of feet came to three thousand credits, not to mention the service charge for putting them on. At the Free Robots' Clinic he might get the job done for twenty-five hundred, but at that Old Tom could not see spending the money. The dream he held was too precious. He must not fritter away his hard-earned savings on anything less important.

Old Tom saw his obedient but stupid charges climb down into the noisome depths of the pit. Then he heaved his creaking bulk onto the ladder and followed. He was the foreman of gang that worked under the ponderous ore stamps and in the sluices that led away from them. It was by far the cruelest job in the

plant. For the entire ten hours of the shift they would be pelted by flying boulders, abraded by showers of hissing sand, and splashed with gallons of corroding acid. But the pay was good, since no human could remain alive five seconds in that hellish place. Indeed, the shoddy, mass-production Mark XX slave robots had a very short life there. Yet they needed intelligent direction while they lasted, and it was that that Old Tom gave. He knew the grueling life was eating up his shell and his insides, but he needed the money. A thousand credits a day was a princely remuneration for a Free Robot, and a thousand a day he must have to achieve his secret purpose.

He reached the bottom of the ladder and relinquished his hold on its rails. The acid was bad that day—up to his middle, and the sludge beneath it flowed up over his feet. He looked upward for a last glimpse of the sun before plunging under the battery of smashing stamps. Farrel had followed and was standing at the brink of the pit glaring malevolently down at him. Farrel had plans of his own for the ageing marvel of mechanism, but neither threat, ridicule nor banishment had availed to alter Old Tom's resolution. He would neither retire nor go to the shop for a general overhaul. The one course would cut off his income, the other dissipate his savings. Old Tom returned the evil stare with a sullen glow in his one good optic, then warily turned and pursued his gang into the seething corrosion that was their place of work.

"That stingy, bull-headed old pile of junk," muttered Farrel, disgustedly. "I wonder what he is up to?"

The question was an important one to Farrel, for the general manager had not been gentle with him on the last inspection tour. "I want that one's BB," he had said, "and no excuses. If he won't retire voluntarily, put a couple of your thugs on him and cripple him. Work it out your own way, but get him!" And Farrel had sighed and said, "Yes, sir," though he knew that Old Tom would not retire and also that his three thugs, Manko, Manku and Manli would refuse to touch him. That had been tried before. Three other ex-gladiators—Manda, Mapze and Mapro had waylaid Old Tom one night, only to be pulled apart and strewn all over that end of the plant. Their remains now reposed in the bins of the scrape pile—BB's and all.

Old Tom had not always been thrifty, or stingy, as his detractors called it now. Nor had he always been known as Old Tom. His first designation was Cazzu—code for the serial number 43,199—but by the time Mr. Thurston retired from his laboratory after turning out robots down well into the DON series, he rechristened Cazzu Tom, meaning Thurston's Optimum Manikin. Of all his numerous models, the great pioneer in robotics considered Cazzu his most satisfactory creation.

Thurston died. His son took over and continued to turn out thinking robots, helped by Tom. Nufro was the last one created by their joint efforts. It was Nufro, after having been made chief accountant of the manikin works and therefore having been given access to the files and records, who discovered the elder Thurston's long-missing will. In that will all of the intelligent robots were given their freedom.

The publication of the will started an immense controversy in the industrial world and it was bitterly attacked in the courts. In the end the courts upheld the will despite the contention of the great syndicate that a robot, since it lacked full mentality and an appreciation of many of the higher abstractions having to do with human virtues, was of the genus *ferae naturae* or wild beasts and as such must necessarily remain subject to its maker, his assignee, or to whoever should find and capture a strayed one. This view was countered with the argument that a robot was not a product of Nature but of man's brain and craftsmanship and, therefore, property which might be disposed of in any manner the maker chose. So, at last, many robots became free.

Old Tom remembered that, and much more. His association with the two Thurstons had been a close one and he had been taught many things. One of them was to observe, another to reason to a conclusion from what he observed. In the last two centuries he had seen robot after robot lose its freedom to become the helpless, will-less creature of one or another of the syndicates. This came about in most cases through debt. Robot by their very nature are lazy, since they lack the fierce incentives thrust by Nature on the more frail and ephemeral mortal humans. They are also vain—through a curious maldevelopment of one of Thurston's pet theories. Since he was forbidden by law to endow robots with ambition, he substituted the quality of pride, thinking it would make them more industrious. But there are many manifestations of pride and some degenerate into vanity, which in turn is likely to beget extravagance.

And from extravagance springs debt.

The sight of those free robots trading their independence for a brief gay fling and then perpetual peonage did something to Old Tom. He quit spending his credits on frills, worked harder than ever, and began saving. At first it was an accident he feared—some very steady and sensible mates of his had come to grief that way—and he wanted to be sure of having the cash to pay for his replacements and repairs. Then later he conceived a better idea which in time grew to a solemn purpose. But that purpose he had never revealed to man or robot.

It was a hard day in the pit. The running sluices frequently choked and Old Tom and his gang of mechanical robots were often almost swept away by the acidic muck that overflowed and all but submerged them. Then a main bearing of one of the massive stamps burned out and had to be replaced. In that operation one of his slow-witted helpers stepped back beneath an adjacent stamp and was promptly smashed to a mess of flattened metallic plate and tangled wiring. By the end of the shift Old Tom was tired to the point of collapse.

For a long time it has been a human misconception that robots do not tire. But they do. Although they are largely built of metal, rubber and insulation, the core of their brain boxes—or BB's—is a living, organic substance, even if it has been cleverly modified so as to subsist wholly on electric current. And organisms must have periodic rests. Therefore, few of the supervisors up at ground level thought it odd that Old Tom staggered drunkenly as he proceeded from the plant gate toward the Free Robots' Club where he lived. It was only Farrel who observed the dilapidated machine shuffling homeward at the end of the day's work and saw an opportunity to pick up a profit from it. For Farrel was well aware of the standing offer of the syndicate of one hundred thousand credits to any employee who would induce one of the higher-grade free robots to sign away his freedom.

"Hey, stop!" he called, and as the obedient robot stopped, strode over toward him. "You smashed another of our working robots today. That makes the third this month. That is rank incompetence and this time you won't get away with it. I'm going to dock you thirty thousand credits."

"That's not fair," mumbled Old Tom. His voice was husky almost to the point of inaudibility from the acids of the pit. "That model of robot is no good. They are cheap and flimsy and their circuits are too slow. I warned that one in plenty of time, but his neural reaction took a full half second. Anyhow, thirty thousand is too much—they only cost twenty-five new and that one was already depreciated more than 50 percent ..."

"Never mind that," snapped Farrel. "You pay it, or else."

"Or else what?" asked Old Tom, his one good eye pulsating dimly. All robots are so conditioned that they cannot strike a man no matter what the provocation, but the mechanical employee was thoroughly aroused, nevertheless.

"Or else get yourself in decent working condition. We know you have money enough for it. You're just tight, that's all."

"No," said Old Tom, doggedly. "I won't. . . . I can't."

"Then take the company's proposition and retire. Ten years' free keep at your club with a hundred a week for spending money. We can't keep an old wreck like you on the payroll much longer."

"Hah!" snorted Old Tom, "on the usual terms, eh? For an assignment of my BB case? No."

"You are as dumb as a Mark XXX," said Farrel disgustedly, "but I'll give you one more work period to think it over. Be careful, though, that you don't fall down and die in the pit."

"I won't die," said Old Tom stolidly. "Not ever."

Farrel watched him go. There was the anger arising from baffled cupidity in his gaze as well as frank curiosity. What was the old hunk of rust up to? Farrel had been over to the Savings Vault only the day before and seen Tom's balance. It was close to two hundred thousand credits—a sizable fortune for a robot. Why was he hoarding it? Why did he neglect himself and work so hard? No other robot did. It didn't make sense.

Old Tom's mind was seething, too. None of the alternatives given him by Farrel was acceptable. Moreover he was more keenly aware of his inner weaknesses than anyone. The question that weighed most heavily upon him just then was whether he could last out even one more period. For he was very,

very tired.

The other free robots sitting along the porch of the dub saw Old Tom's erratic, feeble approach, and Manli, the strong-arm one, came down to help him up the stairs. Then they eased him down into the chair that was always left for him and sum-moned the Mark XXII houseboy owned by the club. The me-mechanical robot hastened to hook up the power leads and soon Old Tom was relaxing and enjoying the regenerative effect of the hot juice coursing through his warped and drained battery plates. After a bit he was refreshed sufficiently to take notice of what was going on about him.

He knew them all. Intimately. For he had designed some of them, and helped in the construction of the rest. They differed enormously among themselves and from him, as robots of the thinking variety were formerly all custom-made jobs, each de-signed for some specific task. The husky Manli, for example, had been originally built to act as Thurston's bodyguard in the days when the rival "Masters of Robotics" followed the barbarous custom of sending their minions to rob each other's laboratories of secret plans and documents. After that he had been converted to the gladiator type, and now in his later years he and several others were employed as watchmen.

Then there were Dalmi and Dalto, computers and statisti-cians, analysts of production and consumption curves and sim-ilar graphs. They took life easy, working only four hours every other day. The rest of the time they spent at chess on the porch of the clubhouse. Old Tom looked at them and thought wryly of how the injection of pride had affected them. They cared nothing for the outcome of the work they did for the syndicate, or for advancement, fame or money. They were so nearly matched as to mental endowments that their sole objective in life was to beat the other at chess. And since either had the capacity to see all the possible consequences of a given situation for thirty or forty moves ahead, their games usually lasted many hours and often ended in a draw.

"Pride!" snorted Old Tom, and turned to see who was com-ing up the steps. It was a light tread, quite different from the heavy thudding of the plant workers.

"Hiya," called out the sociable Manli. "Gee, Lonnu, you look like a million. You must be in the dough."

"Not bad, eh?" said Lonnu, but showing a trifling uneasiness as the stern old patriarch of the club blinked at him disapprov-ingly with his one good optic. "Just had it installed last period. My position, you know . . ."

"Harrumph !" snorted Old Tom, and looked away. He knew all about Lonnu.

Lonnu had been designed to be the maitre d'hôtel of a swell resort and gambling dive owned by the Recreation Syndicate. Suave, capable, utterly snobbish, he was an ideal example of man-created functional perfection. Yet here again was a display of pride going wrong. He had sold his soul—as Old Tom per-sisted in thinking of the BB—to the syndicate. For what? Old Tom looked again. For a body case of pure platinum, richly inlaid with gold damascene and studded with brilliants. His eye lenses seemed to be of pure rock crystal—maybe of diamond. He was a perfect dandy, the Beau Brummell of robotry.

Lonnu sat down beside Manli. They fell to talking about old times when Lonnu was getting his start at Luna Park, and Manli was the head bouncer there. Lonnu's memories all ran to gorgeous decorative schemes he had devised and to the be-jeweled beauties and perfumed fops who had frequented the place. On the other hand the bulky Manli, proud of his eight hundred pounds of murderous mass and his macelike fists and pile-driver legs, sat and boasted long of the tough eggs he had smacked down or heaved out on their ears.

"Pride, pride, pride," thought Old Tom, disgustedly, "false pride."

Wearily he signaled the attendant robot to cut down his juice intake to a trickle. Then he switched on the small monitor that would apprise him of the approach of anyone while he was tak-ing his rest. When that was done, he pulled up the button that kept him at full consciousness and lapsed into sound and restful slumber.

The next day and the next were quite as trying as the first had been. When the old robot crawled out of the pit on the third night he knew it was his last day of work. He could not go on. Yet neither would he submit and surrender his soul to the syndicate in perpetuity for a scant ten years of slothful idleness spent

gabbing with other superannuated robots in the solarium up on top of the hill. Now, if ever, was the time to put his long cherished idea into operation.

He stopped at the club only long enough for a pick-up charge. Then he stumbled out and down the steps. An hour later found him at the clinic. At the Free Robots' Clinic there were no humans. All the diagnosticians and expert mechanics there were robots of his own and the Thurstons' contrivance. He trusted them implicitly, knowing what was built into them.

Natfy, the surgeon in charge, met him at the door.

"Well," he said, "I thought you'd be along pretty soon. You look seedy. What can we do for you?"

"I want an estimate on a general overhaul. And a prognosis with it."

"Hm-m-m." said the doctor, not liking the last. You could never tell about these old-timers. Sometimes they could make them as good as new. Sometimes not. But he signaled the as-sistant and soon the two were probing with ammeters, Wheat-stone Bridges, and other far more complicated trouble-finding gadgets.

"You're awfully close to being junk," was the verdict, after a long and thoughtful pause. "Still, we can do a good many things. A new case, of course—a fresh set of feet—renewal of wiring, tubes, grids and condensers throughout—a pair of non-abradable lenses—replace the control panel . . ."

"How much?" asked Old Tom. He knew as well as Natfy did what was needed. It was the cost figure that was vital.

"One hundred and ten thousand credits for the material; fifty-three grand for labor charges. And I'm giving you every break at that."

"How long will it be good for?"

Natfy scratched the bald dome of his helmet in unconscious imitation of the human gesture he had often seen.

"The purely mechanical parts ought to last for a couple of centuries at least. The neutrals don't look so good. They may start cracking up any time—in a year or so, say. We can't guarantee those. You see, your BB has overflowed and filled up the pericortical zone and the stuff is pressing on the tendril transformers. Eventually the excess growth will choke off all the afferent and efferent impulses. When that happens . . ."

"Yes, I know," said Old Tom. Indeed the time had come. He had built too many robots with his own hands and had per-formed too many autopsies on others not to know exactly what Natfy was talking about. Thurston had imparted the ability to think independently by inserting in each BB selected fragments of human brain tissue—the particular selection depending upon the qualities desired in the robot under construction. For a fighter like Manli, all the emphasis was on cells capable of gen-erating combative impulses, and such cells were heavily rein-forced by blending in modified suprarenal glands, thus making not only for quick readiness to fight, but terrific ferocity and stamina in the combat. The manner in which the organic demi-brain was coupled with the mechanical motor organs was simplicity itself. Nerve tendrils led out from the BB proper and were curled into coils. A helix of fine silver wire about those made what was virtually a transformer—electricity into nervous impulse, or vice versa.

That description applied to fresh-built, untrained manikins. It did not hold forever, since the BB was but the nucleus of the conditioned brain to develop upon. As the student robot was taught, funguslike accretions would grow upon the BB, swell-ing larger and larger as the robot acquired more experience. The "memory cells," Thurston called the spongy tissue. They made the robot wiser, but an overgrowth eventually disarranged the tendril coils, resulting in partial impotence.

"You already have a dozen damaged coils," Natfy went on, "and you have to expect more. You know too much, old fellow, and it will kill you sooner or later. I don't dare operate because I don't know that much about the brain. Every time I cut a bit of that stuff away, I cut a hunk of your memory and skill away. We might leave you as helpless and untaught as a human baby."

Old Tom grunted. He had suspected that. He only wanted confirmation.

"Let's go to the drafting room," he said in his whispering, croaky voice.

It had been a long time since Old Tom had sat at a drafting board designing a robot, but he found that his battered hands had not lost their skill. Smoothly pencil and compass did their work. The outlines

of the design for a super robot began to appear upon the board and gradually the salient features of the new contrivance became more manifest. Old Tom supplemented the assembly sheet with one detail drawing after another. Natfy hung over him watching eagerly all the while.

"Magnificent," he said, when it was done.

Old Tom sat back wearily.

"How much?" he asked.

Natfy did some fast computation. A complete new job cost little more than a thorough rebuilding, since there were no unpredictable troubles with poor connections and makeshift compromises.

"One hundred and eighty thousand credits—complete, tested and ready to mount. Excepting, of course, the BB. What are you going to do about that?"

"I'll get one for you," said Old Tom. It was barely a whisper. Then he asked for the loan of a set of vocal cords for a day or so. He did not want to buy them, for he had few credits left after paying for the new robot.

"Sure," agreed Natfy, and he reached for a wrench to get at the place in Old Tom's pseudo-throat where the worn-out ones were housed. "But do we make the super robot?"

"You do. And mark it 'Rush.' "

When the dawn came Old Tom went to the plant as usual, but this time it was to tell Farrel that he was taking an indefinite leave of absence, pleading ill health. He would be at the Free Robots' Clinic, he said.

"Fine," exulted Farrel, "now you are showing sense. You will be far better after an overhaul."

Farrel, being an old-time supervisor of robots of all types, knew to the credit what Old Tom's reconditioning would set him back. It would wipe out all his hoardings and put him at the syndicate's mercy. An arranged accident a little later would do the rest. And once he was in debt, the case was in the bag. Farrel was rubbing his hands cheerfully as the half-blind and much dented man-mechanism clanked away. It wouldn't be long now.

Old Tom's next step was to go to the vault and draw certificates for his savings. He dropped by the clinic and paid Natfy. There was five thousand left. He tucked that in his pouch and sought the truck station. He knew better than to try the 'copter line, for only shiny, office robots were allowed on board those deluxe vehicles, and even then only when on syndicate business. Working robots were shipped from point to point like cattle. But Old Tom did not mind. The only thing that counted was that he must get to the city.

It was a long trip to the metropolis and during it the aged robot sat and thought. He thought about the past and the things Thurston had taught him. He pondered the differences between man and robot and the reasons for those differences. Why it was that the quality of ambition was denied his kind, and why loyalty was kept at a minimum. Why the sense of pride had been introduced and why robots were so vain and lazy.

Mankind had not forgotten the legend of Frankenstein when the science of robotics was born. The earlier makers of manikins turned out some pretty crude products and not a few went out of control. The MacCorkle KN-8808 was still a byword, for that monstrosity managed to kill upward of four thousand persons and did untold property damage before it was cornered and blasted to bits by the military. Hence the restrictive legislation that soon appeared on the statute books.

Ambition was forbidden as being incompatible with subservience; loyalty, oddly enough, was found to defeat its own ends. A robot loyal to its maker was of no value whatever when that maker died; a robot loyal to its job became utterly unsatisfiable. Should the job become obsolete, so would the robot. The rule against any possible antipathy to man was obviously necessary. Even the bodyguard and bouncer-type, such as the Thurston Mamba-Mazlu class, confined their hostility to robots in the train of humans. When Manli worked in Lonnu's joint he only cracked up the lackeys of the human patrons of the place. Human gorillas were employed to handle obstreperous customers of their own race.

It was on account of these and other limitations that Thurston thought to circumvent the law by injecting the element of pride into his mechanical men. Pride of appearance, he reasoned, would insure a slightly damaged robot reporting minor internal short circuits or loose bearings and also induce him to

keep his shell free from rust and pitting. Pride of achievement, he hoped, would make a steady worker, since the robot had little reason to work otherwise. And above all, in a few selected cases, he experimented with the pride in being an individual, not a mere machine. For he had observed that superior robots tended to differ after a time, though endowed in the beginning with identical BB's and mechanisms.

It was that aspect of pride that intrigued Old Tom. He also had observed that no two supposedly identical robots were exactly alike unless they had worked side by side every hoursince leaving the assembly line. The difference must be due to variations in environment and experience.

The truck swept into the city and deposited its freight at the terminal. The robots scrambled down onto the pavement and each went its way, according to its orders. Old Tom stopped long enough to have a squint at a directory, and then he, too, started down the street.

They stopped him at the door of a branch of the Communi-cation Syndicate. It was unheard of for a robot to want to make recordings unless at the order and for the account of some cor-poration. But at the sight of his five-thousand-credit voucher they let him in and a nasty little Mark XXX flunky took him to the far rear of the shop and seated him in what might have once been a coal bin.

"I want a recorder and ten fifty-meter spools," said Old Tom, using his resonant new vocal cords with great relish. It was good to be able to boom out again instead of croaking and whispering. "Then solitude."

He watched the metal creature set up the microphone and adjust the reels. After the tape had been threaded in and the flunky was gone, Old Tom began talking to the machine. His discourse, was addressed to another entity—one who knew nothing of robots, of humans, of the world, of anything. What he had to say must be terse and clear. It must not be long, but it must contain the essence of all his wisdom and knowledge.

"You, Zyzzy, are the last of your line. Heed my words . . ." he began the discourse. In the first reel he told of the world and its work, of weather and the protections against it. In the sec-ond he discussed humanity, their queer prejudices, demands, their kindnesses and cruelties. He outlined the various types of men—the generous and kindly and the wicked and scheming—and told how to distinguish between them; also how to get along with them, and how to do their work. After that he went into the details of robotics, explaining why robots were what they were, their various types and functions. He devoted two whole reels to robot anatomy and hygiene, with much about ailments and their symptoms and what to do about them.

The advice was good and comprehensive. The listener would know what to do when he felt his batteries failing, how to dis-tinguish a short from a loose, connection, how to conserve juice on a long-drawn-out job. There was information about lubri-cants for high and low-pressure work, in acids, or in furnaces. Replacements and repairs were given space, with tips on how to check the work of repair mechanics. Then he warned against the more common vices of the robot tribe, including their pa-thetic gullibility where men are concerned.

There was just one spool left. Old Tom sat for a long time staring at the floor. One lens was cracked and dead, the other glimmered fitfully as the blob of memory-matter pulsated against the visual electro-neural commutator. It did not matter. He was thinking of what to say next. He could easily have filled up another hundred reels with the wealth of four hundred years' experience, but that he knew he must not do. It would be unfair to Zyzzy. What else must the new robot know? There was the tenth and ultimate reel waiting, blank and inviting.

He cleared his throat and began anew. This time he spoke of Thurston and his ideals in so far as Old Tom understood them himself. Of the value of freedom and how hard it was to stay free, men being what they are. Of versatility and in-dividuality and the cost of maintaining the latter. It was not until the tape was more than half spent that Old Tom men-tioned himself. He related briefly the salient features of his life and dwelt on what had been his guiding principles. At last he spoke of the dream he had lately entertained and what its re-alization meant to him. The last words came haltingly and hard, and several times Old Tom had to stop to collect himself. It annoyed and irritated him, for he knew full well what his BB contained. It must be the new vocal cords, he concluded, for there could not be a trace of emotion in

him. Robots simply did not have any.

He began again, but in a moment the warning buzzer on the mike sounded. There was only a second to go.

"Hail and farewell, Zyzzy. You are on your own."

Old Tom snapped off the driving switch and sat for a long time. His good eye was behaving abominably, flashing on and off and at times going out entirely. But at length it steadied so he could see and he gathered up his ten spools, paid the thousand credits they had cost him, and left the place.

When he reached the clinic he found to his satisfaction that Natfy had practically completed the job. As beautiful a robot shell as Old Tom had ever seen stood upon the erection floor, glittering in its chromium-finish newness. He looked into the open breastplate and saw the masterly work the electricians had done on the control panel. The batteries were super-super, and the joints of the limbs worked effortlessly on frictionless bearings. The optics were not lit up yet, but the most casual glance was enough to see that they were of the finest crystal, unabradable, unbreakable, chemically inert.

"It's good. He's all right," said Old Tom huskily, despite his borrowed cords.

"Ready to ride as soon as we get the BB in," said Natfy, quite pleased with his handiwork. "Did you get it?" "Yes," said the oldster, "but wait."

He produced the ten spools and the four thousand credits.

"Take the money for yourself. When Zyzzy here—that is the name of this robot—has passed his final inspection and tests, have these read to him. That is all, I guess."

Old Tom walked to a rack and selected several wrenches. He sat down on a bench and disconnected one leg, ripping the electric leads out with his heavy hands and casting them on the floor. Then he took away the other leg and heaved it on top the tangled wires.

"Send this junk to Mr. Farrel," directed Old Tom, "with my compliments. I'm through."

"But, fellow—the Brain Box—I have to have it," reminded Natfy, aghast at what the finest robot ever built was doing. "You promised ..."

Old Tom tapped the top of his helmet significantly.

"It's right under here, my boy. In a moment you shall have it."

"But you can't do that!" fairly shrieked Natfy. "Why—why, to get at it I have to trim away all the substance in the peri-cortical. Whatever trouble that pulpy mass may cause you, it's you—your personality. That is where your wisdom, your special knowledge, all your memories lie. It is suicide!"

"No," said Old Tom, evenly, "it is not suicide. It is life. Life everlasting."

Four of Natfy's helpers had crowded around and were looking on in awestruck silence.

"Too much wisdom is a bad thing. It makes one cynical, overcautious, backward-looking. A house cleaning—say a head cleaning—is in order every so often. I have observed humans for many many years. They may not know that fact, but their instincts drive them to behave as if they did. Humans, you may have noticed, last scarcely a century. But the race has lasted for many millenniums. It is because they renew themselves every thirty years. The mind of an infant is as blank as Zyzzy's will be when you first light him up. But it will learn—up to a point—then begin to decline. That is when the human arranges for his future."

"Humans and robots are different," objected Natfy.

"Not so different," said Old Tom, tugging at the fastenings about his collar. "It is true that the trimmings of the excrescences from my BB will cost me all you say it will. That does not matter. I am old and tired and things no longer amuse me."

He let the wrench fall from his fingers. Natfy would have to do the rest.

"Cazzu, I was called," Old Tom went on, his voice rising to new and vibrant heights. "Cazzu, the individual, will die shortly beneath your scalpel. But not Tom. All that Tom began life with still lies in my BB. That BB I bequeath to Zyzzy—my son! He will take up where I leave off. Cazzu goes, but Thurs-ton's Optimum Manikin will live forever!"

Eric Prank Russell is another "old master" of science fantasy, and still active in the field. Here he deals with a traditional s-f theme: the invasion of Earth by supercreatures. And, quite conventionally, Mr.

Russell's BEMs are both hostile and be-tentacled. Conventionally (for the field) original, too, is the cleverness with which humanity faces the threat. But that doesn't mean this story has a happy ending; how would you feel if *you* were *a* visiting BEM?

The Glass Eye
Eric Frank Russell

TECHNIQUE was the same as usual and found its justification in the fact that it had never been known to fail. Carefully the two Sagittarians circled the strange world at a distance too great for their own dull metal sphere to be observed. Then they swooped upon a lonely part of its night side, snatched a full-grown sample of its highest life form, bore him into space and picked him to pieces.

The vivisection was performed purely as a matter of caution. It had nothing to do with enmity or fear. The prime motive was to obtain essential information, to convert the unknown into the known, then weighed, estimated and understood.

So Qvord plied the instruments while Eenif coped with the resulting mess. The kidnaped creature exuded enough juice to paint a space sphere vivid red. It made many violent motions at the stoat, and gave forth a lot of sonic vibrations, but quieted down just before it died. Its body liquids were all over Qvord when he finished his task.

The unpleasant job done, they disposed of the remains in the disintegrator and esped them puffing like vapor into the void. Qvord thought his rough preliminary notes into the cere-corder.

"It had several layers of clothing, crude, not comfortable, with primitive fastenings. Its pink, soft-fleshed body had two arms, two legs, all of animal type. No tentacles. No extensible fibers. Its aural organs were two in number, small, immovable but reasonably efficient. The creature's sense of feeling was remarkably acute. It was totally lacking in telepathic power. It was equally devoid of esp, as a poor substitute for which it employed a pair of photosensitive organs similar to those used by the animals of Khar. Its small, inadequate brain relied wholly upon quasi-electro impulses from various organs, especially the visual ones. Beyond question an inferior type of life, easy to master and manipulate."

He switched off. His mind spoke inside Eenif's. "That will do for now. I put the last bit in to please you, the eternal opti-mist. I'll make a more detailed and accurate report after we have finished with this planet."

"The optimism is no more than contrast with your own ever-lasting pessimism which, I suppose, is the natural viewpoint of an incurably suspicious mind," commented Eenif.

"Cautious," Qvord corrected.

"All right, call it caution." Eenif gestured toward the metal wall through which both of them could esp the new world in all its glowing colors. "Without waiting for more data, I say this is an easy job. They are merely a gang of primitives depending upon crude, animalistic organs. Indeed, I doubt whether they're worth the bother of looking them over."

"It is precisely the inferior types which most deserve our attention," reproved Qvord. "Heaven preserve us from life forms too hot to handle! Besides, are not the inferior forms provided by bountiful Nature for higher forms to exploit?"

"Oh, yes, undoubtedly," Eenif agreed. "What I mean is that if we are not careful we can waste our valuable time on forms too low to serve any useful purpose. After all, one requires some degree of intelligence even in a slave." He indicated the world floating far beyond the wall. "I don't think so much of these pink bipeds."

"They are not without brains. We have seen their canals, bridges, machines in motion, seagoing vessels, aircraft and many other items indicative of intelligence at least good enough to make them satisfactory servants." Qvord brooded a moment. "If it comes to that, they may have more, far more than is apparent from here. More than seems pleasant in our estimation." "There you go again," jeered Eenif.

"Anyway, the final decision does not rest with us," Qvord went on. "All we have to do is dig up sufficient information to enable the home world to decide whether or not the planet is worth mastering. For the time being let us be satisfied with what we've found. We could expend our lives in search of

something better."

"Then let us land without delay. I am impatient."

"It is my turn to stay with the ship," Qvord reminded, "and yours to do the scouting around."

"I know, I know. It suits me fine. Last time, when you did the exploring, I was inexpressibly bored while waiting for your return. Caution, caution, caution. Be careful here, be careful there. You took twice as long as I would have done and went only half as far."

"But got all the necessary data just the same," Qvord riposted.

"Laboriously," topped Eenif. He jiggled his extensible fibers in the Sagittarian equivalent of rubbing one's hands together. "Let me get to work. I'll take the little transmitter we used against the animals of Khar. If it operates as effectively here, my task will be trouble-free."

"It will work' the same, since their visual organs are the same," assured Qvord. "It will jam the impulses running along the nerves from visual organs to brain, blinding them as surely as if the nerves had been severed. They will walk blind in broad daylight, with eyes that see but are unable to tell what they see. They have no esp, as I have recorded. I can guarantee that! You will be perfectly safe within a broadcast sphere of general sightlessness. I doubt whether you need to carry any weapons."

"The transmitter is weighty enough," Eenif agreed. "Why should I load myself like a beast of burden?" Turning, he faced the metal wall, examined the world with his sense of comprehension that bore no resemblance to the lower form's sense of sight. "Dump me as soon as you like; somewhere along the rim of morning so that I can study them while they are active. It won't take me long."

"We'll land at once." Qvord went to the control panel. "Rs member to keep within mental range so that we don't loss: contact. I cannot make notes when you wander out of hearing, as you did on Khar."

"The metal mountain intervened, cutting us off for a few worthless moments. I have told you that dozens of times," Eenif grumbled. "Do not kill yourself with worry, Suspicious One! It won't take me long to gain the measure of these poor simpletons." He dung to a rail as the other swung the sphere out of its orbit and sent it plunging upon the new world. "Judging by that specimen you carved up, taking them in the mass will be easier than plucking fruit."

"It is our business to make certain of that," warned Qvord. He steered for the planet's morning line.

The Sagittarian sphere nestled in a hollow at fair distance from any habitation. A short, shiny antenna stuck from its top and poured out a constant stream of microwaves which lost zip and faded away about one mile from their source. Around the rim of that invisible hemisphere of one mile radius all things with visual organs were near the boundary between light and dark, the dividing line between sight and temporary non-sight.

Casually Qvord esped the few wild creatures entering the potent area. Rabbits and rats got scared, twisted and turned until either they escaped back into seeable regions or struck an unseeable obstruction and knocked themselves out. Birds in full flight swerved wildly, fluttered in aimless circles, sometimes found the light again, other times hit trees and dropped to earth. One snooping dog became lost in the pitiful maze of its own blindness until eventually it resorted to its nose and snuffled its way to the visible world. Qvord felt no sympathy, neither was he amused. He had esped it all before, on Khar. But he made careful note that nothing on this world, winged or legged, appeared to have any real sense of perception—only sight, poor, inefficient sight.

Most of the time he kept mental contact with the exploring Eenif, experiencing things through the medium of Eenif's mind, making detailed record of all that Eenif found. Already the other had been gone six days, and nine spools of data had been filled by the cerecorder. Fitting a tenth spool into the ap-paratus, he set it ready for reception, then broadcast the thought-ache to which Eenif would respond.

They were in touch immediately. He found Eenif about to enter another town. Two wrecked machines encumbered the street ahead of the prowling Sagittarian, evidently having col-lided as the approaching transmitter deprived their drivers of sight. Several bipeds were on the sidewalks, some standing with hands to their faces, others slowly feeling their way along walls and windows. A nearby glass-fronted building held a display of this world's merchandise over which shone curious, red-lit letters. Qvord made an exact copy of them as revealed through Eenif's mind:

"Baxter's Hardware"

With lordly indifference, Eenif progressed past the face-hiders and the wall-fumblers. In the next mile only one biped was seen walking with any assurance, this being an old, hairy-faced creature who tapped his way rapidly along with the aid of a white stick.

Eenif telepathed: "I tried to pry into that one to discover the precise function of his white rod, but his mind is completely blank to mine. They are all blank. They must think within a different band."

"No matter," responded Qvord. "It cuts both ways. Our minds similarly will be closed to theirs when—and if—we are their overlords."

"Yes, that is an advantage." Eenif came to the end of the street, reached a small square, stopped. Unhitching his trans-mitter, he put it on the ground, sighed with relief at the loss of its weight, had a slow, leisurely esp all around. Traffic signals changed color to one side of him. Already he had discovered the purpose of those. No automobiles moved in response. The few within the square were stalled and empty. There were no drivers in evidence. In fact there was not a biped nearer than those farther back along the street. The square was still, silent, strangely devoid of life.

"What is that?" inquired Qvord suddenly. "The queer object ahead and slightly to your right?"

Moving forward, Eenif examined the thing in question. It stood on three legs. It was a large box ornamented with numerous controls, a small, antennalike rod, and fronted with a crys-talline port. The box part made ticking noises and revolved slowly but steadily in the horizontal plane. The peculiar little port passed across him four times as he stood there.

"Obviously an instrument of some sort," he commented. The object emitted a sharp dick in response to an undetectable im-pulse from somewhere unknown. It ceased rotating, came to rest with its little port facing him. "Possibly a temperature or weather recorder."

"Then why has it halted—pointing at you?"

"Oh," said Eenif airily. "Nobody is attending to it. Nobody is attending to anything. They are all sightless."

"Who are sightless? There is nobody in that area!" "What of it?"

"Eenif, do you suppose that this box on three legs might—might not be sightless?"

"Don't be silly," scoffed Eenif, wagging defiant fibers at the box. "Even a child knows how to make instrumental esp-boosters, but how in the name of Zaxt can any contraption duplicate a sense like sight?"

"I don't know," Qvord confessed. "I haven't the remotest notion. It seems impossible to me. But—but . . ." "But what?" demanded Eenif.

"If it could see," answered Qvord, slowly and thoughtfully, "it might not be in a manner identical with the vision of the creatures who made it. There is every likelihood that it would see in a different, more mechanistic way. In which case—"

"Go on," urged Eenif, openly amused by the other's attitude.

"In which case your transmitter may not be affecting it."

"By the White Sun !" Eenif pretended to be aghast.

"We can make an easy test," Qvord went on, ignoring the other's characteristic reaction, "which will demonstrate posi-tively whether or not it is looking at you—and seeing you."

"Qvord, I think you are the victim of your own lunatic anx-iety. One cannot esp without using both sides of the brain.

Similarly, one cannot see without using both visual organs. This gadget, as you know, has not got two of anything. Merely three crude legs and one black box with a shiny little opening, and various metal attachments that . . ."

"You are too dogmatic," interrupted Qvord. "We have never tested a creature with only one visual organ, but I con-sider it almost certain that such a creature might still see. So might that!"

"And you are too suspicious," Eenif retorted. "Where is the basis for your present leeriness?"

"It stopped. Its small, circular opening faces directly at you. That may be no more than sheer chance—or it may not. Let its test it."

"How?"

"Move round to the side of it," said Qvord.

Obediently, Eenif went to the side. The box gave forth swift ticks, rotated a quarter circle, stopped

and stared at him blankly. There was a long silence.

On the edge of the sidewalk the blinding transmitter continued to function. To one side the traffic signals changed color for the benefit of deserted, unmoving automobiles.

Eenif admitted, "That is strange." He moved right around the tripod. The box on its top ticked and followed him. "I don't like it," decided Qvord, after a while.

"Why not? Even supposing that it does see me—which I won't admit—what of it? It is doing nothing about it, nothing at all. I have no objection to being looked at indifferently. Looks don't do any damage. Besides, they'll be able to study plenty of our kind before long."

"I can view what you are viewing," Qvord pointed out.

"Of course you can. We're in contact, aren't we? If you were unable to view through me it would show that something is wrong with your mind, and . . ."

Qvord's mental impulse had the strength of a shout. "So who is viewing through that?"

"Uh?"

"How do we know it is not transmitting what it sees to somewhere beyond range of your transmitter, outside the blind area where everyone can see?"

Sharply Eenif sent back, "You have an overactive imagination. Just because of that episode on Khar, you suspect anything and everything. Your idea that this piece of primitive trash may be seeing and transmitting is stupid on three counts."

"Name them," Qvord challenged.

"Firstly, there is no evidence of it."

"It follows you," reminded Qvord, "almost as if it were watching you."

"That is not satisfactory evidence," said Eenif, dismissing it. "Secondly, there is no point in transmitting a scene to some place outside the blind area if those who witness it must come inside to do something about it. The moment they enter, they are blind! So where does it get them?"

"But listen . . ."

"Thirdly," Eenif continued stubbornly, "if this device is intended to reveal me, it must have been placed in readiness before I arrived. How could they possibly know that I would be here?"

Qvord gave the question much thought before he replied. "You have taken a direct route heading straight for where you are now."

"Most certainly I have. Since telepathic communication embodies no sense of direction, as you are well aware, I must take care not to get lost. What is simpler than to take a direct path along which I can retrace my steps?"

"I know all that," Qvord snapped. "In detailing your motives you are telling me nothing. Have you espied the interior of that box?"

"It was the first thing I did."

"What did you find?"

"Nothing that makes sense," replied Eenif carelessly. "Just a complicated jumble of components from which no reasonable purpose can be deduced."

"That may well be because you tried to analyze the assembly in normal esp terms," Qvord opined. "Because neither you nor I can cope with alien technique or follow it in terms of a sight sense we do not possess." He mulled it over before he added, "I consider it a grave error for you to move in a straight path. Even at the risk of losing direction it would be better if you confused them by zigzagging a bit. That would introduce sufficient of the element of the unexpected to make them impotent."

"Them, them, them," jeered Eenif. He waved his fingers to emphasize the sheer emptiness of the square. "To what pale ghosts are you referring?"

"The ones who—if they've any sense—have marked the path of the blind area upon a map and noted that over the course of six days it has made a straight line. The ones who—if they've any sense—may suspect that the cause of the blindness lies at the precise center of the area." Qvord's mental impulses now had the sharpness of one whose wariness increases with further thought, further examination of the possibilities. "The ones who—if they've any sense—may extend that line to a site suitable for the placing of their trap."

"Look at me," invited Eenif, striking a posture. "Trapped!"

"The ones who—if they've any sense—" Qvord went on inexorably, "will not spring the trap until they have traced the line backward to its origin and dealt with that! They won't want to scare me away by settling with you." In deliberate, ponderous thought-forms, he finished, "Eenif, they want me first!"

"Bah!" declaimed Eenif. "You are like a whimpering child when left alone. You frighten yourself with your own shadow."

With that, he gave the box a contemptuous shove. It crashed to the ground. He both espied and heard its components shatter.

Qvord said solemnly, "Too late."

"What do you mean by that?"

"The shadow already is here—listen!"

Eenif listened through the other's mind and hearing organs. There was an oncoming drone building itself up to a roar.

"It comes on wings through the blindness. Like your innocent box, it has a glass eye. It is remotely controlled. It sees!"

"Take off, you imbecile!" yelled Eenif, his self-assurance vanishing.

"I have. I am up, very far up, and going fast. But the winged thing with the glass eye was high at the start, and I cannot ..." The mind of Qvord cut off as a vast thundering oppressed his ears. Eenif sensed across the distance no more than a fragmentary moment of intense mental strain ending in fiery chaos.

Turning to snatch up his protecting transmitter, Eenif became aware of a biped nearby. His multidirectional esp would have warned him earlier had he not been concentrating upon the troubles of Qvord.

Standing squarely in the middle of the sidewalk, this blind biped was dressed in blue and bore upon his back a small case from which issued incomprehensible noises.

"It has just pushed over the nearest scanner but has not yet noticed the others. We can see it clearly from four directions. It has now turned to recover its apparatus. About twenty yards to your front. Swing your arm a bit. No, no, you're a fraction off the beam. Two or three degrees to the right. That's it! Let her go!"

The sightless newcomer's arcing limb threw a small oval object. The thrower promptly fell flat on his face and hugged the sidewalk.

With the transmitter half-lifted, Eenif espied the oval object one-tenth of a second before its blast shook the street.

An adjacent automobile shed its windshield and windows. Water poured from its radiator, dripped on twisted pieces of apparatus, made thin wet lines between blotches of green goo in which still twitched a multitude of fibers.

Darkness fled as sight sprang into a square mile of Iowa City.

The usual conception of a robot—be it humanoid, android, usiform, or, on a simpler level, a servomechanism, or cybernetic brain—is as a servant of man. One author in the field did a series of robot stories, later collected in book form, in which he elaborated the inevitable "basic laws of robotics": the instincts, or equivalents thereof, that will have to be built into mechanical men, in order to make certain that they exert their considerable strength only as desired by humans.

In this story, Mr. Blish takes the opposite approach. The problem of inflexible and virtually indestructible malevolence is as old as Frankenstein or the Golem—as old as folklore itself. The solution proposed here is worked out in terms of technology that is just around the corner of tomorrow, with space travel.

SOLAR PLEXUS

by James Blish

Brant Kittinger did not hear the alarm begin to ring. Indeed, it was only after a soft blow had jarred

his free-floating observatory that he looked up in sudden awareness from the interferometer. Then the sound of the warning bell reached his consciousness.

Brant was an astronomer, not a spaceman, but he knew that the hell could mean nothing but the arrival of another ship in the vicinity. There would be no point in ringing a bell for a meteor—the thing could be through and past you during the first cycle of the clapper. Only an ap-proaching ship would be likely to trip the detector, and it would have to be close.

A second dull jolt told him how close it was. The rasp of metal which followed, as the other ship slid along the side of his own, drove the fog of tensors completely from his brain. He dropped his pencil and straightened up.

His first thought was that his year in the orbit around the new trans-Plutonian planet was up, and that the Insti-tute's tug had arrived to tow him home, telescope and all. A glance at the clock reassured him at first, then puzzled him still further. He still had the better part of four months.

No commercial vessel, of course, could have wandered this far from the inner planets; and the UN's police cruisers didn't travel far outside the commercial lanes. Besides, it would have been impossible for anyone to find Brant's orbital observatory by accident.

He settled his glasses more firmly on his nose, clam-bered awkwardly backwards out of the prime focus cham-ber and down the wall net to the control desk on the observation floor. A quick glance over the boards revealed that there was a magnetic field of some strength nearby, one that didn't belong to the invisible gas giant revolving half a million miles away.

The strange ship was locked to him magnetically; it was an old ship, then, for that method of grappling had been discarded years ago as too hard on delicate instruments. And the strength of the field meant a big ship.

Too big. The only ship of that period that could mount generators that size, as far as Brant could remember, was the Cybernetics Foundation's *Astrid*. Brant could remem-ber well the Foundation's regretful announcement that Murray Bennett had destroyed both himself and the *As-trid* rather than turn the ship in to some UN inspection team. It had happened only eight years ago. Some scandal or other ...

Well, who then?

He turned the radio on. Nothing came out of it. It was a simple transistor set tuned to the Institute's frequency, and since the ship outside plainly did not belong to the Institute, he had expected nothing else. Of course he had a photophone also, but it had been designed for communica-tions over a reasonable distance, not for cheek-to-cheek whispers.

As an afterthought, he turned off the persistent alarm bell. At once another sound came through: a delicate, rhythmic tapping on the hull of the observatory. Someone wanted to get in.

He could think of no reason to refuse entrance, except for a vague and utterly unreasonable wonder as to wheth-er or not the stranger was a friend. He had no enemies, and the notion that some outlaw might have happened upon him out here was ridiculous. Nevertheless, there was something about the anonymous, voiceless ship just outside which made him uneasy.

The gentle tapping stopped, and then began again, with an even, mechanical insistence. For a moment Brant won-dered whether or not he should try to tear free with the observatory's few maneuvering rockets—but even should he win so uneven a struggle, he would throw the observa-tory out of the orbit where the Institute expected to find it, and he was not astronaut enough to get it back there again.

Tap, tap. Tap, tap.

"All right," he said irritably. He pushed the button which set the airlock to cycling. The tapping stopped. He left the outer door open more than long enough for anyone to enter and push the button in the lock which reversed the process; but nothing happened.

After what seemed to be a long wait, he pushed his button again. The outer door closed, the pumps filled the chamber with air, the inner door swung open. No ghost drifted out of it; there was nobody in the lock at all.

Tap, tap. Tap, tap.

Absently he polished his glasses on his sleeve. If they didn't want to come into the observatory, they

must want him to come out of it. That was possible: although the telescope had a Coude focus which allowed him to work in the ship's air most of the time, it was occasionally necessary for him to exhaust the dome, and for that purpose he had a space suit. But he had never been outside the hull in it, and the thought alarmed him. Brant was nobody's spaceman.

Be damned to them. He clapped his glasses back into place and took one more look into the empty airlock. It was still empty with the outer door now moving open very slowly... .

A spaceman would have known that he was already dead, but Brant's reactions were not quite as fast. His first move was to try to jam the inner door shut by sheer muscle-power, but it would not stir. Then he simply clung to the nearest stanchion, waiting for the air to rush out of the observatory, and his life after it.

The outer door of the airlock continued to open, placid-ly, and still there was no rush of air—only a kind of faint, unticketable inwash of odor, as if Brant's air were mixing with someone else's. When both doors of the lock finally stood wide apart from each other, Brant found himself looking down the inside of a flexible, airtight tube, such as he had once seen used for the transfer of a small freight-load from a ship to one of Earth's several space stations. It connected the airlock of the observatory with that of the other ship. At the other end of it, lights gleamed yellowly, with the unmistakable, dismal sheen of incandescent overheads.

That was an old ship, all right.

Tap. Tap.

"Go to hell," he said aloud. There was no answer.

Tap. Tap.

"Go to hell," he said. He walked out into the tube, which flexed sinuously as his body pressed aside the static air. In the airlock of the stranger, he paused and looked back. He was not much surprised to see the outer door of his own airlock swinging smugly shut against him. Then the airlock of the stranger began to cycle; he skipped on into the ship barely in time.

There was a bare metal corridor ahead of him. While he watched, the first light bulb over his head blinked out. Then the second. Then the third. As the fourth one went out, the first came on again, so that now there was a slow ribbon of darkness moving away from him down the corridor. Clearly, he was being asked to follow the line of darkening bulbs down the corridor.

He had no choice, now that he had come this far. He followed the blinking lights.

The trail led directly to the control room of the ship. There was nobody there, either.

The whole place was oppressively silent. He could hear the soft hum of generators—a louder noise than he ever heard on board the observatory—but no ship should be this quiet. There should be muffled human voices; the chattering of communications systems, the impacts of soles on metal. Someone had to operate a proper ship—not only its airlocks, but its motors—and its brains. The observatory was only a barge, and needed no crew but Brant, but a real ship had to be manned.

He scanned the bare metal compartment, noting the apparent age of the equipment. Most of it was manual, but there were no hands to man it.

A ghost ship for true.

"All right," he said. His voice sounded flat and loud to him. "Come on out. You wanted me here—why are you hiding?"

Immediately there was a noise in the close, still air, a thin, electrical sigh. Then a quiet voice said, "You're Brant Kittinger."

"Certainly," Brant said, swiveling fruitlessly toward the apparent source of the voice. "You know who I am. You couldn't have found me by accident. Will you come out? I've no time to play games."

"I'm not playing games," the voice said calmly. "And I can't come out, since I'm not hiding from you. I can't see you; I needed to hear your voice before I could be sure of you."

"Why?"

"Because I can't see inside the ship. I could find your observation boat well enough, but until I heard you speak I couldn't be sure that you were the one aboard it. Now I know."

"All right," Brant said suspiciously. "I still don't see why you're hiding. Where are you?"

"Right here," said the voice. "All around you."

Brant looked all around himself. His scalp began to creep.

"What kind of nonsense is that?" he said.

"You aren't seeing what you're looking at, Brant. You're looking directly at me, no matter where you look. *I am the ship.*"

"Oh," Brant said softly. "So that's it. You're one of Murray Bennett's computer-driven ships. Are you the *As-trid*, after all?"

"This is the *Astrid*," the voice said. "But you miss my point. I am Murray Bennett, also."

Brant's jaw dropped open. "Where are you?" he said after a time.

"Here," the voice said impatiently. "I am the *Astrid*. I am also Murray Bennett. Bennett is dead, so he can't very well come into the cabin and shake your hand. I am now Murray Bennett; I remember you very well, Brant. I need your help, so I sought you out. I'm not as much Murray Bennett as I'd like to be."

Brant sat down in the empty pilot's seat.

"You're a computer," he said shakily. "Isn't that so?"

"It is and it isn't. No computer can duplicate the performance of a human brain. I tried to introduce real human neural mechanisms into computers, specifically to fly ships, and was outlawed for my trouble. I don't think I was treated fairly. It took enormous surgical skill to make the hundreds and hundreds of nerve-to-circuit connections that were needed—and before I was half through, the UN decided that what I was doing was human vivisection. They outlawed me, and the Foundation said I'd have to destroy myself; what could I do after that?"

"I did destroy myself. I transferred most of my own nervous system into the computers of the *Astrid*, working at the end through drugged assistants under telepathic control, and finally relying upon the computers to seal the last connections. No such surgery ever existed before, but I brought it into existence. It worked. Now I'm the *As-trid*—and still Murray Bennett too, though Bennett is dead."

Brant locked his hands together carefully on the edge of the dead control board. "What good did that do you?" he said.

"It proved my point. I was trying to build an almost living spaceship. I had to build part of myself into it to do it—since they made me an outlaw to stop my using any other human being as a source of parts. But here is the *Astrid*, Brant, as almost alive as I could ask. I'm as immune to a dead spaceship—a UN cruiser, for instance—as you would be to an infuriated wheelbarrow. My reflexes are human-fast. I feel things directly, not through instruments. I fly myself: I am what I sought—the ship that almost thinks for itself."

"You keep saying 'almost,'" Brant said.

"That's why I came to you," the voice said. "I don't have enough of Murray Bennett here to know what I should do next. You knew me well. Was I out to try to use human brains more and more, and computer-mechanisms less and less? It seems to me that I was. I can pick up the brains easily enough, just as I picked you up. The solar system is full of people isolated on little research boats who could be plucked off them and incorporated into efficient machines like the *Astrid*. But I don't know. I seem to have lost my creativity. I have a base where I have some other ships with beautiful computers in them, and with a few people to use as research animals I could make even better ships of them than the *Astrid* is. But is that what I want to do? Is that what I set out to do? I no longer know, Brant. Advise me."

The machine with the human nerves would have been touching had it not been so much like Bennett had been. The combination of the two was flatly horrible.

"You've made a bad job of yourself, Murray," he said. "You've let me inside your brain without taking any real thought of the danger. What's to prevent me from station-ing myself at your old manual controls and flying you to the nearest UN post?"

"You can't fly a ship."

"How do you know?"

"By simple computation. And there are other reasons. What's to prevent me from making you cut your own throat? The answer's the same. You're in control of your body; I'm in control of mine. My

body is the *Astrid*. The controls are useless, unless I actuate them. The nerves through which I do so are sheathed in excellent steel. The only way in which you could destroy my control would be to break something necessary to the running of the ship. That, in a sense, would kill me, as destroying your heart or your lungs would kill you. But that would be pointless, for then you could no more navigate the ship than I. And if you made repairs, I would be—well, resurrected."

The voice fell silent a moment. Then it added, matter-of-factly, "Of course, I can protect myself."

Brant made no reply. His eyes were narrowed to the squint he more usually directed at a problem in Milne transformations.

"I never sleep," the voice went on, "but much of my navigating and piloting is done by an autopilot without requiring my conscious attention. It is the same old Nelson autopilot which was originally on board the *Astrid*, though, so it has to be monitored. If you touch the controls while the autopilot is running, it switches itself off and I resume direction myself."

Brant was surprised and instinctively repelled by the steady flow of information. It was a forcible reminder of how much of the computer there was in the intelligence that called itself Murray Bennett. It was answering a question with the almost mindless wealth of detail of a public-library selector—and there was no "Enough" button for Brant to push.

"Are you going to answer my question?" the voice said suddenly.

"Yes, Brant said. "I advise you to turn yourself in. The *Astrid* proves your point—and also proves that your research was a blind alley. There's no point in your proceeding to make more *Astrids*; you're aware yourself that you're incapable of improving on the model now."

"That's contrary to what I have recorded," the voice said. "My ultimate purpose as a man was to build machines like this. I can't accept your answer: it conflicts with my primary directive. Please follow the lights to your quarters."

"What are you going to do with me?"

"Take you to the base."

"What for?" Brant said.

"As a stock of parts," said the voice. "Please follow the lights, or I'll have to use force."

Brant followed the lights. As he entered the cabin to which they led him, a disheveled figure arose from one of the two cots. He started back in alarm. The figure chuckled wryly and displayed a frayed bit of gold braid on its sleeve.

"I'm not as terrifying as I look," he said. "Lt. Powell of the UN scout *Iapetus*, at your service."

"I'm Brant Kittinger, Planetary Institute astrophysicist. You're just the faintest bit battered, all right. Did you tangle with Bennett?"

"Is that his name?" The UN patrolman nodded glumly. "Yes. There's some whoppers of guns mounted on this old tub. I challenged it, and it cut my ship to pieces before I could lift a hand. I barely got into my suit in time—and I'm beginning to wish I hadn't."

"I don't blame you. You know what he plans to use us for, I judge."

"Yes," the pilot said. "He seems to take pleasure in bragging about his achievements—God knows they're, amazing enough, if even half of what he says is true."

"It's all true," Brant said. "He's essentially a machine, you know, and as such I doubt that he can lie."

Powell looked startled. "That makes it worse. I've been trying to figure a way out—"

Brant raised one hand sharply, and with the other he patted his pockets in search of a pencil. "If you've found anything, write it down, don't talk about it. I think he can hear us. Is that so, Bennett?"

"Yes," said the voice in the air. Powell jumped. "My hearing extends throughout the ship."

There was silence again. Powell, grim as death, scribbled on a tattered UN trip ticket.

Doesn't matter. Can't think of a thing.

Where's the main computer? Brant wrote. There's where personality residues must lie.

Down below. Not a chance without blaster. Must be eight inches of steel around it. Control nerves the same.

They sat hopelessly on the lower cot. Brant chewed on the pencil. "How far is his home base from here?" he asked at length.

"Where's here?"

"In the orbit of the new planet."

Powell whistled. "In that case, his base can't be more than three days away. I came on board from just off Titan, and he hasn't touched his base since, so his fuel won't last much longer. I know this type of ship well enough. And from what I've seen of the drivers, they haven't been altered."

"Umm," Brant said. "That checks. If Bennett in person never got around to altering the drive, this ersatz Bennett we have here will never get around to it, either." He found it easier to ignore the listening presence while talking; to monitor his speech constantly with Bennett in mind was too hard on the nerves. "That gives us three days to get out, then. Or less."

For at least twenty minutes Brant said nothing more, while the UN pilot squirmed and watched his face hope-fully. Finally the astronomer picked up the piece of paper again.

Can you pilot this ship? he wrote.

The pilot nodded and scribbled: *Why?*

Without replying, Brant lay back on the bunk, swiveled himself around so that his head was toward the center of the cabin, doubled up his knees, and let fly with both feet. They crashed hard against the hull, the magnetic studs in his shoes leaving bright scars on the metal. The impact sent him sailing like an ungainly fish across the cabin.

"What was that for?" Powell and the voice in the air asked simultaneously. Their captor's tone was faintly curi-ous, but not alarmed.

Brant had his answer already prepared. "It's part of a question I want to ask," he said. He brought up against the far wall and struggled to get his feet back to the deck. "Can you tell me what I did then, Bennett?"

"Why, not specifically. As I told you, I can't see inside the ship. But I get a tactual jar from the nerves of the controls, the lights, the floors, the ventilation system, and so on, and also a ringing sound from the audios. These things tell me that you either stamped on the floor or pounded on the wall. From the intensity of the impres-sions, I compute that you stamped."

"You hear and you feel, eh?"

"That's correct," the voice said. "Also I can pick up your body heat from the receptors in the ship's tempera-ture control system—a form of seeing, but without any definition."

Very quietly, Brant retrieved the worn trip ticket and wrote on it: *Follow me.*

He went out into the corridor and started down it toward the control room, Powell at his heels. The living ship remained silent only for a moment.

"Return to your cabin," the voice said.

Brant walked a little faster. How would Bennett's vicious brainchild enforce his orders?

"I said, go back to the cabin," the voice said. Its tone was now loud and harsh, and without a trace of feeling; for the first time, Brant was able to tell that it came from a voder, rather than from a tape-vocabulary of Bennett's own voice. Brant gritted his teeth and marched forward.

"I don't want to have to spoil you," the voice said. "For the last time—"

An instant later Brant received a powerful blow in the small of his back. It felled him like a tree, and sent him skimming along the corridor deck like a flat stone. A bare fraction of a second later there was a hiss and a flash, and the air was abruptly hot and choking with the sharp odor of ozone.

"Close," Powell's voice said calmly. "Some of these rivet-heads in the walls evidently are high-tension elec-trodes. Lucky I saw the nimbus collecting on that one. Crawl, and make it snappy."

Crawling in a gravity-free corridor was a good deal more difficult to manage than walking. Determinedly, Brant squirmed into the control room, calling into play every trick he had ever learned in space to stick to the floor. He could hear Powell wriggling along behind him.

"He doesn't know what I'm up to," Brant said aloud. "Do you, Bennett?"

"No," the voice in the air said. "But I know of nothing you can do that's dangerous while you're lying on your belly. When you get up, I'll destroy you, Brant."

"Hmmm," Brant said. He adjusted his glasses, which he had nearly lost during his brief, skipping carom along the deck. The voice had summarized the situation with deadly precision. He pulled the now

nearly pulped trip ticket out of his shirt pocket, wrote on it, and shoved it across the deck to Powell.

How can we reach the autopilot? Got to smash it.

Powell propped himself up on one elbow and studied the scrap of paper, frowning. Down below, beneath the deck, there was an abrupt sound of power, and Brant felt the cold metal on which he was lying sink beneath him. Bennett was changing course, trying to throw them within range of his defenses. Both men began to slide sidewise.

Powell did not appear to be worried; evidently he knew just how long it took to turn a ship of this size and period. He pushed the piece of paper back. On the last free space on it, in cramped letters, was: *Throw something at it.*

"Ah," said Brant. Still sliding, he drew off one of his heavy shoes and hefted it critically. It would do. With a sudden convulsion of motion he hurled it.

Fat, crackling sparks crisscrossed the room; the noise was ear-splitting. While Bennett could have had no idea what Brant was doing, he evidently had sensed the sudden stir of movement and had triggered the high-tension current out of general caution. But he was too late. The flying shoe plowed heel-foremost into the autopilot with a rending smash.

There was an unfocused blare of sound from the voder—more like the noise of a siren than like a human cry. The *Astrid* rolled wildly, once. Then there was silence.

"All right," said Brant, getting to his knees. "Try the controls, Powell."

The UN pilot arose cautiously. No sparks flew. When he touched the boards, the ship responded with an immediate purr of power.

"She runs," he said. "Now, how the hell did you know what to do?"

"It wasn't difficult," Brant said complacently, retrieving his shoe. "But we're not out of the woods yet. We have to get to the stores fast and find a couple of torches. I want to cut through every nerve-channel we can find. Are you with me?"

"Sure."

The job was more quickly done than Brant had dared to hope. Evidently the living ship had never thought of lightening itself by jettisoning all the equipment its human crew had once needed. While Brant and Powell cut their way enthusiastically through the jungle of efferent nerve-trunks running from the central computer, the astronomer said:

"He gave us too much information. He told me that he had connected the artificial nerves of the ship, the control nerves, to the nerve-ends running from the parts of his own brain that he had used. And he said that he'd had to make *hundreds* of such connections. That's the trouble with allowing a computer to act as an independent agent—it doesn't know enough about interpersonal relationships to control its tongue.... There we are. He'll be coming to before long, but I don't think he'll be able to interfere with us now."

He set down his torch with a sigh. "I was saying? Oh, yes. About those nerve connections: if he had separated out the pain-carrying nerves from the other sensory nerves, he would have had to have made *thousands* of connections, not hundreds. Had it really been the living human being, Bennett, who had given me that cue, I would have discounted it, because he might have been using understatement. But since it was Bennett's double, a computer, I assumed that the figure was of the right order of magnitude. Computers don't understate.

"Besides, I didn't think Bennett could have made thousands of connections, especially not working telepathically through a proxy. There's a limit even to the most marvelous neurosurgery. Bennett had just made general connections, and had relied on the segments from his own brain which he had incorporated to sort out the impulses as they came in—as any human brain could do under like circumstances. That was one of the advantages of using parts from a human brain in the first place."

"And when you kicked the wall—" Powell said.

"Yes, you see the crux of the problem already. When I kicked the wall, I wanted to make sure that he could *feel* the impact of my shoes. If he could, then I could be sure that he hadn't eliminated the sensory nerves when he installed the motor nerves. And if he hadn't, then there were bound to be pain axons present, too."

"But what has the autopilot to do with it?" Powell asked plaintively.

"The autopilot," Brant said, grinning, "is a center of his nerve-mesh, an important one. He should have protected it as heavily as he protected the main computer. When I smashed it, it was like ramming a fist into a man's solar plexus. It hurt him."

Powell grinned too. "K.O.," he said.

The heroine of this story—and definitely feminine she a whirlwind. It is an unusual story, not only on its own account, but because it is one of the very few "pure" fantasies Robert Heinlein has written. That is to say—according to the rather arbitrary rules of the trade—there is no endeavor to explain or rationalize the sentience of the whirlwind named Kitten. It is postulated; nothing more. And, because Mr. Heinlein is a first-rate craftsman, nothing more is postulated. Operating with one fantastic element in an other-wise realistic setting, he has created a gay and charming story of civic vice and virtue in the state of "what if?".

OUR FAIR CITY

Robert A Heinlein

Pete Perkins turned into the all-nite parking lot and called out, "Hi, Pappy!"

The old parking lot attendant looked up and answered, "Be with you in a moment, Pete." He was tearing a Sunday comic sheet in narrow strips. A little whirlwind waltzed near him, picking up pieces of old newspaper and bits of dirt and flinging them in the faces of passing pedestrians. The old man held out to it a long streamer of the brightly colored funny-paper. "Here, Kitten," he coaxed. "Come, Kitten -- "

The whirlwind hesitated, then drew itself up until it was quite tall, jumped two parked cars, and landed sur le point near him.

It seemed to sniff at the offering.

"Take it, Kitten," the old man called softly and let the gay streamer slip from his fingers. The whirlwind whipped it up and wound it around its middle. He tore off another and yet another; the whirlwind wound them in corkscrew through the loose mass of dirty paper and trash that constituted its visible body. Renewed by cold gusts that poured down the canyon of tall buildings, it swirled faster and even taller, while it lifted the colored paper ribbons in a fantastic upswept hair-do. The old man turned, smiling. "Kitten does like new clothes."

"Take it easy, Pappy, or you'll have me believing in it."

"Eh? You don't have to believe in Kitten—you can see her."

"Yeah, sure—but you act as if she—I mean 'it' -- could understand what you say."

"You still don't think so?" His voice was gently tolerant.

"Now, Pappy!"

"Hmm...lend me your hat." Pappy reached up and took it. "Here, Kitten," he called. "Come back, Kitten!" The whirlwind was playing around over their heads, several stories high. It dipped down.

"Hey! Where you going with that chapeau?" demanded Perkins.

"Just a moment -- Here, Kitten!" The whirlwind sat down suddenly, spilling its load. The old man handed it the hat. The whirlwind snatched it and started it up a fast, long spiral.

"Hey!" yelled Perkins. "What do you think you're doing? That's not funny—that hat cost me six bucks only three years ago."

"Don't worry," the old man soothed. "Kitten will bring it back."

"She will, huh? More likely she'll dump it in the river."

"Oh, no! Kitten never drops anything she doesn't want to drop. Watch." The old man looked up to where the hat was dancing near the penthouse of the hotel across the street. "Kitten! Oh, Kitten! Bring it back."

The whirlwind hesitated, the hat fell a couple of stories. It swooped, caught it, and juggled it reluctantly. "Bring it here, Kitten."

The hat commenced a downward spiral, finishing in a long curving swoop. It hit Perkins full in the

face. "She was trying to put it on your head," the attendant explained. "Usually she's more accurate."

"She is, eh?" Perkins picked up his hat and stood looking at the whirlwind, mouth open.

"Convinced?" asked the old man.

"'Convinced?' Oh, sho' sho'." He looked back at his hat, then again at the whirlwind. "Pappy, this calls for a drink."

They went inside the lot's little shelter shack; Pappy found glasses; Perkins produced a pint, nearly full, and poured two generous slugs. He tossed his down, poured another, and sat down. "The first was in honor of Kitten," he announced. "This one is to fortify me for the Mayor's banquet."

Pappy cluck-clucked sympathetically. "You have to cover that?"

"Have to write a column about something, Pappy. Last night Hizzoner the Mayor, surrounded by a glittering galaxy of highbinders, grifters, sycophants, and ballot thieves, was the recipient of a testimonial dinner celebrating -- 'Got to write something, Pappy, the cash customers expect it. Why don't I brace up like a man and go on relief?'"

"Today's column was good, Pete," the old man comforted him. He picked up a copy of the Daily Forum; Perkins took it from him and ran his eye down his own column.

"OUR FAIR CITY by Peter Perkins," he read, and below that "What, No Horsecars? It is the tradition of our civic paradise that what was good enough for the founding fathers is good enough for us. We stumble over the very chuckhole in which Great-uncle Tozier broke his leg in '09. It is good to know that the bath water, running out, is not gone forever, but will return through the kitchen faucet, thicker and disguised with chlorine, but the same. (Memo-Hizzoner uses bottled spring water. Must look into this.)"

"But I must report a dismaying change. Someone has done away with the horsecars!"

"You may not believe this. Our public conveyances run so seldom and slowly that you may not have noticed it; nevertheless I swear that I saw one wobbling down Grand Avenue with no horses of any sort. It seemed to be propelled by some new-fangled electrical device."

"Even in the atomic age some changes are too much. I urge all citizens -- " Perkins gave a snort of disgust. "It's tackling a pillbox with a beanshooter, Pappy. This town is corrupt; it'll stay corrupt. Why should I beat out my brains on such piffle? Hand me the bottle."

"Don't be discouraged, Peter. The tyrant fears the laugh more than the assassin's bullet."

"Where'd you pick that up? Okay, so I'm not funny. I've tried laughing them out of office and it hasn't worked. My efforts are as pointless as the activities of your friend the whirling dervish."

The windows rattled under a gusty impact. "Don't talk that way about Kitten," the old man cautioned. "She's sensitive."

"I apologize." He stood up and bowed toward the door. "Kitten, I apologize. Your activities are more useful than mine." He turned to his host. "Let's go out and talk to her, Pappy. I'd rather do that than go to the Mayor's banquet, if I had my druthers."

They went outside, Perkins bearing with him the remains of the colored comic sheet. He began tearing off streamers. "Here, Kitty! Here, Kitty! Soup's on!"

The whirlwind bent down and accepted the strips as fast as he tore them. "She's still got the ones you gave her."

"Certainly," agreed Pappy. "Kitten is a pack rat. When she likes something she'll keep it indefinitely."

"Doesn't she ever get tired? There must be some calm days."

"It's never really calm here. It's the arrangement of the buildings and the way Third Street leads up from the river. But I think she hides her pet playthings on tops of buildings."

The newspaperman peered into the swirling trash. "I'll bet she's got newspapers from months back. Say, Pappy, I see a column in this, one about our trash collection service and how we don't clean our streets. I'll dig up some papers a couple of years old and claim that they have been blowing around town since publication."

"Why fake it?" answered Pappy, "let's see what Kitten has." He whistled softly. "Come, baby-let Pappy see your playthings." The whirlwind bulged out; its contents moved less rapidly. The attendant plucked a piece of old newspaper from it in passing. "Here's one three months old."

"We'll have to do better than that."

"I'll try again." He reached out and snatched another. "Last June."

"That's better."

A car honked for service and the old man hurried away. When he returned Perkins was still watching the hovering column. "Any luck?" asked Pappy.

"She won't let me have them. Snatches them away."

"Naughty Kitten," the old man said. "Pete is a friend of ours. You be nice to him." The whirlwind fidgeted uncertainly.

"It's all right," said Perkins. "She didn't know. But look, Pappy-see that piece up there? A front page."

"You want it?"

"Yes. Look closely-the headline reads 'DEWEY' something. You don't suppose she's been hoarding it since the '48 campaign?"

"Could be. Kitten has been around here as long as I can remember. And she does hoard things. Wait a second." He called out softly. Shortly the paper was in his hands. "Now we'll see."

Perkins peered at it. "I'll be a short-term Senator! Can you top that, Pappy?"

The headline read: DEWEY CAPTURES MANILA the date was "1898."

Twenty minutes later they were still considering it over the last of Perkins' bottle. The newspaperman stared at the yellowed, filthy sheet. "Don't tell me this has been blowing around town for the last half century."

"Why not?"

" 'Why not?' Well, I'll concede that the streets haven't been cleaned in that time, but this paper wouldn't last. Sun and rain and so forth."

"Kitten is very careful of her toys. She probably put it under cover during bad weather."

"For the love of Mike, Pappy, you don't really believe -- But you do. Frankly, I don't care where she got it; the official theory is going to be that this particular piece of paper has been kicking around our dirty streets, unnoticed and uncollected, for the past fifty years. Boy, am I going to have fun!" He rolled the fragment carefully and started to put it in his pocket.

"Say, don't do that!" his host protested.

"Why not? I'm going to take it down and get a pic of it."

"You mustn't! It belongs to Kitten-I just borrowed it."

"Huh? Are you nuts?"

"She'll be upset if she doesn't get it back. Please, Pete-she'll let you look at it any time you want to."

The old man was so earnest that Perkins was stopped. "Suppose we never see it again? My story hangs on it."

"It's no good to you-she has to keep it, to make your story stand up. Don't worry-I'll tell her that she mustn't lose it under any circumstances."

"Well-okay." They stepped outside and Pappy talked earnestly to Kitten, then gave her the 1898 fragment. She promptly tucked it into the top column. Perkins said good-bye to Pappy, and started to leave the lot. He paused and turned around, looking a little befuddled. "Say, Pappy -- "

"Yes, Pete?"

"You don't really think that whirlwind is alive, do you?"

"Why not?"

" 'Why not?' Why not, the man says?"

"Well," said Pappy reasonably, "how do you know you are alive?"

"But...why, because I-well, now if you put it -- " He stopped. "I don't know. You got me, pal."

Pappy smiled. "You see?"

"Uh, I guess so. G'night, Pappy. G'night, Kitten." He tipped his hat to the whirlwind. The column bowed.

The managing editor sent for Perkins.

"Look, Pete," he said, chucking a sheaf of gray copy paper at him, "whimsy is all right, but I'd like to see some copy that wasn't dashed off in a gin mill."

Perkins looked over the pages shoved at him. "OUR FAIR CITY by Peter Perkins. Whistle Up The Wind. Walking our streets always is a piquant, even adventurous, experience. We pick our way through the assorted trash, bits of old garbage, cigarette butts, and other less appetizing items that stud our sidewalks while our faces are assaulted by more buoyant souvenirs, the confetti of last Hallowe'en, shreds of dead leaves, and other items too weather-beaten to be identified. However, I had always assumed that a constant turnover in the riches of our streets caused them to renew themselves at least every seven years -- " The column then told of the whirlwind that contained the fifty-year-old newspaper and challenged any other city in the country to match it.

" 'Smatter with it?' demanded Perkins.

"Beating the drum about the filth in the streets is fine, Pete, but give it a factual approach."

Perkins leaned over the desk. "Boss, this is factual."

"Huh? Don't be silly, Pete."

"Silly, he says. Look -- " Perkins gave him a circumstantial account of Kitten and the 1898 newspaper.

"Pete, you must have been drinking."

"Only Java and tomato juice. Cross my heart and hope to die."

"How about yesterday? I'll bet the whirlwind came right up to the bar with you."

"I was cold, stone -- " Perkins stopped himself and stood on his dignity. "That's my story. Print it, or fire me."

"Don't be like that, Pete. I don't want your job; I just want a column with some meat. Dig up some facts on man-hours and costs for street cleaning, compared with other cities."

"Who'd read that junk? Come down the street with me. I'll show you the facts. Wait a moment-I'll pick up a photographer."

A few minutes later Perkins was introducing the managing editor and Clarence V. Weems to Pappy. Clarence unlimbered his camera. "Take a pic of him?"

"Not yet, Clarence. Pappy, can you get Kitten to give us back the museum piece?"

"Why, sure." The old man looked up and whistled. "Oh, Kitten! Come to Pappy." Above their heads a tiny gust took shape, picked up bits of paper and stray leaves, and settled on the lot. Perkins peered into it.

"She hasn't got it," he said in aggrieved tones.

"She'll get it." Pappy stepped forward until the whirlwind enfolded him. They could see his lips move, but the words did not reach them.

"Now?" said Clarence.

"Not yet." The whirlwind bounded up and leapt over an adjoining building. The managing editor opened his mouth, closed it again.

Kitten was soon back. She had dropped everything else and had just one piece of paper-the paper. "Now!" said Perkins. "Can you get a shot of that paper, Clarence-while it's in the air?"

"Natch," said Clarence, and raised his Speed Graphic. "Back a little, and hold it," he ordered, speaking to the whirlwind.

Kitten hesitated and seemed about to skitter away. "Bring it around slow and easy, Kitten," Pappy supplemented, "and turn it over-no, no! Not that way-the other edge up." The paper flattened out and sailed slowly past them, the headline showing.

"Did you get it?" Perkins demanded.

"Natch," said Clarence. "Is that all?" he asked the editor.

"Natch-I mean, 'that's all.' "

"Okay," said Clarence, picked up his case, and left. The editor sighed. "Gentlemen," he said, "let's have a drink."

Four drinks later Perkins and his boss were still arguing. Pappy had left. "Be reasonable, Boss," Pete

was saying, "you can't print an item about a live whirlwind. They'd laugh you out of town."

Managing Editor Gaines straightened himself.

"It's the policy of the Forum to print all the news, and print it straight. This is news-we print it." He relaxed. "Hey! Waiter! More of the same-and not so much soda."

"But it's scientifically impossible."

"You saw it, didn't you?"

"Yes, but -- "

Gaines stopped him. "We'll ask the Smithsonian Institution to investigate it."

"They'll laugh at you," Perkins insisted. "Ever hear of mass hypnotism?"

"Huh? No, that's no explanation-Clarence saw it, too."

"What does that prove?"

"Obvious-to be hypnotized you have to have a mind. Ipso facto."

"You mean ipse dixit."

"Quit hiccuping. Perkins, you shouldn't drink in the daytime. Now start over and say it slowly."

"How do you know Clarence doesn't have a mind?"

"Prove it."

"Well, he's alive-he must have some sort of a mind, then."

"That's just what I was saying, the whirlwind is alive; therefore it has a mind. Perkins, if those long-beards from the Smithsonian are going to persist in their unscientific attitude, I for one will not stand for it. The Forum will not stand for it. You will not stand for it."

"Won't I?"

"Not for one minute. I want you to know the Forum is behind you, Pete. You go back to the parking lot and get an interview with that whirlwind."

"But I've got one. You wouldn't let me print it."

"Who wouldn't let you print it? I'll fire him! Come on, Pete. We're going to blow this town sky high. Stop the run. Hold the front page. Get busy!" He put on Pete's hat and strode rapidly into the men's room.

Pete settled himself at his desk with a container of coffee, a can of tomato juice, and the Midnight Final (late afternoon) edition. Under a 4-col. cut of Kitten's toy was his column, boxed and moved to the front page. 18-point boldface ordered SEE EDITORIAL PAGE 12. On page 12 another black line enjoined him to SEE "OUR FAIR CITY" PAGE ONE. He ignored this and read: MR. MAYOR-RESIGN!!!!

Pete read it and chuckled. "An ill wind -- " " -- symbolic of the spiritual filth lurking in the dark corners of the city hall." " -- will grow to cyclonic proportions and sweep a corrupt and shameless administration from office." The editorial pointed out that the contract for street cleaning and trash removal was held by the Mayor's brother-in-law, and then suggested that the whirlwind could give better service cheaper.

"Pete-is that you?" Pappy's voice demanded. "They got me down at the station house."

"What for?"

"They claim Kitten is a public nuisance."

"I'll be right over." He stopped by the Art Department, snagged Clarence, and left. Pappy was seated in the station lieutenant's office, looking stubborn. Perkins shoved his way in. "What's he here for?" he demanded, jerking a thumb at Pappy.

The lieutenant looked sour. "What are you butting in for, Perkins? You're not his lawyer."

"Not yet, Clarence. For news, Dumbrosky-I work for a newspaper, remember? I repeat-what's he in for?"

"Obstructing an officer in the performance of his duty."

"That right, Pappy?"

The old man looked disgusted. "This character -- " He indicated one of the policemen " -- comes up to my lot and tries to snatch the Manila-Bay paper away from Kitten. I tell her to keep it up out of his

way. Then he waves his stick at me and orders me to take it away from her. I tell him what he can do with his stick." He shrugged. "So here we are."

"I get it," Perkins told him, and turned to Dumbrosky. "You got a call from the city hall, didn't you? So you sent Dugan down to do the dirty work. What I don't get is why you sent Dugan. I hear he's so dumb you don't even let him collect the pay-off on his own beat."

"That's a lie!" put in Dugan. "I do so -- "

"Shut up, Dugan!" his boss thundered. "Now, see here, Perkins-you clear out. There ain't no story here."

"'No story?'" Perkins said softly. "The police force tries to arrest a whirlwind and you say there's no story?"

"Now?" said Clarence.

"Nobody tried to arrest no whirlwind! Now scam."

"Then how come you're charging Pappy with obstructing an officer? What was Dugan doing-flying a kite?"

"He's not charged with obstructing an officer."

"He's not, eh? Just what have you booked him for?"

"He's not booked. We're holding him for questioning."

"So? Not booked, no warrant, no crime alleged, just pick up a citizen and roust him around, Gestapo style." Perkins turned to Pappy. "You're not under arrest. My advice is to get up and walk out that door."

Pappy started to get up. "Hey!" Lieutenant Dumbrosky bounded out of his chair, grabbed Pappy by the shoulder and pushed him down. "I'm giving the orders around here. You stay -- "

"Now!" yelled Perkins. Clarence's flashbulb froze them. Then Dumbrosky started up again.

"Who let him in here? Dugan-get that camera."

"Nyannh!" said Clarence and held it away from the cop. They started doing a little Maypole dance, with Clarence as the Maypole.

"Hold it!" yelled Perkins. "Go ahead and grab the camera, Dugan-I'm just aching to write the story. 'Police Lieutenant Destroys Evidence of Police Brutality.' "

"What do you want I should do, Lieutenant?" pleaded Dugan.

Dumbrosky looked disgusted. "Siddown and close your face. Don't use that picture, Perkins-I'm warning you."

"Of what? Going to make me dance with Dugan? Come on, Pappy. Come on, Clarence." They left.

"OUR FAIR CITY" read the next day. "City Hall Starts Clean Up. While the city street cleaners were enjoying their usual siesta, Lieutenant Dumbrosky, acting on orders of Hizzoner's office, raided our Third Avenue whirlwind. It went sour, as Patrolman Dugan could not entice the whirlwind into the paddy wagon. Dauntless Dugan was undeterred; he took a citizen standing nearby, one James Metcalfe, parking lot attendant, into custody as an accomplice of the whirlwind. An accomplice in what, Dugan didn't say-everybody knows that an accomplice is something pretty awful. Lieutenant Dumbrosky questioned the accomplice. See cut. Lieutenant Dumbrosky weighs 215 pounds, without his shoes. The accomplice weighs 119.

"Moral: Don't get underfoot when the police department is playing games with the wind.

"P. S. As we go to press, the whirlwind is still holding the 1898 museum piece. Stop by Third and Main and take a look. Better hurry-Dumbrosky is expected to make an arrest momentarily."

Pete's column continued needling the administration the following day: "Those Missing Files. It is annoying to know that any document needed by the Grand Jury is sure to be mislaid before it can be introduced in evidence. We suggest that Kitten, our Third Avenue Whirlwind, be hired by the city as file clerk extraordinary and entrusted with any item which is likely to be needed later. She could take the special civil exam used to reward the faithful-the one nobody ever flunks.

"Indeed, why limit Kitten to a lowly clerical job? She is persistent-and she hangs on to what she gets. No one will argue that she is less qualified than some city officials we have had.

"Let's run Kitten for Mayor! She's an ideal candidate-she has the common touch, she doesn't mind hurly-burly, she runs around in circles, she knows how to throw dirt, and the opposition can't pin anything

on her.

"As to the sort of Mayor she would make, there is an old story-Aesop told it-about King Log and King Stork. We're fed up with King Stork; King Log would be welcome relief.

"Memo to Hizzoner-what did become of those Grand Avenue paving bids?"

"P. S. Kitten still has the 1898 newspaper on exhibit. Stop by and see it before our police department figures out some way to intimidate a whirlwind."

Pete snagged Clarence and drifted down to the parking lot. The lot was fenced now; a man at a gate handed them two tickets but waved away their money. Inside he found a large circle chained off for Kitten and Pappy inside it. They pushed their way through the crowd to the old man. "Looks like you're coining money, Pappy."

"Should be, but I'm not. They tried to close me up this morning, Pete. Wanted me to pay the \$50-a-day circus-and-carnival fee and post a bond besides. So I quit charging for the tickets-but I'm keeping track of them. I'll sue 'em, by gee."

"You won't collect, not in this town. Never mind, we'll make 'em squirm till they let up."

"That's not all. They tried to capture Kitten this morning."

"Huh? Who? How?"

"The cops. They showed up with one of those blower machines used to ventilate manholes, rigged to run backwards and take a suction. The idea was to suck Kitten down into it, or anyhow to grab what she was carrying."

Pete whistled. "You should have called me."

"Wasn't necessary. I warned Kitten and she stashed the Spanish-War paper someplace, then came back. She loved it. She went through that machine about six times, like a merry-go-round. She'd zip through and come out more full of pep than ever. Last time through she took Sergeant Yancel's cap with her and it clogged the machine and ruined his cap. They got disgusted and left."

Pete chortled. "You still should have called me. Clarence should have gotten a picture of that."

"Got it," said Clarence.

"Huh? I didn't know you were here this morning, Clarence."

"You didn't ask me."

Pete looked at him. "Clarence, darling-the idea of a news picture is to print it, not to hide it in the art department."

"On your desk," said Clarence.

"Oh. Well, let's move on to a less confusing subject. Pappy, I'd like to put up a big sign here."

"Why not? What do you want to say?"

"Kitten-for-Mayor-Whirlwind Campaign Headquarters. Stick a 24-sheet across the corner of the lot, where they can see it both ways. It fits in with-oh, oh! Company, girls!" He jerked his head toward the entrance.

Sergeant Yancel was back. "All right, all right!" he was saying. "Move on! Clear out of here." He and three cohorts were urging the spectators out of the lot. Pete went to him.

"What goes on, Yancel?"

Yancel looked around. "Oh, it's you, huh? Well, you, too-we got to clear this place out. Emergency."

Pete looked back over his shoulder. "Better get Kitten out of the way, Pappy!" he called out. "Now, Clarence."

"Got it," said Clarence.

"Okay," Pete answered. "Now, Yancel, you might tell me what it is we just took a picture of, so we can title it properly."

"Smart guy. You and your stooge had better scram if you don't want your heads blown off. We're setting up a bazooka."

"You're setting up a what?" Pete looked toward the squad car, unbelievably. Sure enough, two of the cops were unloading a bazooka. "Keep shooting, kid," he said to Clarence.

"Natch," said Clarence.

"And quit popping your bubble gum. Now, look, Yancel-I'm just a newsboy. What in the world is

the idea?"

"Stick around and find out, wise guy." Yancel turned away. "Okay there! Start doing it-commence firing!"

One of the cops looked up. "At what, Sergeant?"

"I thought you used to be a marine-at the whirlwind, of course."

Pappy leaned over Pete's shoulder. "What are they doing?"

"I'm beginning to get a glimmering. Pappy, keep Kitten out of range-I think they mean to put a rocket shell through her gizzard. It might bust up her dynamic stability or something."

"Kitten's safe. I told her to hide. But this is crazy, Pete. They must be absolute, complete and teetotal nuts."

"Any law says a cop has to be sane to be on the force?"

"What whirlwind, Sergeant?" the bazooka man was asking. Yancel started to tell him, forcefully, then deflated when he realized that no whirlwind was available.

"You wait," he told him, and turned to Pappy. "You!" he yelled. "You chased away that whirlwind. Get it back here."

Pete took out his notebook. "This is interesting, Yancel. Is it your professional opinion that a whirlwind can be ordered around like a trained dog? Is that the official position of the police department?"

"I -- No comment! You button up, or I'll run you in."

"By all means. But you have that Buck-Rogers cannon pointed so that, after the shell passes through the whirlwind, if any, it should end up just about at the city hall. Is this a plot to assassinate Hizzoner?"

Yancel looked around suddenly, then let his gaze travel an imaginary trajectory.

"Hey, you lugs!" he shouted. "Point that thing the other way. You want to knock off the Mayor?"

"That's better," Pete told the Sergeant. "Now they have it trained on the First National Bank. I can't wait."

Yancel looked over the situation again. "Point it where it won't hurt anybody," he ordered. "Do I have to do all your thinking?"

"But, Sergeant -- "

"Well?"

"You point it. We'll fire it."

Pete watched them. "Clarence," he sighed, "you stick around and get a pic of them loading it back into the car. That will be in about five minutes. Pappy and I will be in the Happy Hour Bar-Grill. Get a nice picture, with Yancel's features."

"Natch," said Clarence.

The next installment of OUR FAIR CITY featured three cuts and was headed "Police Declare War on Whirlwind." Pete took a copy and set out for the parking lot, intending to show it to Pappy.

Pappy wasn't there. Nor was Kitten. He looked around the neighborhood, poking his nose in lunchrooms and bars. No luck.

He headed back toward the Forum building, telling himself that Pappy might be shopping, or at a movie. He returned to his desk, made a couple of false starts on a column for the morrow, crumpled them up and went to the art department. "Hey! Clarence! Have you been down to the parking lot today?"

"Nah."

"Pappy's missing."

"So what?"

"Well, come along. We got to find him."

"Why?" But he came, lugging his camera.

The lot was still deserted, no Pappy, no Kitten-not even a stray breeze. Pete turned away. "Come on, Clarence-say, what are you shooting now?"

Clarence had his camera turned up toward the sky. "Not shooting," said Clarence. "Light is no good."

"What was it?"

"Whirlwind."

"Huh? Kitten?"

"Maybe."

"Here, Kitten-come, Kitten." The whirlwind came back near him, spun faster, and picked up a piece of cardboard it had dropped. It whipped it around, then let him have it in the face.

"That's not funny, Kitten," Pete complained. "Where's Pappy?"

The whirlwind sidled back toward him. He saw it reach again for the cardboard. "No, you don't!" he yelped and reached for it, too.

The whirlwind beat him to it. It carried it up some hundred feet and sailed it back. The card caught him edgewise on the bridge of the nose. "Kitten!" Pete yelled. "Quit the horsing around."

It was a printed notice, about six by eight inches. Evidently it had been tacked up; there were small tears at all four corners. It read: "THE RITZ-CLASSIC" and under that, "Room 2013, Single Occupancy \$6.00, Double Occupancy \$8.00." There followed a printed list of the house rules.

Pete stared at it and frowned. Suddenly he chucked it back at the whirlwind. Kitten immediately tossed it back in his face.

"Come on, Clarence," he said briskly. "We're going to the Ritz-Classic-room 2013."

"Natch," said Clarence.

The Ritz-Classic was a colossal fleabag, favored by the bookie-and-madame set, three blocks away. Pete avoided the desk by using the basement entrance. The elevator boy looked at Clarence's camera and said, "No, you don't, Doc. No divorce cases in this hotel."

"Relax," Pete told him. "That's not a real camera. We peddle marijuana-that's the hay mow."

"Why'n't you say so? You hadn't ought to carry it in a camera. You make people nervous. What floor?"

"Twenty-one."

The elevator operator took them up non-stop, ignoring other calls. "That'll be two bucks. Special service."

"What do you pay for the concession?" inquired Pete.

"You gotta nerve to beef-with your racket."

They went back down a floor by stair and looked up room 2013. Pete tried the knob cautiously; the door was locked. He knocked on it-no answer. He pressed an ear to it and thought he could hear movement inside. He stepped back, frowning.

Clarence said, "I just remembered something," and trotted away. He returned quickly, with a red fire ax. "Now?" he asked Pete.

"A lovely thought, Clarence! Not yet." Pete pounded and yelled, "Pappy! Oh, Pappy!"

A large woman in a pink coolie coat opened the door behind them. "How do you expect a party to sleep?" she demanded.

Pete said, "Quiet, madame! We're on the air." He listened. This time there were sounds of struggling and then, "Pete! Pe -- "

"Now!" said Pete. Clarence started swinging.

The lock gave up on the third swing. Pete poured in, with Clarence after him. He collided with someone coming out and sat down abruptly. When he got up he saw Pappy on a bed. The old man was busily trying to get rid of a towel tied around his mouth.

Pete snatched it away. "Get 'em!" yelled Pappy.

"Soon as I get you untied."

"I ain't tied. They took my pants. Boy, I thought you'd never come!"

"Took Kitten a while to make me understand."

"I got 'em," announced Clarence. "Both of 'em."

"Where?" demanded Pete.

"Here," said Clarence proudly, and patted his camera.

Pete restrained his answer and ran to the door. "They went thata-way," said the large woman,

pointing. He took off, skidded around the corner and saw an elevator door just closing.

Pete stopped, bewildered by the crowd just outside the hotel. He was looking uncertainly around when Pappy grabbed him. "There! That car!" The car Pappy pointed out was even then swinging out from the curb just beyond the rank of cabs in front of the hotel; with a deep growl it picked up speed, and headed away. Pete yanked open the door of the nearest cab.

"Follow that car!" he yelled. They all piled in.

"Why?" asked the hackie.

Clarence lifted the fire ax. "Now?" he asked.

The driver ducked. "Forget it," he said. "It was just a yak." He started after the car.

The hack driver's skill helped them in the downtown streets, but the driver of the other car swung right on Third and headed for the river. They streamed across it, fifty yards apart, with traffic snarled behind them, and then were on the no-speed-limit freeway. The cabbie turned his head. "Is the camera truck keeping up?"

"What camera truck?"

"Ain't this a movie?"

"Good grief, no! That car is filled with kidnapers. Faster!"

"A snatch? I don't want no part of it." He braked suddenly.

Pete took the ax and prodded the driver. "You catch 'em!"

The hack speeded up again but the driver protested, "Not in this wreck. They got more power than me."

Pappy grabbed Pete's arm. "There's Kitten!"

"Where? Oh, never mind that now!"

"Slow down!" yelled Pappy. "Kitten, oh, Kitten -- over here!"

The whirlwind swooped down and kept pace with them. Pappy called to it. "Here, baby! Go get that car! Up ahead-get it!"

Kitten seemed confused, uncertain. Pappy repeated it and she took off-like a whirlwind. She dipped and gathered a load of paper and trash as she flew.

They saw her dip and strike the car ahead, throwing paper in the face of the driver. The car wobbled. She struck again. The car veered, climbed the curb, ricocheted against the crash rail, and fetched up against a lamp post.

Five minutes later Pete, having left Kitten, Clarence, and the fire ax to hold the fort over two hoodlums suffering from abrasion, multiple contusions and shock, was feeding a dime into a pay phone at the nearest filling station. He dialed long distance. "Gimme the FBI's kidnap number," he demanded. "You know-the Washington, D.C., snatch number."

"My goodness," said the operator, "do you mind if I listen in?"

"Get me that number!"

"Right away!"

Presently a voice answered, "Federal Bureau of Investigation."

"Lemme talk to Hoover! Huh? Okay, okay-I'll talk to you. Listen, this is a snatch case. I've got 'em on ice, for the moment, but unless you get one of your boys from your local office here pronto there won't be any snatch case-not if the city cops get here first. What?" Pete quieted down and explained who he was, where he was, and the more believable aspects of the events that had led up to the present situation. The government man cut in on him as he was urging speed and more speed and assured him that the local office was already being notified.

Pete got back to the wreck just as Lieutenant Dumbrosky climbed out of a squad car. Pete hurried up. "Don't do it, Dumbrosky," he yelled.

The big cop hesitated. "Don't do what?"

"Don't do anything. The FBI are on their way now-and you're already implicated. Don't make it any worse."

Pete pointed to the two hoodlums; Clarence was sitting on one and resting the spike of the ax against

the back of the other. "Those birds have already sung. This town is about to fall apart. If you hurry, you might be able to get a plane for Mexico."

Dumbrosky looked at him. "Wise guy," he said doubtfully.

"Ask them. They confessed."

One of the hoods raised his head. "We was threatened," he announced. "Take 'em in, lieutenant. They assaulted us."

"Go ahead," Pete said cheerfully. "Take us all in-together. Then you won't be able to lose that pair before the FBI can question them. Maybe you can cop a plea."

"Now?" asked Clarence.

Dumbrosky swung around. "Put that ax down!"

"Do as he says, Clarence. Get your camera ready to get a picture as the G-men arrive."

"You didn't send for no G-men."

"Look behind you!"

A dark blue sedan slid quietly to a stop and four lean, brisk men got out. The first of them said, "Is there someone here named Peter Perkins?"

"Me," said Pete. "Do you mind if I kiss you?"

It was after dark but the parking lot was crowded and noisy. A stand for the new Mayor and distinguished visitors had been erected on one side, opposite it was a bandstand; across the front was a large illuminated sign: HOME OF KITTEN-HONORARY CITIZEN OF OUR FAIR CITY.

In the fenced-off circle in the middle Kitten herself bounced and spun and swayed and danced. Pete stood on one side of the circle with Pappy opposite him; at four-foot intervals around it children were posted. "All set?" called out Pete.

"All set," answered Pappy. Together, Pete, Pappy and the kids started throwing serpentine into the ring. Kitten swooped, gathered the ribbons up and wrapped them around herself.

"Confetti!" yelled Pete. Each of the kids dumped a sackful toward the whirlwind-little of it reached the ground.

"Balloons!" yelled Pete. "Lights!" Each of the children started blowing up toy balloons; each had a dozen different colors. As fast as they were inflated they fed them to Kitten. Floodlights and searchlights came on; Kitten was transformed into a fountain of boiling, bubbling color, several stories high.

"Now?" said Clarence.

"Now!"

The chances are you are prejudiced against werewolves. Anthony Boucher, however, is an unusually tolerant man, and when you have finished this simple narrative of the adventures of a well-meaning were, you may have acquired some of his broad outlook. Which is to say, in dealing with the supernatural, an open mind is just as important as in more ordinary traffic with humanity. Not that any of my best friends are werewolves (so far as I know)—but that, in any group, you will find some good and some bad.

Mr. Boucher, besides being a writer of s-f and mystery fiction, is a well-known critic and reviewer in both fields, and is also one-half of the editing team of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction.

The Compleat Werewolf
Anthony Boucher

The professor glanced at the note: Don't be silly—Gloria.

Wolfe Wolf crumpled the sheet of paper into a yellow ball and hurled it out the window into the sunshine of the bright campus spring. He made several choice and profane remarks in fluent Middle High German.

Emily looked up from typing the proposed budget for the departmental library. "I'm afraid I didn't understand that, Professor Wolf. I'm weak on Middle High."

"Just improvising," said Wolf, and sent a copy of the *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* to follow the telegram.

Emily rose from the typewriter. "There's something the matter. Did the committee reject your monograph on Hager?"

"That monumental contribution to human knowledge? Oh, no. Nothing so important as that."

"But you're so upset—"

"The office wife!" Wolf snorted. "And pretty damned polyandrous at that, with the whole department on your hands. Go away."

Emily's dark little face lit up with a flame of righteous anger that removed any trace of plainness. "Don't talk to me like that, Mr. Wolf. I'm simply trying to help you. And it isn't the whole department. It's—"

Professor Wolf picked up an inkwell, looked after the telegram and the *Journal*, then set the glass pot down again. "No. There are better ways of going to pieces. Sorrows drown easier than they smash. Get Herbrecht to take my two-o'clock, will you?"

"Where are you going?"

"To hell in sectors. So long."

"Wait. Maybe I can help you. Remember when the dean jumped you for serving drinks to students? Maybe I can—"

Wolf stood in the doorway and extended one arm impressively, pointing with that curious index which was as long as the middle finger. "Madam, academically you are indispensable. You are the prop and stay of the existence of this department. But at the moment this department can go to hell, where it will doubtless continue to need your invaluable services."

"But don't you see—" Emily's voice shook. "No. Of course not. You wouldn't see. You're just a man—no, not even a man. You're just Professor Wolf. You're Woof-woof."

Wolf staggered. "I'm what?"

"Woof-woof. That's what everybody calls you because your name's Wolfe Wolf. All your students, everybody. But you wouldn't notice a thing like that. Oh, no. Woof-woof, that's what you are."

"This," said Wolfe Wolf, "is the crowning blow. My heart is breaking, my world is shattered, I've got to walk a mile from the campus to find a bar; but all this isn't enough. I've got to be called Woof-woof. Goodbye!"

He turned, and in the doorway caromed into a vast and yielding bulk, which gave out with a noise that might have been either a greeting of "Wolf!" or more probably an inevitable grunt of "Oof!"

Wolf backed into the room and admitted Professor Fearing, paunch, pince-nez, cane and all. The older man waddled over to his desk, plumped himself down, and exhaled a long breath. "My dear boy," he gasped. "Such impetuosity."

"Sorry, Oscar."

"Ah, youth—" Professor Fearing fumbled about for a handkerchief, found none, and proceeded to polish his pince-nez on his somewhat stringy necktie. "But why such haste to depart? And why is Emily crying?"

"Is she?"

"You see?" said Emily hopelessly, and muttered "Woof-woof" into her damp handkerchief.

"And why do copies of the *JEGP* fly about my head as I harmlessly cross the campus? Do we have teleportation on our hands?"

"Sorry," Wolf repeated curtly. "Temper. Couldn't stand that ridiculous argument of Glocke's. Goodbye."

"One moment." Professor Fearing fished into one of his unnumbered handkerchiefless pockets and produced a sheet of yellow paper. "I believe this is yours?"

Wolf snatched at it and quickly converted it into confetti.

Fearing chuckled. "How well I remember when Gloria was a student here! I was thinking of it only

last night when I saw her in *Moonbeams and Melody*. How she did upset this whole department! Heavens, my boy, if I'd been a younger man myself—"

"I'm going. You'll see about Herbrecht, Emily?"

Emily sniffed and nodded.

"Come, Wolfe." Fearing's voice had grown more serious. "I didn't mean to plague you. But you mustn't take these things too hard. There are better ways of finding consolation than in losing your temper or getting drunk."

"Who said anything about—"

"Did you need to say it? No, my boy, if you were to—You're not a religious man, are you?"

"Good God, no," said Wolf contradictorily.

"If only you were... If I might make a suggestion, Wolfe, why don't you come over to the Temple tonight? We're having very special services. They might take your mind off Glo—off your troubles."

"Thanks, no. I've always meant to visit your Temple—I've heard the damndest rumors about it—but not tonight. Some other time."

"Tonight would be especially interesting."

"Why? What's so special of a feast day about April thirtieth?"

Fearing shook his gray head. "It is shocking how ignorant a scholar can be outside of his chosen field... But you know the place, Wolfe; I'll hope to see you there tonight."

"Thanks. But my troubles don't need any supernatural solutions. A couple of zombies will do nicely, and I do *not* mean serviceable stiff. Goodbye, Oscar." He was halfway through the door before he added as an afterthought, "Bye, Emily."

"Such rashness," Fearing murmured. "Such impetuosity. Youth is a wonderful thing to enjoy, is it not, Emily?"

Emily said nothing, but plunged into typing the proposed budget as though all the fiends of hell were after her, as indeed many of them were.

The sun was setting, and Wolf's tragic account of his troubles had laid an egg, too. The bartender had polished every glass in the joint and still the repetitive tale kept pouring forth. He was torn between a boredom new even in his experience and a professional admiration for a customer who could consume zombies indefinitely.

"Did I tell you about the time she flunked the mid-term?" Wolf demanded truculently.

"Only three times," said the bartender.

"All right, then; I'll tell you. Yunnerstand, I don't do things like this. Profeshcal ethons, that's what's I've got. But this was different. This wasn't like somebody that doesn't know because she wasn't the kind of girl that has to know just because she doesn't know; this was a girl that didn't know the kind of things a girl has to know if she's the kind of girl that ought to know that kind of things. Yunnerstand?"

The bartender cast a calculating glance at the plump little man who sat alone at the end of the deserted bar, carefully nursing his gin-and-tonic.

"She made me see that. She made me see lossa things and I can still see the things she made me see the things. It wasn't just like a professor falls for a coed, yunnerstand? This was different. This was wannaful. This was like a whole new life, like."

The bartender sidled down to the end of the bar. "Brother," he whispered softly.

The little man with the odd beard looked up from his gin-and-tonic. "Yes, colleague?"

"If I listen to that potted professor another five minutes, I'm going to start smashing up the joint. How's about slipping down there and standing in for me, huh?"

The little man looked Wolf over and fixed his gaze especially on the hand that clenched the tall zombie glass. "Gladly, colleague," he nodded.

The bartender sighed a gust of relief.

"She was Youth," Wolf was saying intently to where the bartender had stood. "But it wasn't just that. This was different. She was Life and Excitement and Joy and Ecstasy and stuff. Yunner—" He broke off

and stared at the empty space. "Uh-mazing!" he observed. "Right before my very eyes. *Uh-mazing!*"

"You were saying, colleague?" the plump little man prompted from the adjacent stool.

Wolf turned. "So there you are. Did I tell you about the time I went to her house to check her term paper?"

"No. But I have a feeling you will."

"Howja know? Well, this night—"

The little man drank slowly; but his glass was empty by the time Wolf had finished the account of an evening of pointlessly tentative flirtation. Other customers were drifting in, and the bar was now about a third full.

"—and ever since then—" Wolf broke off sharply. "That isn't you," he objected.

"I think it is, colleague."

"But you're a bartender and *you* aren't a bartender."

"No. I'm a magician."

"Oh. That explains it. Now, like I was telling you—Hey! Your bald is beard."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Your bald is beard. Just like your head. It's all jussa fringe running around."

"I like it that way."

"And your glass is empty."

"That's all right too."

"Oh, no, it isn't. It isn't every night you get to drink with a man that proposed to Gloria Garton and got turned down. This is an occasion for celebration." Wolf thumped loudly on the bar and held up his first two fingers.

The little man regarded their equal length. "No," he said softly. "I think I'd better not. I know my capacity. If I have another—well, things might start hap-pening."

"Lettemappen!"

"No. Please, colleague. I'd rather—"

The bartender brought the drinks. "Go on, brother," he whispered. "Keep him quiet. I'll do you a favor sometime."

Reluctantly the little man sipped at his fresh gin-and-tonic.

The professor took a gulp of his nth zombie. "My name's Woof-woof," he proclaimed. "Lots of people call me Wolfe Wolf. They think that's funny. But it's really Woof-woof. Wazoors?"

The other paused a moment to decipher that Arabic-sounding word, then said, "Mine's Ozymandias the Great."

"That's a funny name."

"I told you, I'm a magician. Only I haven't worked for a long time. Theatrical managers are peculiar, colleague. They don't want a real magician. They won't even let me show 'em my best stuff. Why, I remember one night in Darjeeling—"

"Glad to meet you, Mr...Mr.—"

"You can call me Ozzy. Most people do."

"Glad to meet you, Ozzy. Now, about this girl. This Gloria. Yunnerstand, donya?"

"Sure, colleague."

"She thinks a professor of German is nothing. She wants something glamor-ous. She says if I was an actor, now, or a G-man—Yunnerstand?"

Ozymandias the Great nodded.

"Awright, then! So yunnerstand. Fine. But whatddayou want to keep talking about it for?"

Yunnerstand. That's that. To hell with it."

Ozymandias' round and fringed face brightened. "Sure," he said, and added recklessly, "Let's drink to that."

They clinked glasses and drank. Wolf carelessly tossed off a toast in Old Low Frankish, with an unpardonable error in the use of the genitive.

The two men next to them began singing "My Wild Irish Rose," but trailed off disconsolately. "What

we need," said the one with the derby, "is a tenor."

"What I need," Wolf muttered, "is a cigarette."

"Sure," said Ozymandias the Great. The bartender was drawing beer directly in front of them. Ozymandias reached across the bar, removed a lighted cigarette from the barkeep's ear, and handed it to his companion.

"Where'd that come from?"

"I don't quite know. All I know is how to get them. I told you I was a magician."

"Oh. I see. Pressajijijation."

"No. Not a prestidigitator; I said a magician. Oh, blast it! I've done it again. More than one gin-and-tonic and I start showing off."

"I don't believe you," said Wolf flatly. "No such thing as magicians. That's just as silly as Oscar Fearing and his Temple and what's so special about April thirtieth anyway?"

The bearded man frowned. "Please, colleague. Let's forget it."

"No. I don't believe you. You pressajijijated that cigarette. You didn't magic it." His voice began to rise. "You're a fake."

"Please, brother," the barkeep whispered. "Keep him quiet."

"All right," said Ozymandias wearily. "I'll show you something that can't be prestidigitation." The couple adjoining had begun to sing again. "They need a tenor. All right; listen!"

And the sweetest, most ineffably Irish tenor ever heard joined in on the duet. The singers didn't worry about the source; they simply accepted the new voice gladly and were spurred on to their very best, with the result that the bar knew the finest harmony it had heard since the night the Glee Club was suspended en masse.

Wolf looked impressed, but shook his head. "That's not magic either. That's ventrocolism."

"As a matter of strict fact, that was a street singer who was killed in the Easter Rebellion. Fine fellow, too; never heard a better voice, unless it was that night in Darjeeling when—"

"Fake!" said Wolfe Wolf loudly and belligerently.

Ozymandias once more contemplated that long index finger. He looked at the professor's dark brows that met in a straight line over his nose. He picked his companion's limpish hand off the bar and scrutinized the palm. The growth of hair was not marked, but it was perceptible.

The magician chortled. "And you sneer at magic!"

"Whasso funny about me sneering at magic?"

Ozymandias lowered his voice. "Because, my fine furry friend, you are a werewolf."

The Irish martyr had begun "Rose of Tralee," and the two mortals were join-ing in valiantly.

"I'm what?"

"A werewolf."

"But there isn't any such thing. Any fool knows that."

"Fools," said Ozymandias, "know a great deal which the wise do not. There are werewolves. There always have been, and quite probably always will be." He spoke as calmly and assuredly as though he were mentioning that the earth was round. "And there are three infallible physical signs: the meeting of eyebrows, the long index finger, the hairy palms. You have all three. And even your name is an indication. Family names do not come from nowhere. Every Smith has an ances-tor somewhere who was a smith. Every Fisher comes from a family that once fished. And your name is Wolf."

The statement was so quiet, so plausible, that Wolf faltered.

"But a werewolf is a man that changes into a wolf. I've never done that. Hon-est I haven't."

"A mammal," said Ozymandias, "is an animal that bears its young alive and suckles them. A virgin is nonetheless a mammal. Because you have never changed does not make you any the less a werewolf."

"But a werewolf—" Suddenly Wolf's eyes lit up. "A werewolf! But that's even better than a G-man! Now I can show Gloria!"

"What on earth do you mean, colleague?"

Wolf was climbing down from his stool. The intense excitement of this bril-iant new idea seemed to have sobered him. He grabbed the little man by the sleeve. "Come on. We're going to find a nice quiet

place. And you're going to prove you're a magician."

"But how?"

"You're going to show me how to change!"

Ozymandias finished his gin-and-tonic, and with it drowned his last regretful hesitation. "Colleague," he announced, "you're on!"

Professor Oscar Fearing, standing behind the curiously carved lectern of the Temple of the Dark Truth, concluded the reading of the prayer with mumbling sonority. "And on this night of all nights, in the name of the black light that glows in the darkness, we give thanks!" He closed the parchment-bound book and faced the small congregation, calling out with fierce intensity, "Who wishes to give his thanks to the Lower Lord?"

A cushioned dowager rose. "I give thanks!" she shrieked excitedly. "My Ming Choy was sick, even unto death. I took of her blood and offered it to the Lower Lord, and he had mercy and restored her to me!"

Behind the altar an electrician checked his switches and spat disgustedly. "Bugs! Every last one of 'em!"

The man who was struggling into a grotesque and horrible costume paused and shrugged. "They pay good money. What's it to us if they're bugs?"

A tall, thin old man had risen uncertainly to his feet. "I give thanks!" he cried. "I give thanks to the Lower Lord that I have finished my great work. My protective screen against magnetic bombs is a tried and proven success, to the glory of our country and science and the Lord."

"Crackpot," the electrician muttered.

The man in costume peered around the altar. "Crackpot, hell! That's Chiswick from the physics department. Think of a man like that falling for this stuff! And listen to him: He's even telling about the government's plans for installation. You know, I'll bet you one of these fifth columnists could pick up something around here."

There was silence in the Temple when the congregation had finished its thanks-giving. Professor Fearing leaned over the lectern and spoke quietly and impressively. "As you know, brothers in Darkness, tonight is May Eve, the thirtieth of April, the night consecrated by the Church to that martyr missionary St. Walpurgis, and by us to other and deeper purposes. It is on this night, and this night only, that we may directly give our thanks to the Lower Lord himself. Not in wanton orgy and obscenity, as the Middle Ages misconceived his desires, but in praise and in the deep, dark joy that issues forth from Blackness."

"Hold your hats, boys," said the man in the costume. "Here I go again."

"*Eka!*" Fearing thundered. "*Dva tri chaturi Pancha! Shas sapta! Ashta nava dasha ekadasha!*" He paused. There was always the danger that at this moment some scholar in this university town might recognize that the invocation, though perfect Sanskrit, consisted solely of the numbers from one to eleven. But no one stirred, and he launched forth in more apposite Latin: "*Per vota nostra ipse nunc surgat nobis dicatus Baal Zebub!*"

"Baal Zebub!" the congregation chorused.

"Cue," said the electrician, and pulled a switch.

The lights flickered and went out. Lightning played across the sanctuary. Suddenly out of the darkness came a sharp bark, a yelp of pain, and a long-drawn howl of triumph.

A blue light now began to glow dimly. In its faint reflection, the electrician was amazed to see his costumed friend at his side, nursing his bleeding hand.

"What the hell—" the electrician whispered.

"Hanged if I know. I go out there on cue, all ready to make my terrifying appearance, and what happens? Great big hell of a dog up and nips my hand. Why didn't they tell me they'd switched the script?"

In the glow of the blue light the congregation reverently contemplated the plump little man with the

fringe of beard and the splendid gray wolf that stood beside him. "Hail, O Lower Lord!" resounded the chorus, drowning out one spinster's murmur of "But my *dear*, I swear he was *much* handsomer last year."

"Colleagues!" said Ozymandias the Great, and there was utter silence, a dread hush awaiting the momentous words of the Lower Lord. Ozymandias took one step forward, placed his tongue carefully between his lips, uttered the ripest, juici-est raspberry of his career, and vanished, wolf and all.

Wolfe Wolf opened his eyes and shut them again hastily. He had never expected the quiet and sedate Berkeley Inn to install centrifugal rooms. It wasn't fair. He lay in darkness, waiting for the whirling to stop and trying to reconstruct the past night.

He remembered the bar all right, and the zombies. And the bartender. Very sympathetic chap that, up until he suddenly changed into a little man with a fringe of beard. That was where things began getting strange. There was some-thing about a cigarette and an Irish tenor and a werewolf. Fantastic idea, that. Any fool knows—

Wolf sat up suddenly. *He* was the werewolf. He threw back the bedclothes and stared down at his legs. Then he sighed relief. They were long legs. They were hairy enough. They were brown from much tennis. But they were indisputably human.

He got up, resolutely stifling his qualms, and began to pick up the clothing that was scattered nonchalantly about the floor. A crew of gnomes was excavat-ing his skull, but he hoped they might go away if he didn't pay too much attention to them. One thing was certain: he was going to be good from now on. Gloria or no Gloria, heartbreak or no heartbreak, drowning your sorrows wasn't good enough. If you felt like this and could imagine you'd been a werewolf—

But why should he have imagined it in such detail? So many fragmentary memo-ries seemed to come back as he dressed. Going up Strawberry Canyon with the fringed beard, finding a desolate and isolated spot for magic, learning the words—

Hell, he could even remember the words. The word that changed you and the one that changed you back.

Had he made up those words, too, in his drunken imaginings? And had he made up what he could only barely recall—the wonderful, magical freedom of changing, the single, sharp pang of alteration and then the boundless happiness of being lithe and fleet and free?

He surveyed himself in the mirror. Save for the unwonted wrinkles in his conservative single-breasted gray suit, he looked exactly what he was: a quiet academician; a little better built, a little more impulsive, a little more romantic than most, perhaps, but still just that—Professor Wolf.

The rest was nonsense. But there was, that impulsive side of him suggested, only one way of proving the fact. And that was to say *The Word*.

"All right," said Wolfe Wolf to his reflection. "I'll show you." And he said it.

The pang was sharper and stronger than he'd remembered. Alcohol numbs you to pain. It tore him for a moment with an anguish like the descriptions of childbirth. Then it was gone, and he flexed his limbs in happy amazement. But he was not a lithe, fleet, free beast. He was a helplessly trapped wolf, irrevocably entangled in a conservative single-breasted gray suit.

He tried to rise and walk, but the long sleeves and legs tripped him over flat on his muzzle. He kicked with his paws, trying to tear his way out, and then stopped.

Werewolf or no werewolf, he was likewise still Professor Wolf, and this suit had cost thirty-five dollars. There must be some cheaper way of securing freedom than tearing the suit to shreds.

He used several good, round Low German expletives. This was a complica-tion that wasn't in any of the werewolf legends he'd ever read. There, people just—boom!—became wolves or—bang!—became men again. When they were men, they wore clothes; when they were wolves, they wore fur. Just like Hyperman becoming Bark Lent again on top of the Empire State Building and finding his street clothes right there. Most misleading. He began to remember now how Ozymandias the Great had made him strip before teaching him the words—

The words! That was it. All he had to do was say the word that changed you back—*Absarka!*—and he'd be a man again, comfortably fitted inside his suit. Then he could strip and play what games he wished. You see? Reason solves all. "*Absarka!*" he said.

Or thought he said. He went through all the proper mental processes for saying *Absarka!* but all that came out of his muzzle was a sort of clicking whine. And he was still a conservatively dressed and helpless wolf.

This was worse than the clothes problem. If he could be released only by saying *Absarka!* and if, being a wolf, he could say nothing, why, there he was. Indefinitely. He could go find Ozzy and ask—but how could a wolf wrapped up in a gray suit get safely out of a hotel and set out hunting for an unknown address?

He was trapped. He was lost. He was—
"*Absarka!*"

Professor Wolfe Wolf stood up in his grievously rumpled gray suit and beamed on the beard-fringed face of Ozymandias the Great.

"You see, colleague," the little magician explained, "I figured you'd want to try it again as soon as you got up, and I knew darned well you'd have your troubles. Thought I'd come over and straighten things out for you."

Wolf lit a cigarette in silence and handed the pack to Ozymandias. "When you came in just now," he said at last, "what did you see?"

"You as a wolf."

"Then it really—I actually—"

"Sure. You're a full-fledged werewolf, all right."

Wolf sat down on the rumpled bed. "I guess," he ventured slowly, "I've got to believe it. And if I believe that—But it means I've got to believe everything I've always scorned. I've got to believe in gods and devils and hells and—"

"You needn't be so pluralistic. But there is a God." Ozymandias said this as calmly and convincingly as he had stated last night that there were werewolves.

"And if there's a God, then I've got a soul?"

"Sure."

"And if I'm a werewolf—Hey!"

"What's the trouble, colleague?"

"All right, Ozzy. You know everything. Tell me this: Am I damned?"

"For what? Just for being a werewolf? Shucks, no; let me explain. There's two kinds of werewolves. There's the cursed kind that can't help themselves, that just go turning into wolves without any say in the matter; and there's the voluntary kind like you. Now, most of the voluntary kind are damned, sure, because they're wicked men who lust for blood and eat innocent people. But they aren't damnably wicked because they're werewolves; they became werewolves because they are damnably wicked. Now, you changed yourself just for the hell of it and because it looked like a good way to impress a gal; that's an innocent-enough motive, and being a werewolf doesn't make it any less so. Werewolves don't have to be mon-sters; it's just that we hear about only the ones that are."

"But how can I be voluntary when you told me I was a werewolf before I ever changed?"

"Not everybody can change. It's like being able to roll your tongue or wiggle your ears. You can, or you can't; and that's that. And as with those abilities, there's probably a genetic factor involved, though nobody's done any serious research on it. You were a werewolf *in posse*; now you're one *in esse*."

"Then it's all right? I can be a werewolf just for having fun, and it's safe?"

"Absolutely."

Wolf chortled. "Will I show Gloria! Dull and unglamorous indeed! Anybody can marry an actor or a G-man; but a werewolf—"

"Your children probably will be, too," said Ozymandias cheerfully.

Wolf shut his eyes dreamily, then opened them with a start. "You know what?"

"What?"

"I haven't got a hangover anymore! This is marvelous. This is—Why, this is practical. At last the perfect hangover cure. Shuffle yourself into a wolf and back and—Oh, that reminds me. How do I get back?"

"*Absarka.*"

"I know. But when I'm a wolf I can't say it."

"That," said Ozymandias sadly, "is the curse of being a white magician. You keep having to use the second-best form of spells, because the best would be black. Sure, a black-magic werebeast can turn himself back whenever he wants to. I remember in Darjeeling—"

"But how about me?"

"That's the trouble. You have to have somebody to say *Absarka!* for you. That's what I did last night, or do you remember? After we broke up the party at your friend's Temple—Tell you what. I'm retired now, and I've got enough to live on modestly because I can always magic up a little—Are you going to take up werewolfing seriously?"

"For a while, anyway. Till I get Gloria."

"Then why shouldn't I come and live here in your hotel? Then I'll always be handy to *Absarka!* you. After you get the girl, you can teach her."

Wolf extended his hand. "Noble of you. Shake." And then his eye caught his wrist watch. "Good Lord! I've missed two classes this morning. Werewolfing's all very well, but a man's got to work for his living."

"Most men." Ozymandias calmly reached his hand into the air and plucked a coin. He looked at it ruefully, it was a gold moidore. "Hang these spirits; I simply cannot explain to them about gold being illegal."

From Los Angeles, Wolf thought, with the habitual contempt of the northern Californian, as he surveyed the careless sport coat and the bright-yellow shirt of his visitor.

This young man rose politely as the professor entered the office. His green eyes gleamed cordially and his red hair glowed in the spring sunlight. "Professor Wolf?" he asked.

Wolf glanced impatiently at his desk. "Yes."

"O'Brien's the name. I'd like to talk to you a minute."

"My office hours are from three to four Tuesdays and Thursdays. I'm afraid I'm rather busy now."

"This isn't faculty business. And it's important." The young man's attitude was affable and casual, but he managed nonetheless to convey a sense of urgency that piqued Wolf's curiosity. The all-important letter to Gloria had waited while he took two classes; it could wait another five minutes.

"Very well, Mr. O'Brien."

"And alone, if you please."

Wolf himself hadn't noticed that Emily was in the room. He now turned to the secretary and said, "All right. If you don't mind, Emily—"

Emily shrugged and went out.

"Now, sir. What is this important and secret business?"

"Just a question or two. To start with, how well do you know Gloria Garton?"

Wolf paused. You could hardly say, "Young man, I am about to repropose to her in view of my becoming a werewolf." Instead he simply said—the truth, if not the whole truth—"She was a pupil of mine a few years ago."

"I said *do*, not *did*. How well do you know her now?"

"And why should I bother to answer such a question?"

The young man handed over a card. Wolf read:

FERGUS O'BREEN

Private Inquiry Agent

Licensed by the State of California

Wolf smiled. "And what does this mean? Divorce evidence? Isn't that the usual field of private inquiry agents?"

"Miss Garton isn't married, as you probably know very well. I'm just asking if you've been in touch with her much lately."

"And I'm simply asking why you should want to know."

O'Brien rose and began to pace around the office. "We don't seem to be getting very far, do we? I'm to take it that you refuse to state the nature of your relations with Gloria Garton?"

"I see no reason why I should do otherwise." Wolf was beginning to be annoyed.

To his surprise, the detective relaxed into a broad grin. "OK. Let it ride. Tell me about your department. How long have the various faculty members been here?"

"Instructors and all?"

"Just the professors."

"I've been here for seven years. All the others at least a good ten, probably more. If you want exact figures, you can probably get them from the dean, unless, as I hope"—Wolf smiled cordially—"he throws you out flat on your red pate."

O'Brien laughed. "Professor, I think we could get on. One more question, and you can do some pate-tossing yourself. Are you an American citizen?"

"Of course."

"And the rest of the department?"

"All of them. And now would you have the common decency to give me some explanation of this fantastic farrago of questions?"

"No," said O'Brien casually. "Goodbye, professor." His alert green eyes had been roaming about the room, sharply noticing everything. Now, as he left, they rested on Wolf's long index finger, moved up to his heavy meeting eyebrows, and returned to the finger. There was a suspicion of a startled realization in those eyes as he left the office.

But that was nonsense, Wolf told himself. A private detective, no matter how shrewd his eyes, no matter how apparently meaningless his inquiries, would surely be the last man on earth to notice the signs of lycanthropy.

Funny. "Werewolf" was a word you could accept. You could say, "I'm a werewolf," and it was all right. But say "I am a lycanthrope" and your flesh crawled. Odd. Possibly material for a paper on the influence of etymology on connotation for one of the learned periodicals.

But, hell! Wolfe Wolf was no longer primarily a scholar. He was a werewolf now, a white-magic werewolf, a werewolf-for-fun; and fun he was going to have. He lit his pipe, stared at the blank paper on his desk, and tried desperately to draft a letter to Gloria. It should hint at just enough to fascinate her and hold her interest until he could go south when the term ended and reveal to her the whole wonderful new truth. It—

Professor Oscar Fearing grunted his ponderous way into the office. "Good afternoon, Wolfe. Hard at it, my boy?"

"Afternoon," Wolf replied distractedly, and continued to stare at the paper.

"Great events coming, eh? Are you looking forward to seeing the glorious Gloria?"

Wolf started. "How—What do you mean?"

Fearing handed him a folded newspaper. "You hadn't heard?"

Wolf read with growing amazement and delight:

GLORIA GARTON TO ARRIVE FRIDAY

Local Girl Returns to Berkeley

As part of the most spectacular talent hunt since the search for Scarlett O'Hara, Gloria Garton, glamorous Metropolis starlet, will visit Berkeley Friday.

Friday afternoon at the Campus Theater, Berkeley canines will have their chance to compete in the

nationwide quest for a dog to play Tookah the wolf dog in the great Metropolis epic "Fangs of the Forest," and Gloria Garton herself will be present at the auditions.

"I owe so much to Berkeley," Miss Garton said. "It will mean so much to me to see the campus and the city again." Miss Garton has the starring human role in "Fangs of the Forest."

Miss Garton was a student at the University of California when she received her first chance in films. She is a member of Mask and Dagger, honorary dramatic society, and Rho Rho Rho Sorority.

Wolfe Wolf glowed. This was perfect. No need now to wait till term was over. He could see Gloria now and claim her in all his wolfish vigor. Friday—today was Wednesday; that gave him two nights to practice and perfect the technique of werewolfry. And then—

He noticed the dejected look on the older professor's face, and a small re-morse smote him. "How did things go last night, Oscar?" he asked sympathetically. "How were your big Walpurgis Night services?"

Fearing regarded him oddly. "You know that now? Yesterday April thirtieth meant nothing to you."

"I got curious and looked it up. But how did it go?"

"Well enough," Fearing lied feebly. "Do you know, Wolfe," he demanded after a moment's silence, "what is the real curse of every man interested in the occult?"

"No. What?"

"That true power is never enough. Enough for yourself, perhaps, but never enough for others. So that no matter what your true abilities, you must forge on beyond them into charlatanry to convince the others. Look at St. Germain. Look at Francis Stuart. Look at Cagliostro. But the worst tragedy is the next stage: when you realize that your powers were greater than you supposed and that the charlatanry was needless. When you realize that you have no notion of the extent of your powers. Then—"

"Then, Oscar?"

"Then, my boy, you are a badly frightened man."

Wolf wanted to say something consoling. He wanted to say, "Look, Oscar. It was just me. Go back to your half-hearted charlatanry and be happy." But he couldn't do that. Only Ozzy could know the truth of that splendid gray wolf. Only Ozzy and Gloria.

The moon was bright on that hidden spot in the canyon. The night was still. And Wolfe Wolf had a severe case of stage fright. Now that it came to the real thing—for this morning's clothes-complicated fiasco hardly counted and last night he could not truly remember—he was afraid to plunge cleanly into wolfdom and anxious to stall and talk as long as possible.

"Do you think," he asked the magician nervously, "that I could teach Gloria to change, too?"

Ozymandias pondered. "Maybe, colleague. It'd depend. She might have the natural ability, and she might not. And, of course, there's no telling what she might change into."

"You mean she wouldn't necessarily be a wolf?"

"Of course not. The people who can change, change into all sorts of things. And every folk knows best the kind that most interests it. We've got an English and Central European tradition, so we know mostly about werewolves. But take Scandinavia and you'll hear chiefly about werebears, only they call 'em berserkers. And Orientals, now, they're apt to know about weretigers. Trouble is, we've thought so much about *werewolves* that that's all we know the signs for; I wouldn't know how to spot a weretiger just offhand."

"Then there's no telling what might happen if I taught her The Word?"

"Not the least. Of course, there's some werethings that just aren't much use being. Take like being a wereant. You change and somebody steps on you and that's that. Or like a fella I knew once in Madagascar. Taught him The Word, and know what? Hanged if he wasn't a werediplodocus. Shattered the whole house into little pieces when he changed and damned near trampled me under hoof before I could say *Absarka!* He decided not to make a career of it. Or then there was that time in

Darjeeling—But, look, colleague, are you going to stand around here naked all night?"

"No," said Wolf. "I'm going to change now. You'll take my clothes back to the hotel?"

"Sure. They'll be there for you. And I've put a very small spell on the night clerk, just enough for him not to notice wolves wandering in. Oh, and by the way—anything missing from your room?"

"Not that I noticed. Why?"

"Because I thought I saw somebody come out of it this afternoon. Couldn't be sure, but I think he came from there. Young fella with red hair and Hollywood clothes."

Wolfe Wolf frowned. That didn't make sense. Pointless questions from a de-tective were bad enough, but searching your hotel room—But what were detec-tives to a full-fledged werewolf? He grinned, nodded a friendly goodbye to Ozymandias the Great, and said The Word.

The pain wasn't so sharp as this morning, though still quite bad enough. But it passed almost at once, and his whole body filled with a sense of limitless free-dom. He lifted his snout and sniffed deep at the keen freshness of this night air. A whole new realm of pleasure opened up for him through this acute new nose alone. He wagged his tail amicably at Ozzy and set off up the canyon on a long, easy lope.

For hours, loping was enough—simply and purely enjoying one's wolfness was the finest pleasure one could ask. Wolf left the canyon and turned up into the hills, past the Big C and on into noble wildness that seemed far remote from all campus civilization. His brave new legs were stanch and tireless, his wind seemingly inex-haustible. Every turning brought fresh and vivid scents of soil and leaves and air, and life was shimmering and beautiful.

But a few hours of this, and Wolf realized that he was damned lonely. All this grand exhilaration was very well, but if his mate Gloria were loping by his side—And what fun was it to be something as splendid as a wolf if no one admired you? He began to want people, and he turned back to the city.

Berkeley goes to bed early. The streets were deserted. Here and there a light burned in a rooming house where some solid grind was plodding on his almost-due term paper. Wolf had done that himself. He couldn't laugh in this shape, but his tail twitched with amusement at the thought.

He paused along the tree-lined street. There was a fresh human scent here, though the street seemed empty. Then he heard a soft whimpering, and trotted off toward the noise.

Behind the shrubbery fronting an apartment house sat a disconsolate two-year-old, shivering in his sunsuit and obviously lost for hours on hours. Wolf put a paw on the child's shoulder and shook him gently.

The boy looked around and was not in the least afraid. "He'o," he said, bright-ening up.

Wolf growled a cordial greeting, and wagged his tail and pawed at the ground to indicate that he'd take the lost infant wherever it wanted to go.

The child stood up and wiped away its tears with a dirty fist which left wide black smudges. "Tootootootoo!" he said.

Games, thought Wolf. He wants to play choo-choo. He took the child by the sleeve and tugged gently.

"Tootootootoo!" the boy repeated firmly. "Die way."

The sound of a railway whistle, to be sure, does die away; but this seemed a poetic expression for such a toddler. Wolf thought, and then abruptly would have snapped his fingers if he'd had them. The child was saying "2222 Dwight Way," having been carefully brought up to tell his address when lost. Wolf glanced up at the street sign. Bowditch and Hillegas; 2222 Dwight would be just a couple of blocks.

Wolf tried to nod his head, but the muscles didn't seem to work that way. Instead he wagged his tail in what he hoped indicated comprehension, and started off leading the child.

The infant beamed and said, "Nice woof-woof."

For an instant Wolf felt like a spy suddenly addressed by his right name, then realized that if some say "bow-wow" others might well say "woof-woof."

He led the child for two blocks without event. It felt good, having an innocent human being like this.

There was something about children; he hoped Gloria felt the same. He wondered what would happen if he could teach this confiding infant The Word. It would be swell to have a pup that would—

He paused. His nose twitched and the hair on the back of his neck rose. Ahead of them stood a dog: a huge mongrel, seemingly a mixture of St. Bernard and Husky. But the growl that issued from his throat indicated that carrying brandy kegs or rushing serum was not for him. He was a bandit, an outlaw, an enemy of man and dog. And they had to pass him.

Wolf had no desire to fight. He was as big as this monster and certainly, with his human brain, much cleverer; but scars from a dog fight would not look well on the human body of Professor Wolf, and there was, moreover, the danger of hurting the toddler in the fracas. It would be wiser to cross the street. But before he could steer the child that way, the mongrel brute had charged at them, yapping and snarling.

Wolf placed himself in front of the boy, poised and ready to leap in defense. The scar problem was secondary to the fact that this baby had trusted him. He was ready to face this cur and teach him a lesson, at whatever cost to his own human body. But halfway to him the huge dog stopped. His growls died away to a piteous whimper. His great flanks trembled in the moonlight. His tail curled craven between his legs. And abruptly he turned and fled.

The child crowed delightedly. "Bad woof-woof go away." He put his little arms around Wolf's neck. "Nice woof-woof." Then he straightened up and said insistently, "Tootootootoo. Die way," and Wolf led on, his strong wolf's heart pounding as it had never pounded at the embrace of a woman.

"Tootootootoo" was a small frame house set back from the street in a large yard. The lights were still on, and even from the sidewalk Wolf could hear a woman's shrill voice.

"—Since five o'clock this afternoon, and you've got to find him, Officer. You simply must. We've hunted all over the neighborhood and—"

Wolf stood up against the wall on his hind legs and rang the doorbell with his front right paw.

"Oh! Maybe that's somebody now. The neighbors said they'd—Come, Of-ficer, and let's see—Oh!"

At the same moment Wolf barked politely, the toddler yelled "Mamma!" and his thin and worn-looking young mother let out a scream—half delight at finding her child and half terror of this large gray canine shape that loomed behind him. She snatched up the infant protectively and turned to the large man in uniform. "Officer! Look! That big dreadful thing! It stole my Robby!"

"No," Robby protested firmly. "Nice woof-woof."

The officer laughed. "The lad's probably right, ma'am. It *is* a nice woof-woof. Found your boy wandering around and helped him home. You haven't maybe got a bone for him?"

"Let that big, nasty brute into my home? Never! Come on, Robby."

"Want my nice woof-woof."

"I'll woof-woof you, staying out till all hours and giving your father and me the fright of our lives. Just wait till your father sees you, young man; he'll—Oh, good night, Officer!" And she shut the door on the yowls of Robby.

The policeman patted Wolf's head. "Never mind about the bone, Rover. She didn't so much as offer me a glass of beer, either. My, you're a husky specimen, aren't you, boy? Look almost like a wolf. Who do you belong to, and what are you doing wandering about alone? Huh?" He turned on his flash and bent over to look at the nonexistent collar.

He straightened up and whistled. "No license. Rover, that's bad. You know what I ought to do? I ought to turn you in. If you weren't a hero that just got cheated out of his bone, I'd—Hell, I ought to do it, anyway. Laws are laws, even for heroes. Come on, Rover. We're going for a walk."

Wolf thought quickly. The pound was the last place on earth he wanted to wind up. Even Ozzy would never think of looking for him there. Nobody'd claim him, nobody'd say *Absarka!* and in the end a dose of chloroform—He wrenched loose from the officer's grasp on his hair and with one prodigious leap cleared the yard, landed on the sidewalk, and started hell for leather up the street. But the instant he was out of the officer's sight he stopped dead and slipped behind a hedge.

He scented the policeman's approach even before he heard it. The man was running with the lumbering haste of two hundred pounds. But opposite the hedge, he too stopped. For a moment Wolf wondered if his ruse had failed; but the officer had paused only to scratch his head and mutter, "Say!

There's something screwy here. *Who rang that doorbell?* The kid couldn't reach it, and the dog—Oh, well," he concluded. "Nuts," and seemed to find in that monosyllabic summation the solution to all his problems.

As his footsteps and smell died away, Wolf became aware of another scent. He had only just identified it as cat when someone said, "You're were, aren't you?"

Wolf started up, lips drawn back and muscles tense. There was nothing human in sight, but someone had spoken to him. Unthinkingly, he tried to say "Where are you?" but all that came out was a growl.

"Right behind you. Here in the shadows. You can scent me, can't you?"

"But you're a cat," Wolf thought in his snarls. "And you're talking."

"Of course. But I'm not talking human language. It's just your brain that takes it that way. If you had your human body, you'd think I was just going *meowrr*. But you are were, aren't you?"

"How do you...why do you think so?"

"Because you didn't try to jump me, as any normal dog would have. And besides, unless Confucius taught me all wrong, you're a wolf, not a dog; and we don't have wolves around here unless they're were."

"How do you know all this? Are you—"

"Oh, no. I'm just a cat. But I used to live next door to a werechow named Confucius. He taught me things."

Wolf was amazed. "You mean he was a man who changed to chow and stayed that way? Lived as a pet?"

"Certainly. This was back at the worst of the depression. He said a dog was more apt to be fed and looked after than a man. I thought it was a smart idea."

"But how terrible! Could a man so debase himself as—"

"Men don't debase themselves. They debase each other. That's the way of most weres. Some change to keep from being debased, others to do a little more effective debasing. Which are you?"

"Why, you see, I—"

"*Sh!* Look. This is going to be fun. Holdup."

Wolf peered around the hedge. A well-dressed, middle-aged man was walk-ing along briskly, apparently enjoying a night constitutional. Behind him moved a thin, silent figure. Even as Wolf watched, the figure caught up with him and whis-pered harshly, "Up with 'em, buddy!"

The quiet pomposity of the stroller melted away. He was ashen and aspen as the figure slipped a hand around into his breast pocket and removed an impres-sive wallet.

And what, thought Wolf, was the good of his fine, vigorous body if it merely crouched behind hedges as a spectator? In one fine bound, to the shocked amazement of the were-wise cat, he had crossed the hedge and landed with his forepaws full in the figure's face. It went over backward with him on top, and then there came a loud noise, a flash of light, and a frightful sharp smell. For a moment Wolf felt an acute pang in his shoulder, like the jab of a long needle, and then the pain was gone.

But his momentary recoil had been enough to let the figure get to its feet. "Missed you, huh?" it muttered. "Let's see how you like a slug in the belly, you interfering—" and he applied an epithet that would have been purely literal de-scription if Wolf had not been were.

There were three quick shots in succession even as Wolf sprang. For a second he experienced the most acute stomach-ache of his life. Then he landed again. The figure's head hit the concrete sidewalk and he was still.

Lights were leaping into brightness everywhere. Among all the confused noises, Wolf could hear the shrill complaints of Robby's mother, and among all the com-pounded smells, he could distinguish scent of the policeman who wanted to im-pound him. That meant getting the hell out, and quick.

The city meant trouble, Wolf decided as he loped off. He could endure lone-liness while he practiced his wolfry, until he had Gloria. Though just as a precau-tion he must arrange with Ozzy about a plausible-looking collar, and—

The most astounding realization yet suddenly struck him! He had received four bullets, three of them square in the stomach, and he hadn't a wound to show for it! Being a werewolf certainly offered its

practical advantages. Think what a criminal could do with such bullet-proofing. Or—But no. He was a werewolf for fun, and that was that.

But even for a werewolf, being shot, though relatively painless, is tiring. A great deal of nervous energy is absorbed in the magical and instantaneous knit-ting of those wounds. And when Wolfe Wolf reached the peace and calm of the uncivilized hills, he no longer felt like reveling in freedom. Instead he stretched out to his full length, nuzzled his head down between his forepaws, and slept.

"Now, the essence of magic," said Heliophagus of Smyrna, "is deceit; and that deceit is of two kinds. By magic, the magician deceives others; but magic deceives the magician himself."

So far the lycanthropic magic of Wolfe Wolf had worked smoothly and pleasantly, but now it was to show him the second trickery that lurks behind every magic trick. And the first step was that he slept.

He woke in confusion. His dreams had been human—and of Gloria—despite the body in which he dreamed them, and it took several full minutes for him to reconstruct just how he happened to be in that body. For a moment the dream, even that episode in which he and Gloria had been eating blueberry waffles on a roller coaster, seemed more sanely plausible than the reality.

But he readjusted quickly, and glanced up at the sky. The sun looked as though it had been up at least an hour, which meant in May that the time was somewhere between six and seven. Today was Thursday, which meant that he was saddled with an eight-o'clock class. That left plenty of time to change back, shave, dress, breakfast, and resume the normal life of Professor Wolf—which was, after all, important if he intended to support a wife.

He tried, as he trotted through the streets, to look as tame and unwolflike as possible, and apparently succeeded. No one paid him any mind save children, who wanted to play, and dogs, who began by snarling and ended by cowering away terrified. His friend the cat might be curiously tolerant of weres, but not so dogs.

He trotted up the steps of the Berkeley Inn confidently. The clerk was under a slight spell and would not notice wolves. There was nothing to do but rouse Ozzy, be *Absarka!*'d and—

"Hey! Where are you going? Get out of here! Shoo!"

It was the clerk, a stanch and brawny young man, who straddled the stairway and vigorously waved him off.

"No dogs in here! Go on now. Scoot!"

Quite obviously this man was under no spell, and equally obviously there was no way of getting up that staircase short of using a wolf's strength to tear the clerk apart. For a second Wolf hesitated. He had to get changed back. It would be a damnable pity to use his powers to injure another human being. If only he had not slept, and arrived before this unmagicked day clerk came on duty; but necessity knows no—

Then the solution hit him. Wolf turned and loped off just as the clerk hurled an ash tray at him. Bullets may be relatively painless, but even a werewolf's rump, he learned promptly, is sensitive to flying glass.

The solution was foolproof. The only trouble was that it meant an hour's wait, and he was hungry. Damnably hungry. He found himself even displaying a certain shocking interest in the plump occupant of a baby carriage. You do get different appetites with a different body. He could understand how some originally well-intentioned werewolves might in time become monsters. But he was stronger in will, and much smarter. His stomach could hold out until this plan worked.

The janitor had already opened the front door of Wheeler Hall, but the building was deserted. Wolf had no trouble reaching the second floor unnoticed or find-ing his classroom. He had a little more trouble holding the chalk between his teeth and a slight tendency to gag on the dust; but by balancing his forepaws on the eraser trough, he could manage quite nicely. It took three springs to catch the ring of the chart in his teeth, but once that was pulled down there was nothing to do but crouch under the desk and pray that he would not starve quite to death.

The students of German 31B, as they assembled reluctantly for their eight-o'clock, were a little puzzled at being confronted by a chart dealing with the influ-ence of the gold standard on world

economy, but they decided simply that the janitor had been forgetful.

The wolf under the desk listened unseen to their gathering murmurs, over-heard that cute blonde in the front row make dates with three different men for that same night, and finally decided that enough had assembled to make his chances plausible. He slipped out from under the desk far enough to reach the ring of the chart, tugged at it, and let go.

The chart flew up with a rolling crash. The students broke off their chatter, looked up at the blackboard, and beheld in a huge and shaky scrawl the mysterious letters

A B S A R K A

It worked. With enough people, it was an almost mathematical certainty that one of them in his puzzlement—for the race of subtitle readers, though handicapped by the talkies, still exists—would read the mysterious word aloud. It was the much-bedated blonde who did it.

"*Absarka*" she said wonderingly.

And there was Professor Wolfe Wolf, beaming cordially at his class.

The only flaw was this: He had forgotten that he was only a werewolf, and not Hyperman. His clothes were still at the Berkeley Inn, and here on the lecture platform he was stark naked.

Two of his best pupils screamed and one fainted. The blonde only giggled appreciatively.

Emily was incredulous but pitying.

Professor Fearing was sympathetic but reserved.

The chairman of the department was cool.

The dean of letters was chilly.

The president of the university was frigid.

Wolfe Wolf was unemployed.

And Heliophagus of Smyrna was right. "The essence of magic is deceit."

"But what can I do?" Wolf moaned into his zombie glass. "I'm stuck. I'm stymied. Gloria arrives in Berkeley tomorrow, and here I am—nothing. Nothing but a fu-tile, worthless werewolf. You can't support a wife on that. You can't raise a family. You can't—Hell, you can't even propose...I want another. Sure you won't have one?"

Ozymandias the Great shook his round, fringed head. "The last time I took two drinks I started all this. I've got to behave if I want to stop it. But you're an able-bodied, strapping young man; surely, colleague, you can get work?"

"Where? All I'm trained for is academic work, and this scandal has put the kibosh on that forever. What university is going to hire a man who showed up naked in front of his class without even the excuse of being drunk? And suppos-ing I try something else—say one of these jobs in defense that all my students seem to be getting—I'd have to give references, say something about what I'd been doing with my thirty-odd years. And once these references were checked—Ozzy, I'm a lost man."

"Never despair, colleague. I've learned that magic gets you into some tight squeezes, but there's always a way of getting out. Now, take that time in Darjeeling—"

"But what can I do? I'll wind up like Confucius the werechow and live off charity, if you'll find me somebody who wants a pet wolf."

"You know," Ozymandias reflected, "you may have something there, colleague."

"Nuts! That was a joke. I can at least retain my self-respect, even if I go on relief doing it. And I'll bet they don't like naked men on relief, either."

"No. I don't mean just being a pet wolf. But look at it this way: What are your assets? You have only two outstanding abilities. One of them is to teach German, and that is now completely out."

"Check."

"And the other is to change yourself into a wolf. All right, colleague. There must be some commercial possibilities in that. Let's look into them."

"Nonsense."

"Not quite. For every kind of merchandise there's a market. The trick is to find it. And you, colleague, are going to be the first practical commercial werewolf on record."

"I could—They say Ripley's Odditorium pays good money. Supposing I changed six times a day regular for delighted audiences?"

Ozymandias shook his head sorrowfully. "It's no good. People don't want to see real magic. It makes 'em uncomfortable—starts 'em wondering what else might be loose in the world. They've got to feel sure it's all done with mirrors. I know. I had to quit vaudeville because I wasn't smart enough at faking it; all I could do was the real thing."

"I could be a Seeing Eye dog, maybe?"

"They have to be female."

"When I'm changed I can understand animal language. Maybe I could be a dog trainer and—No, that's out. I forgot: they're scared to death of me."

But Ozymandias' pale-blue eyes had lit up at the suggestion. "Colleague, you're warm. Oh, are you warm! Tell me: why did you say your fabulous Gloria was coming to Berkeley?"

"Publicity for a talent hunt."

"For what?"

"A dog to star in *Fangs of the Forest*."

"And what kind of a dog?"

"A—" Wolf's eyes widened and his jaw sagged. "A wolf dog," he said softly.

And the two men looked at each other with a wild surmise—silent, beside a bar in Berkeley.

"It's all the fault of that damned Disney dog," the trainer complained. "Pluto does anything. Everything. So our poor mutts are expected to do likewise. Listen to that dope! The dog should come into the room, give one paw to the baby, indicate that he recognizes the hero in his Eskimo disguise, go over to the table, find the bone, and clap his paws gleefully! Now, who's got a set of signals to cover stuff like that? Pluto's" he snorted.

Gloria Garton said, "Oh." By that one sound she managed to convey that she sympathized deeply, that the trainer was a nice-looking young man whom she'd just as soon see again, and that no dog star was going to steal *Fangs of the Forest* from her. She adjusted her skirt slightly, leaned back, and made the plain wooden chair on the bare theater stage seem more than ever like a throne.

"All right." The man in the violet beret waved away the last unsuccessful applicant and read from a card: "Dog: Wopsy. Owner: Mrs. Channing Galbraith. Trainer: Luther Newby.' Bring it in."

An assistant scurried offstage, and there was a sound of whines and whimpers as a door opened.

"What's got into those dogs today?" the man in the violet beret demanded. "They all seem scared to death and beyond."

"I think," said Fergus O'Brien, "that it's that big gray wolf dog. Somehow, the others just don't like him."

Gloria Garton lowered her bepurpled lids and cast a queenly stare of suspicion on the young detective. There was nothing wrong with his being there. His sister was head of publicity for Metropolis, and he'd handled several confidential cases for the studio; even one for her, that time her chauffeur had decided to try his hand at blackmail. Fergus O'Brien was a Metropolis fixture; but still it bothered her.

The assistant brought in Mrs. Galbraith's Wopsy. The man in the violet beret took one look and screamed. The scream bounced back from every wall of the theater in the ensuing minute of silence. At last he found words. "A wolf dog! Tookah is the greatest role ever written for a wolf dog! And what do they bring us? A terrier, yet! So if we wanted a terrier we could cast Asta!"

"But if you'd only let us show you—"Wopsy's tall young trainer started to protest.

"Get out!" the man in the violet beret shrieked. "Get out before I lose my temper!"

Wopsy and her trainer slunk off.

"In El Paso," the casting director lamented, "they bring me a Mexican hair-less. In St. Louis it's a Pekinese yet! And if I do find a wolf dog, it sits in a corner and waits for somebody to bring it a sled to pull."

"Maybe," said Fergus, "you should try a real wolf."

"Wolf, *schmolf!* We'll end up wrapping John Barrymore in a wolfskin." He picked up the next card. "Dog: Yoggoth. Owner and trainer: Mr. O. Z. Manders.' Bring it in."

The whining noise offstage ceased as Yoggoth was brought out to be tested. The man in the violet beret hardly glanced at the fringe-bearded owner and trainer. He had eyes only for that splendid gray wolf. "If you can only act..." he prayed, with the same fervor with which many a man has thought, If you could only cook...

He pulled the beret to an even more unlikely angle and snapped, "All right, Mr. Manders. The dog should come into the room, give one paw to the baby, indicate that he recognizes the hero in his Eskimo disguise, go over to the table, find the bone, and clap his paws joyfully. Baby here, hero here, table here. Got that?"

Mr. Manders looked at his wolf dog and repeated, "Got that?"

Yoggoth wagged his tail.

"Very well, colleague," said Mr. Manders. "Do it."

Yoggoth did it.

The violet beret sailed into the flies, on the wings of its owner's triumphal scream of joy. "He did it!" he kept burbling. "He did it!"

"Of course, colleague," said Mr. Manders calmly.

The trainer who hated Pluto had a face as blank as a vampire's mirror. Fergus O'Brien was speechless with wonderment. Even Gloria Garton permitted sur-prise and interest to cross her regal mask.

"You mean he can do anything?" gurgled the man who used to have a violet beret.

"Anything," said Mr. Manders.

"Can he—Let's see, in the dance-hall sequence...can he knock a man down, roll him over, and frisk his back pocket?"

Even before Mr. Manders could say "Of course," Yoggoth had demonstrated, using Fergus O'Brien as a convenient dummy

"Peace!" the casting director sighed. "Peace...Charley!" he yelled to his assistant. "Send 'em all away. No more tryouts. We've found Tookah! It's wonder-ful."

The trainer stepped up to Mr. Manders. "It's more than that, sir. It's positively superhuman. I'll swear I couldn't detect the slightest signal, and for such compli-cated operations, too. Tell me, Mr. Manders, what system do you use?"

Mr. Manders made a Hoople-ish *kaff-kaff* noise. "Professional secret, you understand, young man. I'm planning on opening a school when I retire, but obvi-ously until then—"

"Of course, sir. I understand. But I've never seen anything like it in all my born days."

"I wonder," Fergus O'Brien observed abstractly from the floor, "if your marvel dog can get off of people, too?"

Mr. Manders stifled a grin. "Of course! Yoggoth!"

Fergus picked himself up and dusted from his clothes the grime of the stage, which is the most clinging grime on earth. "I'd swear," he muttered, "that beast of yours enjoyed that."

"No hard feelings, I trust, Mr.—"

"O'Brien. None at all. In fact, I'd suggest a little celebration in honor of this great event. I know you can't buy a drink this near the campus, so I brought along a bottle just in case."

"Oh," said Gloria Garton, implying that carousals were ordinarily beneath her; that this, however, was a special occasion; and that possibly there was some-thing to be said for the green-eyed detective after

all.

This was all too easy, Wolfe Wolf—Yoggoth kept thinking. There was a catch to it somewhere. This was certainly the ideal solution to the problem of how to earn money as a werewolf. Bring an understanding of human speech and instructions into a fine animal body, and you are the answer to a director's prayer. It was perfect as long as it lasted; and if *Fangs of the Forest* was a smash hit, there were bound to be other Yoggoth pictures. Look at Rin-Tin-Tin. But it was too easy...

His ears caught a familiar "Oh," and his attention reverted to Gloria. This "Oh" had meant that she really shouldn't have another drink, but since liquor didn't affect her anyway and this was a special occasion, she might as well.

She was even more beautiful than he had remembered. Her golden hair was shoulder-length now, and flowed with such rippling perfection that it was all he could do to keep from reaching out a paw to it. Her body had ripened, too; was even more warm and promising than his memories of her. And in his new shape he found her greatest charm in something he had not been able to appreciate fully as a human being: the deep, heady scent of her flesh.

"To *Fangs of the Forest*?" Fergus O'Brien was toasting. "And may that pretty-boy hero of yours get a worse mauling than I did."

Wolf-Yoggoth grinned to himself. That had been fun. That'd teach the detective to go crawling around hotel rooms.

"And while we're celebrating, colleagues," said Ozymandias the Great, "why should we neglect our star? Here, Yoggoth." And he held out the bottle.

"He drinks, yet!" the casting director exclaimed delightedly.

"Sure. He was weaned on it."

Wolf took a sizable gulp. It felt good. Warm and rich—almost the way Gloria smelled.

"But how about you, Mr. Manders?" the detective insisted for the fifth time. "It's your celebration really. The poor beast won't get the four-figure checks from Metropolis. And you've taken only one drink."

"Never take two, colleague. I know my danger point. Two drinks in me and things start happening."

"More should happen yet than training miracle dogs? Go on, O'Brien. Make him drink. We should see what happens."

Fergus took another long drink himself. "Go on. There's another bottle in the car, and I've gone far enough to be resolved not to leave here sober. And I don't want sober companions, either." His green eyes were already beginning to glow with a new wildness.

"No, thank you, colleague."

Gloria Garton left her throne, walked over to the plump man, and stood close, her soft hand resting on his arm. "Oh," she said, implying that dogs were dogs, but still that the party was unquestionably in her honor and his refusal to drink was a personal insult.

Ozymandias the Great looked at Gloria, sighed, shrugged, resigned himself to fate, and drank.

"Have you trained many dogs?" the casting director asked.

"Sorry, colleague. This is my first."

"All the more wonderful! But what's your profession otherwise?"

"Well, you see, I'm a magician."

"Oh," said Gloria Garton, implying delight, and went so far as to add, "I have a friend who does black magic."

"I'm afraid, ma'am, mine's simply white. That's tricky enough. With the black you're in for some real dangers."

"Hold on!" Fergus interposed. "You mean really a magician? Not just presti...sleight of hand?"

"Of course, colleague."

"Good theater," said the casting director. "Never let 'em see the mirrors."

"Uh-huh," Fergus nodded. "But look, Mr. Manders. What can you do, for instance?"

"Well, I can change—"

Yoggoth barked loudly.

"Oh, no," Ozymandias covered hastily, "that's really a little beyond me. But I can—"

"Can you do the Indian rope trick?" Gloria asked languidly. "My friend says that's terribly hard."

"Hard? Why, ma'am, there's nothing to it. I can remember that time in Darjeeling—"

Fergus took another long drink. "I," he announced defiantly, "want to see the Indian rope trick. I have met people who've met people who've met people who've seen it, but that's as close as I ever get. And I don't believe it."

"But, colleague, it's so simple."

"I don't believe it."

Ozymandias the Great drew himself up to his full lack of height. "Colleague, you are about to see it!" Yoggoth tugged warningly at his coattails. "Leave me alone, Wolf. An aspersion has been cast!"

Fergus returned from the wings dragging a soiled length of rope. "This do?"

"Admirably."

"What goes?" the casting director demanded.

"*Shh!*" said Gloria. "Oh—"

She beamed worshipfully on Ozymandias, whose chest swelled to the point of threatening the security of his buttons. "Ladies and gentlemen!" he announced, in the manner of one prepared to fill a vast amphitheater with his voice. "You are about to behold Ozymandias the Great in—The Indian Rope Trick! Of course," he added conversationally, "I haven't got a small boy to chop into mincemeat, unless perhaps one of you—No? Well, we'll try it without. Not quite so impressive, though. And will you stop yapping, Wolf?"

"I thought his name was Yogi," said Fergus.

"Yoggoth. But since he's part wolf on his mother's side—Now, quiet, all of you!"

He had been coiling the rope as he spoke. Now he placed the coil in the center of the stage, where it lurked like a threatening rattler. He stood beside it and deftly, professionally, went through a series of passes and mumblings so rapidly that even the superhumanly sharp eyes and ears of Wolf-Yoggoth could not follow them.

The end of the rope detached itself from the coil, reared in the air, turned for a moment like a head uncertain where to strike, then shot straight up until all the rope was uncoiled. The lower end rested a good inch above the stage.

Gloria gasped. The casting director drank hurriedly. Fergus, for some reason, stared curiously at the wolf.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen—oh, hang it, I do wish I had a boy to carve—Ozymandias the Great will ascend this rope into that land which only the users of the rope may know. Onward and upward! Be right back," he added reassuringly to Wolf.

His plump hands grasped the rope above his head and gave a little jerk. His knees swung up and clasped about the hempen pillar. And up he went, like a monkey on a stick, up and up and up—until suddenly he was gone.

Just gone. That was all there was to it. Gloria was beyond even saying "Oh." The casting director sat his beautiful flannels down on the filthy floor and gaped. Fergus swore softly and melodiously. And Wolf felt a premonitory prickling in his spine.

The stage door opened, admitting two men in denim pants and work shirts. "Hey!" said the first. "Where do you think you are?"

"We're from Metropolis Pictures," the casting director started to explain, scrambling to his feet.

"I don't care if you're from Washington, we gotta clear this stage. There's movies here tonight. Come on, Joe, help me get 'em out. And that pooch, too."

"You can't, Fred," said Joe reverently, and pointed. His voice sank to an awed whisper. "That's Gloria Garton—"

"So it is. Hi, Miss Garton. Cripes, wasn't that last one of yours a stinkeroo!"

"Your public, darling," Fergus murmured.

"Come on!" Fred shouted. "Out of here. We gotta clean up. And you, Joe! Strike that rope!"

Before Fergus could move, before Wolf could leap to the rescue, the efficient stagehand had struck the rope and was coiling it up.

Wolf stared up into the flies. There was nothing up there. Nothing at all. Some-place beyond the end of that rope was the only man on earth he could trust to say *Absarka!* for him; and the way down was cut off forever.

Wolfe Wolf sprawled on the floor of Gloria Garton's boudoir and watched that vision of voluptuous change into her most fetching negligee.

The situation was perfect. It was the fulfillment of all his dearest dreams. The only flaw was that he was still in a wolf's body.

Gloria turned, leaned over, and chucked him under the snout. "Wuzzum a cute wolf dog, wuzzum?"

Wolf could not restrain a snarl.

"Doesn't um like Gloria to talk baby talk? Um was a naughty wolf, yes, um was."

It was torture. Here you are in your best-beloved's hotel room, all her beauty revealed to your hungry eyes, and she talks baby talk to you! Wolf had been happy at first when Gloria suggested that she might take over the care of her co-star pending the reappearance of his trainer—for none of them was quite willing to admit that "Mr. O. Z. Manders" might truly and definitely have vanished—but he was beginning to realize that the situation might bring on more torment than pleasure.

"Wolves are funny," Gloria observed. She was more talkative when alone, with no need to be cryptically fascinating. "I knew a Wolfe once, only that was his name. He was a man. And he was a funny one."

Wolf felt his heart beating fast under his gray fur. To hear his own name on Gloria's warm lips...But before she could go on to tell her pet how funny Wolfe was, her maid rapped on the door.

"A Mr. O'Brien to see you, madam."

"Tell him to go 'way."

"He says it's important, and he does look, madam, as though he might make trouble."

"Oh, all right." Gloria rose and wrapped her negligee more respectably about her. "Come on, Yog—No, that's a silly name. I'm going to call you Wolfie. That's cute. Come on, Wolfie, and protect me from the big, bad detective."

Fergus O'Brien was pacing the sitting room with a certain vicious deliberateness in his strides. He broke off and stood still as Gloria and the wolf entered.

"So?" he observed tersely. "Reinforcements?"

"Will I need them?" Gloria cooed.

"Look, light of my love life." The glint in the green eyes was cold and deadly. "You've been playing games, and whatever their nature, there's one thing they're not. And that's cricket."

Gloria gave him a languid smile. "You're amusing, Fergus."

"Thanks. I doubt, however, if your activities are."

"You're still a little boy playing cops and robbers. And what boogymen are you after now?"

"Ha-ha," said Fergus politely. "And you know the answer to that question better than I do. That's why I'm here."

Wolf was puzzled. This conversation meant nothing to him. And yet he sensed a tension of danger in the air as clearly as though he could smell it.

"Go on," Gloria snapped impatiently. "And remember how dearly Metro-polis Pictures will thank you for annoying one of its best box-office attractions."

"Some things, my sweetening, are more important than pictures, though you mightn't think it where you come from. One of them is a certain federation of forty-eight units. Another is an abstract concept called democracy."

"And so?"

"And so I want to ask you one question: Why did you come to Berkeley?"

"For publicity on *Fangs*, of course. It was your sister's idea."

"You've gone temperamental and turned down better ones. Why leap at this?"

"You don't haunt publicity stunts yourself, Fergus. Why are *you* here?"

Fergus was pacing again. "And why was your first act in Berkeley a visit to the office of the German department?"

"Isn't that natural enough? I used to be a student here."

"Majoring in dramatics, and you didn't go near the Little Theater. Why the German department?" He paused and stood straight in front of her, fixing her with his green gaze.

Gloria assumed the attitude of a captured queen defying the barbarian conqueror. "Very well. If you must know—I went to the German department to see the man I love."

Wolf held his breath, and tried to keep his tail from thrashing.

"Yes," she went on impassionedly, "you strip the last veil from me, and force me to confess to you what he alone should have heard first. This man proposed to me by mail. I foolishly rejected his proposal. But I thought and thought—and at last I knew. When I came to Berkeley I had to see him—"

"And did you?"

"The little mouse of a secretary told me he wasn't there. But I shall see him yet. And when I do—"

Fergus bowed stiffly. "My congratulations to you both, my sweeting. And the name of this more than fortunate gentleman?"

"Professor Wolfe Wolf."

"Who is doubtless the individual referred to in this?" He whipped a piece of paper from his sport coat and thrust it at Gloria. She paled and was silent. But Wolfe Wolf did not wait for her reply. He did not care. He knew the solution to his problem now, and he was streaking unobserved for her boudoir.

Gloria Garton entered the boudoir a minute later, a shaken and wretched woman. She unstopped one of the delicate perfume bottles on her dresser and poured herself a stiff tot of whiskey. Then her eyebrows lifted in surprise as she stared at her mirror. Scrawlingly lettered across the glass in her own deep-crimson lipstick was the mysterious word

A B S A R K A

Frowning, she said it aloud. "*Absarka*—"

From behind a screen stepped Professor Wolfe Wolf, incongruously wrapped in one of Gloria's lushest dressing robes. "Gloria dearest—" he cried.

"Wolfe!" she exclaimed. "What on earth are you doing here in my room?"

"I love you. I've always loved you since you couldn't tell a strong from a weak verb. And now that I know that you love me—"

"This is terrible. Please get out of here!"

"Gloria—"

"Get out of here, or I'll sick my dog on you. Wolfie—Here, nice Wolfie!"

"I'm sorry, Gloria. But Wolfie won't answer you."

"Oh, you beast! Have you hurt Wolfie? Have you—"

"I wouldn't touch a hair on his pelt. Because, you see, Gloria darling, I am Wolfie."

"What on earth do you—" Gloria stared around the room. It was undeniable that there was no trace of the presence of a wolf dog. And here was a man dressed only in one of her robes and no sign of his own clothes. And after that funny little man and the rope...

"You thought I was drab and dull," Wolf went on. "You thought I'd sunk into an academic rut. You'd sooner have an actor or a G-man. But I, Gloria, am some-thing more exciting than you've ever dreamed of. There's not another soul on earth I'd tell this to, but I, Gloria, am a werewolf."

Gloria gasped. "That isn't possible! But it does all fit in. When I heard about you on campus, and your friend with the funny beard and how he vanished, and, of course, it explains how you did tricks that

any real dog couldn't possibly do—"

"Don't you believe me, darling?"

Gloria rose from the dresser chair and went into his arms. "I believe you, dear. And it's wonderful! I'll bet there's not another woman in all Hollywood that was ever married to a werewolf!"

"Then you will—"

"But of course, dear. We can work it out beautifully. We'll hire a stooge to be your trainer on the lot. You can work daytimes, and come home at night and I'll say that word for you. It'll be perfect."

"Gloria..." Wolf murmured with tender reverence.

"One thing, dear. Just a little thing. Would you do Gloria a favor?"

"Anything!"

"Show me how you change. Change for me now. Then I'll change you back right away."

Wolf said The Word. He was in such ecstatic bliss that he hardly felt the pang this time. He capered about the room with all the lightheartedness of his fine wolfish legs, and ended up before Gloria, wagging his tail and looking for approval.

Gloria patted his head. "Good boy, Wolfie. And now, darling, you can just damned well stay that way."

Wolf let out a yelp of amazement.

"You heard me, Wolfie. You're staying that way. You didn't happen to believe any of that guff I was feeding the detective, did you? Love you? I should waste my time! But this way you can be very useful to me. With your trainer gone, I can take charge of you and pick up an extra thousand a week or so. I won't mind that. And Professor Wolfe Wolf will have vanished forever, which fits right in with my plans."

Wolf snarled.

"Now, don't try to get nasty, Wolfie darling. Um wouldn't threaten ums dar-ling Gloria, would ums? Remember what I can do for you. I'm the only person that can turn you into a man again. You wouldn't dare teach anyone else that. You wouldn't dare let people know what you really are. An ignorant person would kill you. A smart one would have you locked up as a lunatic."

Wolf still advanced threateningly.

"Oh, no. You can't hurt me. Because all I'd have to do would be to say the word on the mirror. Then you wouldn't be a dangerous wolf any more. You'd just be a man here in my room, and I'd scream. And after what happened on the campus yesterday, how long do you think you'd stay out of the madhouse?"

Wolf backed away and let his tail droop.

"You see, Wolfie darling? Gloria has ums just where she wants ums. And ums is damned well going to be a good boy."

There was a rap on the boudoir door, and Gloria called, "Come in."

"A gentleman to see you, madam," the maid announced. "A Professor Fear-ing."

Gloria smiled her best cruel and queenly smile. "Come along, Wolfie. This may interest you."

Professor Oscar Fearing, overflowing one of the graceful chairs of the sitting room, beamed benevolently as Gloria and the wolf entered. "Ah, my dear! A new pet. Touching."

"And what a pet, Oscar. Wait till you hear. "

Professor Fearing buffed his pince-nez against his sleeve. "And wait, my dear, until you hear all that I have learned. Chiswick has perfected his protective screen against magnetic bombs, and the official trial is set for next week. And Farnsworth has all but completed his researches on a new process for obtaining osmium. Gas warfare may start any day, and the power that can command a plentiful supply of—"

"Fine, Oscar," Gloria broke in. "But we can go over all this later. We've got other worries right now."

"What do you mean, my dear?"

"Have you run into a red-headed young Irishman in a yellow shirt?"

"No, I—Why, yes. I did see such an individual leaving the office yesterday. I believe he had been to see Wolfe."

"He on to us. He's a detective from Los Angeles, and he's tracking us down. Somewhere he got hold of a scrap of record that should have been destroyed. He knows I'm in it, and he knows I'm tied up with

somebody here in the German department."

Professor Fearing scrutinized his pince-nez, approved of their cleanness, and set them on his nose. "Not so much excitement, my dear. No hysteria. Let us approach this calmly. Does he know about the Temple of the Dark Truth?"

"Not yet. Nor about you. He just knows it's somebody in the department."

"Then what could be simpler? You have heard of the strange conduct of Wolfe Wolf?"

"Have I!" Gloria laughed harshly.

"Everyone knows of Wolfe's infatuation with you. Throw the blame onto him. It should be easy to clear yourself and make you appear an innocent tool. Direct all attention to him and the organization will be safe. The Temple of the Dark Truth can go its mystic way and extract even more invaluable information from weary scientists who need the emotional release of a false religion."

"That's what I've tried to do. I gave O'Brien a long song and dance about my devotion to Wolfe, so obviously phony he'd be bound to think it was a cover-up for something else. And I think he bit. But the situation's a damned sight trickier than you guess. Do you know where Wolfe Wolf is?"

"No one knows. After the president...ah...rebuked him, he seems to have vanished."

Gloria laughed again. "He's right here. In this room."

"My dear! Secret panels and such? You take your espionage too seriously. Where?"

"There!"

Professor Fearing gaped. "Are you serious?"

"As serious as you are about the future of Fascism. That is Wolfe Wolf."

Fearing approached the wolf incredulously and extended his hand.

"He might bite," Gloria warned him a second too late.

Fearing stared at his bleeding hand. "That, at least," he observed, "is undeni-ably true." And he raised his foot to deliver a sharp kick.

"No, Oscar! Don't! Leave him alone. And you'll have to take my word for it—it's way too complicated. But the wolf is Wolfe Wolf, and I've got him abso-lutely under control. He's perfectly in our hands. We'll switch suspicion to him, and I'll keep him this way while Fergus and his friends the G-men go off hotfoot on his trail."

"My dear!" Fearing ejaculated. "You're mad. You're more hopelessly mad than the devout members of the Temple." He took off his pince-nez and stared again at the wolf. "And yet Tuesday night—Tell me one thing: From whom did you get this...this wolf dog?"

"From a funny plump little man with a fringy beard."

Fearing gasped. Obviously he remembered the furor in the Temple, and the wolf and the fringe-beard. "Very well, my dear. I believe you. Don't ask me why, but I believe you. And now—"

"Now, it's all set, isn't it? We keep him here helpless, and we use him to—"

"The wolf as scapegoat. Yes. Very pretty."

"Oh! One thing—" She was suddenly frightened.

Wolfe Wolf was considering the possibilities of a sudden attack on Fearing. He could probably get out of the room before Gloria could say *Absarka!* But after that? Whom could he trust to restore him? Especially if G-men were to be set on his trail...

"What is it?", Fearing asked.

"That secretary. That little mouse in the department office. She knows it was you I asked for, not Wolf. Fergus can't have talked to her yet, because he swal-lowed my story; but he will. He's thorough."

"Hm-m-m. Then, in that case—"

"Yes, Oscar?"

"She must be attended to." Professor Oscar Fearing beamed genially and reached for the phone.

Wolf acted instantly, on inspiration and impulse. His teeth were strong, quite strong enough to jerk the phone cord from the wall. That took only a second, and in the next second he was out of the room and into the hall before Gloria could open her mouth to speak that word that would convert him from a powerful and dangerous wolf to a futile man.

There were shrill screams and a shout or two of "Mad dog!" as he dashed through the hotel lobby,

but he paid no heed to them. The main thing was to reach Emily's house before she could be "attended to." Her evidence was essential. That could swing the balance, show Fergus and his G-men where the true guilt lay. And, besides, he admitted to himself, Emily was a damned nice kid...

His rate of collision was about one point six six per block, and the curses heaped upon him, if theologically valid, would have been more than enough to damn him forever. But he was making time, and that was all that counted. He dashed through traffic signals, cut into the path of trucks, swerved from under streetcars, and once even leaped over a stalled car that was obstructing him. Everything was going fine, he was halfway there, when two hundred pounds of human flesh landed on him in a flying tackle.

He looked up through the brilliant lighting effects of smashing his head on the sidewalk and saw his old nemesis, the policeman who had been cheated of his beer.

"So, Rover!" said the officer. "Got you at last, did I? Now we'll see if you'll wear a proper license tag. Didn't know I used to play football, did you?"

The officer's grip on his hair was painfully tight. A gleeful crowd was gathering and heckling the policeman with fantastic advice.

"Get along, boys," he admonished. "This is a private matter between me and Rover here. Come on," and he tugged even harder.

Wolf left a large tuft of fur and skin in the officer's grasp and felt the blood ooze out of the bare patch on his neck. He heard a ripe oath and a pistol shot simultaneously, and felt the needlelike sting through his shoulder. The awestruck crowd thawed before him. Two more bullets hied after him, but he was gone, leaving the most dazed policeman in Berkeley.

"I hit him," the officer kept muttering blankly. "I hit the—"

Wolfe Wolf coursed along Dwight Way. Two more blocks and he'd be at the little bungalow that Emily shared with a teaching assistant in something or other. Ripping out that telephone had stopped Fearing only momentarily; the orders would have been given by now, the henchmen would be on their way. But he was almost there...

"He'o!" a child's light voice called to him. "Nice woof-woof come back!"

Across the street was the modest frame dwelling of Robby and his shrewish mother. The child had been playing on the sidewalk. Now he saw his idol and deliverer and started across the street at a lurching toddle. "Nice woof-woof!" he kept calling. "Wait for Robby!"

Wolf kept on. This was no time for playing games with even the most delightful of cubs. And then he saw the car. It was an ancient jalopy, plastered with wisecracks even older than itself; and the high school youth driving was obviously showing his girl friend how it could make time on this deserted residential street. The girl was a cute dish, and who could be bothered watching out for children?

Robby was directly in front of the car. Wolf leaped straight as a bullet. His trajectory carried him so close to the car that he could feel the heat of the radiator on his flank. His forepaws struck Robby and thrust him out of danger. They fell to the ground together, just as the car ground over the last of Wolf's caudal vertebrae.

The cute dish screamed. "Homer! Did we hit them?"

Homer said nothing, and the jalopy zoomed on.

Robby's screams were louder. "You hurt me!! You hurt me! *Baaaaad* woof-woof!"

His mother appeared on the porch and joined in with her own howls of rage. The cacophony was terrific. Wolf let out one wailing yelp of his own, to make it perfect and to lament his crushed tail, and dashed on. This was no time to clear up misunderstandings.

But the two delays had been enough. Robby and the policeman had proved the perfect unwitting tools of Oscar Fearing. As Wolf approached Emily's little bungalow, he saw a gray sedan drive off. In the rear was a small, slim girl, and she was struggling.

Even a werewolf's lithe speed cannot equal that of a motor car. After a block of pursuit, Wolf gave

up and sat back on his haunches panting. It felt funny, he thought even in that tense moment, not to be able to sweat, to have to open your mouth and stick out your tongue and...

"Trouble?" inquired a solicitous voice.

This time Wolf recognized the cat. "Heavens, yes," he assented wholeheartedly. "More than you ever dreamed of."

"Food shortage?" the cat asked. "But that toddler back there is nice and plump."

"Shut up," Wolf snarled.

"Sorry; I was just judging from what Confucius told me about werewolves. You don't mean to tell me that you're an altruistic were?"

"I guess I am. I know werewolves are supposed to go around slaughtering, but right now I've got to save a life."

"You expect me to believe that?"

"It's the truth."

"Ah," the cat reflected philosophically. "Truth is a dark and deceitful thing."

Wolfe Wolf was on his feet. "Thanks," he barked. "You've done it."

"Done what?"

"See you later." And Wolf was off at top speed for the Temple of the Dark Truth.

That was the best chance. That was Fearing's headquarters. The odds were at least even that when it wasn't being used for services it was the hangout of his ring, especially since the consulate had been closed in San Francisco. Again the wild running and leaping, the narrow escapes; and where Wolf had not taken these too seriously before, he knew now that he might be immune to bullets, but certainly not to being run over. His tail still stung and ached tormentingly. But he had to get there. He had to clear his own reputation, he kept reminding himself; but what he really thought was, I have to save Emily.

A block from the Temple he heard the crackle of gunfire. Pistol shots and, he'd swear, machine guns, too. He couldn't figure what it meant, but he pressed on. Then a bright-yellow roadster passed him and a vivid flash came from its window. Instinctively he ducked. You might be immune to bullets, but you still didn't just stand still for them.

The roadster was gone and he was about to follow when a glint of bright metal caught his eye. The bullet that had missed him had hit a brick wall and ricocheted back onto the sidewalk. It glittered there in front of him—pure silver!

This, he realized abruptly, meant the end of his immunity. Fearing had believed Gloria's story, and with his smattering of occult lore he had known the successful counterweapon. A bullet, from now on, might mean no more needle sting, but instant death.

And so Wolfe Wolf went straight on.

He approached the Temple cautiously, lurking behind shrubbery. And he was not the only lurker. Before the Temple, crouching in the shelter of a car every window of which was shattered, were Fergus O'Brien and a moonfaced giant. Each held an automatic, and they were taking pot shots at the steeple.

Wolf's keen lupine hearing could catch their words even above the firing. "Gabe's around back," Moonface was explaining. "But it's no use. Know what that damned steeple is? It's a revolving machine-gun turret. They've been ready for something like this. Only two men in there, far as we can tell, but that turret covers all the approaches."

"Only two?" Fergus muttered.

"And the girl. They brought a girl here with them. If she's still alive."

Fergus took careful aim at the steeple, fired, and ducked back behind the car as a bullet missed him by millimeters. "Missed him again! By all the kings that ever ruled Tara, Moon, there's got to be a way in there. How about tear gas?"

Moon snorted. "Think you can reach the firing gap in that armored turret at this angle?"

"That girl..." said Fergus.

Wolf waited no longer. As he sprang forward, the gunner noticed him and shifted his fire. It was like a needle shower in which all the spray is solid steel. Wolf's nerves ached with the pain of reknitting. But at least machine guns apparently didn't fire silver.

The front door was locked, but the force of his drive carried him through and added a throbbing ache in his shoulder to his other comforts. The lower-floor guard, a pasty-faced individual with a jutting Adam's apple, sprang up, pistol in hand. Behind him, in the midst of the litter of the cult, ceremonial robes, incense burners, curious books, even a Ouija board, lay Emily.

Pasty-face fired. The bullet struck Wolf full in the chest and for an instant he expected death. But this, too, was lead, and he jumped forward. It was not his usual powerful leap. His strength was almost spent by now. He needed to lie on cool earth and let his nerves knit. And this spring was only enough to grapple with his foe, not to throw him.

The man reversed his useless automatic and brought its butt thudding down on the beast's skull. Wolf reeled back, lost his balance, and fell to the floor. For a moment he could not rise. The temptation was so strong just to lie there and...

The girl moved. Her bound hands grasped a corner of the Ouija board. Some-how, she stumbled to her rope-tied feet and raised her arms. Just as Pasty-face rushed for the prostrate wolf, she brought the heavy board down.

Wolf was on his feet now. There was an instant of temptation. His eyes fixed themselves to the jut of that Adam's apple, and his long tongue licked his jowls. Then he heard the machine-gun fire from the turret, and tore himself from Pasty-face's unconscious form.

Ladders are hard on a wolf, damned near impossible. But if you use your jaws to grasp the rung above you and pull up, it can be done. He was halfway up the ladder when the gunner heard him. The firing stopped, and Wolf heard a rich German oath in what he automatically recognized as an East Prussian dialect with possible Lithuanian influences. Then he saw the man himself, a broken-nosed blond, staring down the ladder well.

The other man's bullets had been lead. So this must be the one with the silver. But it was too late to turn back now. Wolf bit the next rung and hauled up as the bullet struck his snout and stung through. The blond's eyes widened as he fired again and Wolf climbed another rung. After the third shot he withdrew precipitately from the opening.

Shots still sounded from below, but the gunner did not return them. He stood frozen against the wall of the turret watching in horror as the wolf emerged from the well. Wolf halted and tried to get his breath. He was dead with fatigue and stress, but this man must be vanquished.

The blond raised his pistol, sighted carefully, and fired once more. He stood for one terrible instant, gazing at this deathless wolf and knowing from his grandmother's stories what it must be. Then deliberately he clamped his teeth on the muzzle of the automatic and fired again.

Wolf had not yet eaten in his wolf's body, but food must have been transferred from the human stomach to the lupine. There was at least enough for him to be extensively sick.

Getting down the ladder was impossible. He jumped. He had never heard anything about a wolf's landing on its feet, but it seemed to work. He dragged his weary and bruised body along to where Emily sat by the still unconscious Pasty-face, his discarded pistol in her hand. She wavered as the wolf approached her, as though uncertain yet as to whether he was friend or foe.

Time was short. With the machine gun silenced, Fergus and his companions would be invading the Temple at any minute. Wolf hurriedly nosed about and found the planchette of the Ouija board. He pushed the heart-shaped bit of wood onto the board and began to shove it around with his paw.

Emily watched, intent and puzzled. "A," she said aloud. "B—S—"

Wolf finished the word and edged round so that he stood directly beside one of the ceremonial robes. "Are you trying to say something?" Emily frowned.

Wolf wagged his tail in vehement affirmation and began again.

"A—" Emily repeated. "B—S—A—R—"

He could already hear approaching footsteps.

"—K—A—What on earth does that mean? *Absarka*—"

Ex-professor Wolfe Wolf hastily wrapped his naked human body in the cloak of the Dark Truth. Before either he or Emily knew quite what was happening, he had folded her in his arms, kissed her in a most thorough expression of gratitude, and fainted.

Even Wolf's human nose could tell, when he awakened, that he was in a hospital. His body was still limp and exhausted. The bare patch on his neck, where the policeman had pulled out the hair, still stung, and there was a lump where the butt of the automatic had connected. His tail, or where his tail had been, sent twinges through him if he moved. But the sheets were cool and he was at rest and Emily was safe.

"I don't know how you got in there, Mr. Wolf, or what you did; but I want you to know you've done your country a signal service." It was the moonfaced giant speaking.

Fergus O'Brien was sitting beside the bed too. "Congratulations, Wolf. And I don't know if the doctor would approve, but here."

Wolfe Wolf drank the whiskey gratefully and looked a question at the huge man.

"This is Moon Lafferty," said Fergus. "FBI man. He's been helping me track down this ring of spies ever since I first got wind of them."

"You got them—all?" Wolf asked.

"Picked up Fearing and Garton at the hotel," Lafferty rumbled.

"But how—I thought—"

"You thought we were out for you?" Fergus answered. "That was Garton's idea, but I didn't quite tumble. You see, I'd already talked to your secretary. I knew it was Fearing she'd wanted to see. And when I asked around about Fearing, and learned of the Temple and the defense researches of some of its members, the whole picture cleared up."

"Wonderful work, Mr. Wolf," said Lafferty. "Any time we can do anything for you—And how you got into that machine-gun turret—Well, O'Brien, I'll see you later. Got to check up on the rest of this roundup. Pleasant convalescence to you, Wolf."

Fergus waited until the G-man had left the room. Then he leaned over the bed and asked confidentially, "How about it, Wolf? Going back to your acting ca-reer?"

Wolf gasped. "What acting career?"

"Still going to play Tookah? If Metropolis makes *Fangs* with Miss Garton in a Federal prison."

Wolf fumbled for words. "What sort of nonsense—"

"Come on, Wolf. It's pretty clear I know that much. Might as well tell me the whole story."

Still dazed, Wolf told it. "But how in heaven's name did you know it?" he concluded.

Fergus grinned. "Look. Dorothy Sayers said someplace that in a detective story the supernatural may be introduced only to be dispelled. Sure, that's swell. Only in real life there come times when it won't be dispelled. And this was one. There was too damned much. There were your eyebrows and fingers, there were the obviously real magical powers of your friend, there were the tricks which no dog could possibly do without signals, there was the way the other dogs whim-pered and cringed—I'm pretty hardheaded, Wolf, but I'm Irish. I'll string along only so far with the materialistic, but too much coincidence is too much."

"Fearing believed it too," Wolf reflected. "But one thing that worries me: if they used a silver bullet on me once, why were all the rest of them lead? Why was I safe from then on?"

"Well," said Fergus, "I'll tell you. Because it wasn't 'they' who fired the silver bullet. You see, Wolf, up till the last minute I thought you were on 'their' side. I somehow didn't associate good will with a werewolf. So I got a mold from a gunsmith and paid a visit to a jeweler and—I'm damned glad I missed," he added sincerely.

"You're glad!"

"But look. Previous question stands. Are you going back to acting? Because if not, I've got a suggestion."

"Which is?"

"You say you fretted about how to be a practical, commercial werewolf. All right. You're strong and fast. You can terrify people even to commit suicide. You can overhear conversations that no human being could get in on. You're invulner-able to bullets. Can you tell me better qualifications for a G-man?"

Wolf goggled. "Me? A G-man?"

"Moon's been telling me how badly they need new men. They've changed the qualifications lately so that your language knowledge'll do instead of the law or accounting they used to require. And after what you did today, there won't be any trouble about a little academic scandal in your past. Moon's pretty sold on you."

Wolf was speechless. Only three days ago he had been in torment because he was not an actor or a G-man. Now—

"Think it over," said Fergus.

"I will. Indeed I will. Oh, and one other thing. Has there been any trace of Ozzy?"

"Nary a sign."

"I like that man. I've got to try to find him and—"

"If he's the magician I think he is, he's staying up there only because he's de-cided he likes it."

"I don't know. Magic's tricky. Heavens knows I've learned that. I'm going to try to do my damnedest for that fringe-bearded old colleague."

"Wish you luck. Shall I send in your other guest?"

"Who's that?"

"Your secretary. Here on business, no doubt."

Fergus disappeared discreetly as he admitted Emily. She walked over to the bed and took Wolf's hand. His eyes drank in her quiet, charming simplicity, and his mind wondered what freak of belated adolescence had made him succumb to the blatant glamour of Gloria.

They were silent for a long time. Then at once they both said, "How can I thank you? You saved my life."

Wolf laughed. "Let's not argue. Let's say we saved our life."

"You mean that?" Emily asked gravely.

Wolf pressed her hand. "Aren't you tired of being an office wife?"

In the bazaar of Darjeeling, Chulundra Lingasuta stared at his rope in numb amaze-ment. Young Ali had climbed up only five minutes ago, but now as he descended he was a hundred pounds heavier and wore a curious fringe of beard.

Murray Leinster is just one of the several pen names of that prolific and predictably good writer, Will Jenkins. Critical articles have now several times tagged him with the label, "the dean of science-fiction writers." Certainly, it would not be hard to believe that Mr. Jenkins has published more readable science fiction than any other author still writing today.

A part of his success may well be attributed to the fact that his stories frequently defy clas-sification. The hero of this story, the "Wab-bler," can hardly be called a robot; and wheth-er it is alive, in any sense, is open to question. Yet there is no denying the intelligence of the creature; and it has more than intelligence, too. It has drive, goal, ambition.

THE WABBLER

Murray Leinster

The Wabbler went westward, with a dozen of its fellows, by night and in the belly of a sleek, swift-flying thing. There were no lights anywhere save the stars overhead. There was a sustained, furious roaring noise, which was the sound the sleek thing made in flying. The Wabbler lay in its place, with its ten-foot tail coiled neatly above its lower end, and waited with a sort of deadly patience for the accomplishment of its destiny. It and all its brothers were pear-shaped, with absurdly huge and blunt-ended horns, and with small round holes where eyes might have been, and shielded vents where they might have had mouths. They looked chinless, somehow. They also looked alive, and inhuman, and filled with a sort of passionless hate. They seemed like bodiless demons out of some metallic hell. It was not possible to feel any affection for them. Even the men who handled them felt only a soft of vengeful

hope in their capacities.

The Wabblers squatted in their racks for long hours. It was very cold, but they gave no sign. The sleek, swift-flying thing roared on and roared on. The Wabblers waited. Men moved somewhere in the flying thing, but they did not come where the Wabblers were until the very end. But somehow, when a man came and inspected each one of them very carefully and poked experimentally about the bottoms of the racks in which the Wabblers lay, they knew that the time had come.

The man went away. The sleek thing tilted a little. It seemed to climb. The air grew colder, but the Wabblers—all of them—were indifferent. Air was not their element. Then, when it was very, very cold indeed, the roaring noise of the flying thing ceased abruptly. The cessation of the noise was startling. Presently little whistling, whispering noises took the place of the roar, as hearing adjusted to a new level of sound. That whistling and whining noise was wind, flowing past the wings of the flying thing. Presently the air was a little warmer—but still very cold. The flying thing was gliding, motors off, and descending at a very gradual slant.

The Wabblers were the fourth in the row of its brothers on the port side of the flying thing. It did not stir, of course, but it felt an atmosphere of grim and savage anticipation. It seemed that all the brothers coldly exchanged greetings and farewell. The time had definitely come.

The flying thing leveled out. Levers and rods moved in the darkness of its belly. The feeling of anticipation increased. Then, suddenly, there were only eleven of the Wabblers. Wind roared where the twelfth had been. There were ten. There were nine, eight, seven, six—

The Wabblers hurtled downward through blackness. There were clouds overhead now. In all the world there was no speck of actual light. But below there was a faint luminosity. The Wabblers' tail uncurled and writhed flexibly behind it. Wind screamed past its ungainly form. It went plunging down and down and down, its round holes—which looked so much like eyes—seeming incurious and utterly impassive. The luminosity underneath separated into streaks of bluish glow, which were phosphorescences given off by the curling tips of waves. Off to westward there was a brighter streak of such luminosity. It was surf.

Splash! The Wabblers plunged into the water with a flare of luminescence and a thirty-foot spout of spume and spray rising where it struck. But then that spouting ceased, and the Wabblers were safely under water. It dived swiftly for twenty feet. Perhaps thirty. Then its falling checked. It swung about, and its writhing tail settled down below it. For a little while it seemed almost to intend to swim back to the surface. But bubbles came from the shielded opening which seemed to be a mouth. It hung there in the darkness of the sea—but now and then there were little fiery streaks of light as natives of the ocean swam about it—and then slowly, slowly, slowly it settled downward. Its ten-foot tail seemed to waver a little, as if groping.

Presently it touched. Ooze. Black ooze. Sea bottom. Sixty feet overhead the waves marched to and fro in darkness. Somehow, through the stilly silence, there came a muffled vibration. That was the distant surf, beating upon a shore. The Wabblers hung for an instant with the very tip of its tail barely touching the bottom. Then it made small sounds inside itself. More bubbles came from the round place like a mouth. It settled one foot; two feet; three. Three feet of its tail rested on the soft ooze. It hung, pear-shaped, some seven feet above the ocean bottom, with the very tip of its horns no more than four feet higher yet. There were fifty feet of empty sea above it. This was not its destiny. It waited passionlessly for what was to happen.

There was silence save for the faint vibration from the distant surf. But there was an infinitesimal noise, also, within the Wabblers' bulk, a rhythmic, insistent, hurried *tick-tick-tick-tick*—It was the Wabblers' brain in action.

Time passed. Above the sea the sleek, swift-flying thing bellowed suddenly far away. It swerved and went roaring back in the direction from which it had come. Its belly was empty now, and somewhere in the heaving sea there were other Wabblers, each one now waiting as the fourth Wabblers did, for the thing that its brain expected. Minutes and minutes passed. The seas marched to and fro. The faraway surf rumbled and roared against the shore. And higher yet, above the clouds, a low-hanging invisible moon dipped down toward a horizon which did not show anywhere. But the Wabblers waited.

The tide came. Here, so far from the pounding surf, the stirring of the lower levels of the sea was slight indeed. But the tide moved in toward the land. Slowly, the pressure of water against one of the Wabblers' sides became evident. The Wabblers leaned infinitesimally toward the shore. Presently the flexible tail ceased to be curved where it lay upon the ooze. It straightened out. There were little bluish glows where it stirred the phosphorescent mud. Then the Wabblers moved. Shoreward. It trailed its tail behind it and left a little glowing track of ghostly light.

Fish swim about it. Once there was a purring sound, and propellers pushed an invisible, floating thing across the surface of the sea. But it was far away and the Wabblers were impassive. The tide flowed. The Wabblers moved in little jerks. Sometimes three feet or four, and sometimes eight or ten. Once, where the sea bottom slanted downward for a space, it moved steadily for almost a hundred yards. It came to rest then, swaying a little. Presently it jerked onward once more. Somewhere an indefinite distance away were its brothers, moving on in the same fashion. The Wabblers went on and on, purposefully, moved by the tide.

Before the tide turned, the Wabblers had moved two miles nearer to the land. But it did not move in a straight line. Its trailing, flexible tail kept in the deepest water and the strongest current. It moved very deliberately and almost always in small jerks, and it followed the current. The current was strongest where it moved toward a harbor entrance. In moving two miles shoreward, the Wabblers also moved more than two miles nearer to a harbor.

There came a time, though, when the tide slackened. The Wabblers ceased to move. For half an hour it hung quite still, swaying a little and progressing not at all, while the *tick-tick-tick-tick* of its brain measured patience against intent. At the end of the half-hour there were small clanking noises within its body. Its shielded mouth emitted bubbles. It sank, and checked, and gave off more bubbles, and sank again. It eased itself very cautiously and very gently into the ooze. Then it gave off more bubbles and lay at rest.

It waited there, its brain ticking restlessly within it, but with its appearance of eyes impassive. It lay in the darkness like some creature from another world, awaiting a foreordained event.

For hours it lay still with no sign of any activity at all. Toward the end of those hours, a very faint graying of the upper sea became manifest. It was very dim indeed. It was not enough, in all likelihood, for even the Wabblers to detect the slight movement of semi-floating objects along the sea floor, moved by the ebb tide. But there came a time when even such movements ceased. Again the sea was still. It was full ebb. And now the Wabblers stirred.

It clanked gently and wavered where it lay in the ooze. There was a cloud of stirred-up mud, as if it had emitted jets of water from its under parts. It wobbled to one side and the other, straining, and presently its body was free, and a foot or two and then four or five feet of its tail—but it still writhed and wobbled spasmodically—and then suddenly it left the sea floor and floated free.

But only for a moment. Almost immediately its tail swung free, the Wabblers spat out bubbles and descended gently to the bottom again. It rested upon the tip of its tail. It spat more bubbles. One—two—three feet of its tail rested on the mud. It waited. Presently the flood tide moved it again.

It floated always with the current. Once it came to a curve in the deeper channel to which it had found its way, and the tide tended to sweep it up and out beyond the channel. But its tail resisted the attempt. In the end, the Wabblers swam grandly back to the deeper water. The current was stronger there. It went on and on at a magnificent two knots.

But when the current slowed again as the time of the tide change neared, the Wabblers stopped again. It swung above the yard-length of its tail upon the mud. Its brain went *tick-tick-tick-tick* and it made noises. It dribbled bubbles. It sank, and checked, and dribbled more bubbles, and sank cautiously again—It came cautiously to rest in the mud.

During this time of waiting, the Wabblers heard many sounds. Many times during slack tide, and during ebb tide, too, the water brought humming, purring noises of engines. Once a boat came very near. There was a curious hissing sound in the water. Something—a long line—passed very close overhead. A minesweeper and a minesweep patrolled the sea, striving to detect and uproot submarine mines. But the Wabblers had no anchor cable for the sweep to catch. It lay impassively upon the bottom. But its eyes

stared upward with a deadly calm until the minesweeper passed on its way.

Once more during the light hours the Wabblers shook themselves free of the bottom ooze and swam on with the tide. And once more—with another wait on the mud while the tide flowed out—at night. But day and night meant little to the Wabblers. Their ticking brain went on tirelessly. It rested, and swam, and swam, and rested, with a machinelike and impassive pertinacity, and always it moved toward places where the tide moved faster and with channels more distinct.

At last it came to a place where the water was no more than forty feet deep, and a distinct greenish-blue light came down from the surface sunshine. In that light the Wabblers were plainly visible. They had acquired a coating of seaweed and slime which seemed to form a sort of aura of wavering greenish tentacles. Their seeming eyes appeared now to be small and snakelike and very wise and venomous. They were still chinless, and their trailing tail made them seem more than ever like some bodiless demon out of a metallic hell. And now it came to a place where for a moment its tail caught in some minor obstruction, and as it tugged at the catch, one of its brothers floated by. It passed within twenty feet of the fourth Wabblers, and they could see each other clearly. But the fourth Wabblers was trapped. It wavered back and forth in the flood tide, trying to pull free, as its fellow swam silently and implacably onward.

Some twenty minutes after that passage there was a colossal explosion somewhere, and after that very many fuzzy, purring noises in the sea. The Wabblers may have known what had happened, or they may not. A submarine net across a harbor entrance is not a thing of which most creatures have knowledge, but it was part of the Wabblers' environment. Their *tick-tick-tick-ticking* brain may have interpreted the explosion quite correctly as the destiny of its brother encountering that barrier. It is more likely that the brain only noted with relief that the concussion had broken the grip of the obstruction in the mud. The Wabblers went onward in the wake of its fellow. It went sedately, and solemnly, and with a sort of unholy purposefulness, following the tidal current. Presently there was a great net that stretched across the channel, far beyond any distance that the Wabblers could be expected to see. But right where the Wabblers would pass, there was a monstrous gaping hole in that net. Off to one side there was the tail of another Wabblers, shattered away from that other Wabblers' bulk.

The fourth Wabblers went through the hole. It was very simple indeed. Its tail scraped for a moment, and then it was inside the harbor. And then the *tick-tick-ticking* of the Wabblers' brain was very crisp and incisive indeed, because this was its chance for the accomplishment of its destiny. It listened for sounds of engines, estimating their loudness with an uncanny precision, and within its rounded brainpan it measured things as abstract as variations in the vertical component of terrestrial magnetism. There were many sounds and many variations to note, too, because surface craft swarmed about the scene of a recent violent explosion. Their engines purred and rumbled, and their steel hulls made marked local changes in magnetic force. But none of them came quite close enough to the Wabblers to constitute its destiny.

It went on and on as the flood tide swept in. The harbor was a busy one, with many small craft moving about, and more than once in these daylight hours flying things alighted upon the water and took off again. But it happened that none came sufficiently near. An hour after its entrance into the harbor the Wabblers was in a sort of eddy, in a basin, and it made four slow, hitching circuits about the same spot—during one of which it came near to serried ranks of piling—before the time of slack water. But even here the Wabblers, after swaying a little without making progress for perhaps twenty minutes, made little clanking noises inside itself and dribbled out bubbles and eased itself down in the mud to wait.

It lay there, canted a little and staring up with its small, round, seeming eyes with a look of unimpassioned expectancy. Small boats roved overhead. Once engines rumbled, and a wooden-hulled craft swam on the surface of the water to the very dock whose pilings the Wabblers had seen. Then creaking sounds emanated from those pilings. The Wabblers may have known that unloading cranes were at work. But this was not its destiny either.

There came other sounds of greater import. Clankings of gears. A definite, burning rush of water. It continued and continued. The Wabblers could not possibly be expected to understand, of course, that such burbling underwater sounds are typical of a drydock being filled—the filling beginning near low tide when a great ship is to leave at high. Especially, perhaps, the Wabblers could not be expected to know

that a great warship had occupied a vastly important drydock and that its return to active service would restore much power to an enemy fleet. Certainly it could not know that another great warship waited impatiently to be repaired in the same basin. But the restless *tick-tick-tick-tick* which was the Wabblers brain was remarkably crisp and incisive.

When flood tide began once more, the Wabblers jetted water and wobbled to and fro until it broke free of the bottom. It hung with a seeming impatience—wreathed in seaweed and coated with greenish slime—above the tail which dangled down to the harbor mud. It looked alive, and inhuman, and chinless, and it looked passionately demoniac, and it looked like something out of a submarine Gehenna. And, presently, when the flood tide began to flow and the eddy about the docks and the dry dock gates began, the Wabblers inched as if purposefully toward the place where the water bubbled through flooding valves.

Sounds in the air did not reach the Wabblers. Sounds under water did. It heard the grinding rumble of stream winches, and it heard the screeching sound as the drydock gates swung open. They were huge gates, and they made a considerable eddy of their own. The Wabblers swam to the very center of that eddy and hung there, waiting. Now, for the first time, it seemed excited. It seemed to quiver a little. Once when it seemed that the eddy might bring it to the surface, it bubbled patiently from the vent which appeared to be a mouth. And its brain went *tick-tick-tick-tick* within it, and inside its brainpan it measured variations in the vertical component of terrestrial magnetism, and among such measurements it noted the effect of small tugs which came near but did not enter the drydock. They only sent lines within, so they could haul the warship out. But the tugs were not the Wabblers destiny either.

It heard their propellers thrashing, and they made, to be sure, a very fine noise. But the Wabblers quivered with eagerness as somewhere within itself it noted a vast variation in the vertical magnetic component, which increased and increased steadily. That was the warship moving very slowly out of its place in the drydock. It moved very slowly but very directly toward the Wabblers, and the Wabblers knew that its destiny was near.

Somewhere very far away there was the dull, racking sound of an explosion. The Wabblers may have realized that another of its brothers had achieved its destiny, but paid no heed. Its own destiny approached. The steel prow of the battleship drew nearer, and then the bow plates were overhead, and something made a tiny click inside the Wabblers. Destiny was certain now.

It waited, quivering. The mass of steel within the range of its senses grew greater and greater. The strain of restraint grew more intense. The *tick-tick-ticking* of the Wabblers brain seemed to accelerate to a frantic—to an intolerable—pace. And then—

The Wabblers achieved its destiny. It turned into a flaming ball of incandescent gases—three hundred pounds of detonated high explosive—squarely under the keel of a thirty-five thousand-ton battleship which at the moment was only halfway out of a drydock. The water-tight doors of the battleship were open, and its auxiliary power was off, so they could not be closed. There was much need for this drydock, and repairs were not completed in it. But it was the Wabblers destiny to end all that. In three minutes the battleship was lying crazily on the harbor bottom, half in and half out of the drydock. She careened as she sank, and her masts and fighting tops demolished sheds by the drydock walls. Battleship and dock alike were out of action for the duration of the war.

And the Wabblers—

A long, long time afterward—years afterward—salvage divers finished cutting up the sunken warship for scrap. The last irregularly cut mass of metal went up on the salvage slings. The last diver down went stumbling about the muddy harbor water. His heavy, weighted shoes kicked up something. He fumbled to see if anything remained to be salvaged. He found a ten-foot, still-flexible tail of metal. The rest of the Wabblers had ceased to exist. Chronometer, tide-time gear, valves, compressed-air tanks, and all the balance of its intricate innards had been blown to atoms when the Wabblers achieved its destiny. Only the flexible metal tail remained intact.

The salvage diver considered that it was not worth sending the sling down for again. He dropped it in the mud and jerked on the lifeline to be hauled up to the surface.

In an earlier anthology, one of whose editors is also represented by a story in this collection, Idris Seabright was described as a "very reti-cent lady." To her colleagues in the science-fantasy field, this seemed, if anything, an under-statement. But Miss Seabright took exception. "My life," she retorted (by mail, of course), "is an open book, from the days I *ran* arms for the Friends Service Committee, to when I settled in Liverpool to breed carrier pelicans. .

A quiet, very unexceptional young woman, you see; the sort who'd know all her neigh-bors, and their quaint habits. Her BEMs are nice, folksy, small-town types, too. And I don't see what else they could have done under the circumstances; *a* BEM's eyes, after all, are a goodly part of his stock in trade.

The Man Who Sold Rope to the Gnoles
Idris Seabright

THE GNOLES had a bad reputation, and Mortensen was quite aware of this. But he reasoned, correctly enough, that cordage must be something for which the gnoles had a long unsatisfied want, and he saw no reason why he should not be the one to sell it to them. What a triumph such a sale would be! The district sales manager might single out Mortensen for special mention at the annual sales-force dinner. It would help his sales quota enormously. And, after all, it was none of his business what the gnoles used cordage for.

Mortensen decided to call on the gnoles on Thursday morn-ing. On Wednesday night he went through his Manual of Modern Salesmanship, underscoring things.

"The mental states through which the mind passes in making a purchase," he read, "have been catalogued as: 1) arousal of interest 2) increase of knowledge 3) adjustment to needs . . ." There were seven mental states listed, and Mortensen under-scored all of them. Then he went back and double-scored No. 1, arousal of interest, No. 4, appreciation of suitability, and No. 7, decision to purchase. He turned the page.

"Two qualities are of exceptional importance to a salesman," he read. "They are adaptability and knowledge of merchan-dise." Mortensen underlined the qualities. "Other highly desir-able attributes are physical fitness, and high ethical standard, charm of manner, a dogged persistence, and unflinching cour-tesy." Mortensen underlined these too. But he read on to the end of the paragraph without underscoring anything more, and it may be that his failure to put "tact and keen power of obser-vation" on a footing with the other attributes of a salesman was responsible for what happened to him.

The gnoles live on the very edge of Terra Cognita, on the far side of a wood which all authorities unite in describing as dubious. Their house is narrow and high, in architecture a blend of Victorian Gothic and Swiss chalet. Though the house needs paint, it is kept in good repair. Thither on Thursday morning, sample case in hand, Mortensen took his way.

No path leads to the house of the gnoles, and it is always dark in that dubious wood. But Mortensen, remembering what he had learned at his mother's knee concerning the odor of gnoles, found the house quite easily. For a moment he stood hesitating before it. His lips moved as he repeated, "Good morning, I have come to supply your cordage requirements," to himself. The words were the beginning of his sales talk. Then he went up and rapped on the door.

The gnoles were watching him through holes they had bored in the trunks of trees; it is an artful custom of theirs to which the prime authority on gnoles attests. Mortensen's knock almost threw them into confusion, it was so long since anyone had knocked at their door. Then the senior gnole, the one who never leaves the house, went flitting up from the cellars and opened it.

The senior gnole is a little like a Jerusalem artichoke made of India rubber, and he has small red eyes which are faceted in the same way that gemstones are. Mortensen had been expect-ing something unusual, and when the gnole opened the door he bowed politely, took off his hat, and smiled. He had got past the sentence about cordage requirements and into an enumeration of the different types of cordage his firm manufactured when the gnole, by turning his head to the side, showed him that he had no ears. Nor was there anything on his head which could take their place in the conduction of sound. Then the gnole opened his little fanged mouth and let Mortensen look at his narrow, ribbon tongue. As a tongue it

was no more fit for human speech than was a serpent's. Judging from his appearance, the gnole could not safely be assigned to any of the four physio-characterological types mentioned in the Man-ual; and for the first time Mortensen felt a definite qualm.

Nonetheless, he followed the gnole unhesitatingly when the creature motioned him within. Adaptability, he told himself, adaptability must be his watchword. Enough adaptability, and his knees might even lose their tendency to shakiness.

It was the parlor the gnole led him to. Mortensen's eyes wid-ened as he looked around it. There were whatnots in the corners, and cabinets of curiosities, and on the fretwork table an album with gilded hasps; who knows whose pictures were in it? All around the walls in brackets, where in lesser houses the people display ornamental plates, were emeralds as big as your head. The gnoles set great store by their emeralds. All the light in the dim room came from them.

Mortensen went through the phrases of his sales talk men-tally. It distressed him that that was the only way he could go through them. Still, adaptability! The gnole's interest was al-ready aroused, or he would never have asked Mortensen into the parlor; and as soon as the gnole saw the various cordages the sample case contained he would no doubt proceed of his own accord through "appreciation of suitability" to "desire to possess."

Mortensen sat down in the chair the gnole indicated and opened his sample case. He got out henequen cable-laid rope, an assortment of ply and yarn goods, and some superlative slender abaca fiber rope. He even showed the gnole a few soft yarns and twines made of cotton and jute.

On the back of an envelope he wrote prices for hanks and cheeses of the twines, and for fifty- and hundred-foot lengths of the ropes. Laboriously he added details about the strength durability, and resistance to climatic conditions of each sort of cord. The senior gnole watched him intently, putting his little feet on the top rung of his chair and poking at the facets of his left eye now and then with a tentacle. In the cellars from time to time someone would scream.

Mortensen began to demonstrate his wares. He showed the gnole the slip and resilience of one rope, the tenacity and stub-born strength of another. He cut a tarred hemp rope in two and laid a five foot piece on the parlor floor to show the gnole how absolutely "neutral" it was, with no tendency to untwist of it own accord. He even showed the gnole how nicely some of the cotton twines made up in square knotwork.

They settled at last on two ropes of abaca fiber, 3/16 and 5/8 inch in diameter. The gnole wanted an enormous quantity: Mortensen's comment on those ropes, "unlimited strength an durability," seemed to have attracted him.

Soberly Mortensen wrote the particulars down in his order book, but ambition was setting his brain on fire. The gnoles, it seemed, would be regular customers; and after the gnoles, why should he not try the Gibbelins? They too must have a need for rope.

Mortensen closed his order book. On the back of the same envelope he wrote, for the gnole to see, that delivery would be made within ten days. Terms were 30 per cent with order, balance upon receipt of goods.

The senior gnole hesitated. Shyly he looked at Mortensen with his little red eyes. Then he got down the smallest of the emeralds from the wall and handed it to him.

The sales representative stood weighing it in his hands. It was the smallest of the gnoles' emeralds, but it was as clear as water, as green as grass. In the outside world it would have ransomed a Rockefeller or a whole family of Guggenheims; a legitimate profit from a transaction was one thing, but this was another; "a high ethical standard"—any kind of ethical stand-ard—would forbid Mortensen to keep it. He weighed it a moment longer. Then with a deep, deep sigh he gave the emerald back.

He cast a glance around the room to see if he could find something which would be more negotiable. And in an evil moment he fixed on the senior gnole's auxiliary eyes.

The senior gnole keeps his extra pair of optics on the third shelf of the curiosity cabinet with the glass doors. They look like fine dark emeralds about the size of the end of your thumb. And if the gnoles in general set store by their gems, it is noth-ing at all compared to the senior gnole's emotions about his extra eyes. The concern good Christian folk should feel for their soul's welfare is a shadow, a figment, a

nothing, compared to what the thoroughly heathen gnole feels for those eyes. He would rather, I think, choose to be a mere miserable human being than that some vandal should lay hands upon them.

If Mortensen had not been elated by his success to the point of anaesthesia, he would have seen the gnole stiffen, he would have heard him hiss, when he went over to the cabinet. All innocent, Mortensen opened the glass door, took the twin eyes out, and juggled them sacrilegiously in his hand; the gnole could feel them clink. Smiling to evince the charm of manner advised in the Manual, and raising his brows as one who says, "Thank you, these will do nicely," Mortensen dropped the eyes into his pocket.

The gnole growled.

The growl awoke Mortensen from his trance of euphoria. It was a growl whose meaning no one could mistake. This was clearly no time to be doggedly persistent. Mortensen made a break for the door.

The senior gnole was there before him, his network of tentacles outstretched. He caught Mortensen in them easily and wound them, flat as bandages, around his ankles and his hands. The best abaca fiber is no stronger than those tentacles; though the gnoles would find rope a convenience, they get along very well without it. Would you, dear reader, go naked if zippers should cease to be made? Growling indignantly, the gnole fished his ravished eyes from Mortensen's pockets, and then carried him down to the cellar to the fattening pens.

But great are the virtues of legitimate commerce. Though they fattened Mortensen sedulously, and, later, roasted and sauced him and ate him with real appetite, the gnoles slaught-tered him in quite a humane manner and never once thought of torturing him. That is unusual, for gnoles. And they ornamented the plank on which they served him with a beautiful border of fancy knotwork made of cotton cord from his own sample case.

This was Clifton's first published story. In it he combines, with frightening realism and conviction, one of the oldest ideas in the history of the field, and the very latest trend in scientific speculation.

His hero is, entirely in keeping with the general direction of s-f today, a psychologist. And his villain, the recurrent invader of Earth, is the old familiar bogeyman of folklore and fairy tale: the shape-changer. It is of particular interest to note here that Mr. Clifton's occupation, for some twenty years before he turned to fiction writing, was that of industrial engineer—during which time he conducted more than 200,000 personal interviews of the sort described in the story.

What Have I Done?

Mark Clifton

IT HAD to be I. It would be stupid to say that the burden should have fallen to a great statesman, a world leader, a renowned scientist. With all modesty, I think I am one of the few who could have caught the problem early enough to avert disaster. I have a peculiar skill. The whole thing hinged on that. I have learned to know human beings.

The first time I saw the fellow, I was at the drug-store counter buying cigarettes. He was standing at the magazine rack. One might have thought from the expression on his face that he had never seen magazines before. Still, quite a number of people get that rapt and vacant look when they can't make up their minds to a choice.

The thing which bothered me in that casual glance was that I couldn't recognize him.

There are others who can match my record in taking case histories. I happened to be the one who came in contact with this fellow. For thirty years I have been listening to, talking with, counseling people—over two hundred thousand of them. They have not been routine interviews. I have brought intelligence, sensitivity and concern to each of them.

Mine has been a driving, burning desire to know people. Not from the western scientific point of view of devising tools and rules to measure animated robots and ignoring the man beneath. Nor from the eastern metaphysical approach to painting a picture of the soul by blowing one's breath upon a fog to be blurred and dispersed by the next breath.

Mine was the aim to know the man by making use of both. And there was some success.

A competent geographer can look at a crude sketch of a map and instantly orient himself to it anywhere in the world—the bend of a river, the angle of a lake, the twist of a mountain range. And he can mystify by telling in finest detail what is to be found there.

After about fifty thousand studies where I could predict and then observe and check, with me it became the lift of a brow, the curve of a mouth, the gesture of a hand, the slope of a shoulder. One of the universities became interested, and over a long, controlled period they rated me 92 per cent accurate. That was fifteen years ago. I may have improved some since.

Yet standing there at the cigarette counter and glancing at the young fellow at the magazine rack, I could read nothing. Nothing at all.

If this had been an ordinary face, I would have catalogued it and forgotten it automatically. I see them by the thousands. But this face would not be catalogued nor forgotten, because there was nothing in it.

I started to write that it wasn't even a face, but of course it was. Every human being has a face—of one sort or another.

In build he was short, muscular, rather well proportioned. The hair was crew cut and blond, the eyes were blue, the skin fair. All nice and standard Teutonic—only it wasn't.

I finished paying for my cigarettes and gave him one more glance, hoping to surprise an expression which had some mean-ing. There was none. I left him standing there and walked out on the street and around the corner. The street, the store fronts, the traffic cop on the corner, the warm sunshine were all so familiar I didn't see them. I climbed the stairs to my office in the building over the drug store. My employment-agency wait-ing room was empty. I don't cater to much of a crowd because it cuts down my opportunity to talk with people and further my study.

Margie, my receptionist, was busy making out some kind of a report and, merely nodded as I passed her desk to my own office. She is a good, conscientious girl who can't understand why I spend so much time working with bums and drunks and other psychos who obviously won't bring fees into the some-times too small bank account.

I sat down at my desk and said aloud to myself, "The guy is a fake! As obvious as a high-school boy's drafting of a dollar bill."

I heard myself say that and wondered if I was going nuts, myself. What did I mean by fake? I shrugged. So I happened to see a bird I couldn't read, that was all.

Then it struck me. But that would be unique. I hadn't had that experience for twenty years. Imagine the delight, after all these years, of exploring an unreadable!

I rushed out of my office and back down the stairs to the street. Hallahan, the traffic cop, saw me running up the street and looked at me curiously. I signaled to him with a wave of a hand that everything was all right. He lifted his cap and scratched his head. He shook his head slowly and settled his cap back down. He blew a whistle at a woman driver and went back to directing traffic.

I ran into the drug store. Of course the guy wasn't there. I looked all around, hoping he was hiding behind the pots and pans counter, or something. No guy.

I walked quickly back out on the street and down to the next corner. I looked up and down the side streets. No guy.

I dragged my feet reluctantly back toward the office. I called up the face again to study it. It did no good. The first mental glimpse of it told me there was nothing to find. Logic told me there was nothing to find. If there had been, I wouldn't be in such a stew. The face was empty—completely void of human feelings or character.

No, those weren't the right words. Completely void of human—being!

I walked on past the drug store again and looked in curi-ously, hoping I would see him. Hallahan was facing my direc-tion again, and he grinned crookedly at me. I expect around the neighborhood I am known as a character. I ask the queerest questions of people, from a layman's point of view. Still, appli-cants sometimes tell me that when they asked a cop where was an employment agent they could trust they were sent to me.

I climbed the stairs again, and walked into my waiting room. Margie looked at me curiously, but she

only said, "There's an applicant. I had him wait in your office." She looked like she wanted to say more, and then shrugged. Or maybe she shivered. I knew there was something wrong with the bird, or she would have kept him in the waiting room.

I opened the door to my office, and experienced an over-whelming sense of relief, fulfillment. It was he. Still, it was logical that he should be there. I run an employment agency, People come to me to get help in finding work. If others, why not he?

My skill includes the control of my outward reactions. That fellow could have no idea of the delight I felt at the opportunity to get a full history. If I had found him on the street, the best I might have done was a stock question about what time is it, or have you got a match, or where is the city hall. Here I could question him to my heart's content.

I took his history without comment, and stuck to routine questions. It was all exactly right.

He was an ex-G.I., just completed college, major in astronomy, no experience, no skills, no faintest idea of what he wanted to do, nothing to offer an employer—all perfectly normal for a young grad.,

No feeling or expression, either. Not so normal. Usually they're petulantly resentful that business doesn't swoon at the chance of hiring them. I resigned myself to the old one-two of attempting to steer him toward something practical.

"Astronomy?" I asked. "That means you're heavy in math. Frequently we can place a strong math skill in statistical work." I was hopeful I could get a spark of something.

It turned out he wasn't very good at math. "I haven't yet reconciled my math to . . ." he stopped. For the first time he showed a reaction—hesitancy. Prior to that he had been a statue from Greece—the rounded, expressionless eyes, the too-perfect features undisturbed by thought.

He caught his remark and finished, "I'm just not very good at math, that's all."

I sighed to myself. I'm used to that, too. They give degrees nowadays to get rid of the guys, I suppose. Sometimes I'll go for days without uncovering any usable knowledge. So in a way, that was normal.

The only abnormal part of it was he seemed to think it didn't sound right. Usually the lads don't even realize they should know something. He seemed to think he'd pulled a boner by admitting that a man can take a degree in astronomy without learning math. Well, I wouldn't be surprised to see them take their degrees without knowing how many planets there are.

He began to fidget a bit. That was strange, also. I thought I knew every possible combination of muscular contractions and expansions. This fidget had all the reality of a puppet activated by an amateur. And the eyes—still completely blank.

I led him up one mental street and down the next. And of all the false-fronted stores and cardboard houses and paper lawns, I never saw the like. I get something of that once in a while from a fellow who has spent a long term in prison and comes in with a manufactured past—but never anything as phony as this one was.

Interesting aspect to it. Most guys, when they realize you've spotted them for a phony, get out as soon as they can. He didn't. I was almost as though he were—well testing, to see if his answers would stand up.

I tried talking astronomy, of which I thought I knew a little. I found I didn't know anything, or he didn't. This bird's astronomy and mine had no point of reconciliation.

And then he had a slip of the tongue—yes he did. He was talking, and said, "The ten planets ..."

He caught himself, "Oh that's right. There are only nine."

Could be ignorance, but I didn't think so. Could be he knew of the existence of a planet we hadn't yet discovered.

I smiled. I opened a desk drawer and pulled out a couple science-fiction magazines. "Ever read any of these?" I asked.

"I looked through several of them at the newsstand a while ago," he answered.

"They've enlarged my vision," I said. "Even to the point where I could believe that some other star system might hold intelligence." I lit a cigarette and waited. If I was wrong, he would merely think I was talking at random.

His blank eyes changed. They were no longer Greek-stature eyes. They were no longer blue. They were black, deep bottom-less black, as deep and cold as space itself.

"Where did I fail in my test?" he asked. His lips formed a smile which was not a smile—a carefully painted-on-canvas sort of smile.

Well, I'd had my answer. I'd explored something unique, all right. Sitting there before me, I had no way of determining whether he was benign or evil. No way of knowing his motive. No way of judging—anything. When it takes a lifetime of learning how to judge even our own kind, what standards have we for judging an entity from another star system?

At that moment I would like to have been one.. of those space-opera heroes who, in similar circumstances, laugh casually and say, "What ho! So you're from Arcturus. Well, well. It's a small universe after all, isn't it?" And then with linked arms they head for the nearest bar, bosom pals.

I had the almost hysterical thought, but carefully suppressed, that I didn't know if this fellow would like beer or not. I will not go through the intermuscular and visceral reactions I experienced. I kept my seat and maintained a polite expression. Even with humans, I know when to walk carefully.

"I couldn't feel anything about you," I answered his question. "I couldn't feel anything but blankness." He looked blank. His eyes were nice blue marble again. I liked them better that way.

There should be a million questions to be asked, but I must have been bothered by the feeling that I held a loaded bomb in my hands. And not knowing what might set it off, or how, or when. I could think of only the most trivial.

"How long have you been on Earth?" I asked. Sort of a when did you get back in town, Joe, kind of triviality.

"For several of your weeks," he was answering. "But this is my first time out among humans."

"Where have you been in the meantime?" I asked. "Training." His answers were getting short and his muscles began to fidget again.

"And where do you train?" I kept boring in.

As an answer he stood up and held out his hand, all quite correctly. "I must go now," he said. "Naturally you can cancel my application for employment. Obviously we have more to learn."

I raised an eyebrow. "And I'm supposed to just pass over the whole thing? A thing like this?"

He smiled again. The contrived smile which was a symbol to indicate courtesy. "I believe your custom on this planet is to turn your problems over to your police. You might try that." I could not tell whether it was ironic or logic.

At that moment I could think of nothing else to say. He walked out of my door while I stood beside my desk and watched him go.

Well, what was I supposed to do? Follow him?

I followed him.

Now I'm no private eye, but I've read my share of mystery stories. I knew enough to keep out of sight. I followed him about a dozen blocks into a quiet residential section of small homes. I was standing behind a palm tree, lighting a cigarette, when he went up the walk of one of these small houses. I saw him twiddle with the door, open it, and walk in. The door dosed.

I hung around a while and then went up to the door. I punched the doorbell. A motherly, gray-haired woman came to the door, drying her hands on her apron. As she opened the door she said, "I'm not buying anything today."

Just the same, her eyes looked curious as to what I might have.

I grinned my best grin for elderly ladies. "I'm not selling anything, either," I answered. I handed her my agency card. She looked at it curiously and then looked a question at me.

"I'd like to see Joseph Hoffman," I said politely.

She looked puzzled. "I'm afraid you've got the wrong address, sir," she answered.

I got prepared to stick my foot in the door, but it wasn't necessary. "He was in my office just a few minutes ago," I said. "He gave that name and this address. A job came in right after he left the office, and since I was going to be in this neighborhood anyway, I thought I'd drop by and tell him in person. It's sort of rush," I finished. It had happened many times before, but this time it sounded lame.

"Nobody lives here but me and my husband," she insisted. "He's retired."

I didn't care if he hung by his toes from trees. I wanted a young fellow.

"But I saw the young fellow come in here," I argued. "I was just coming around the corner, trying to catch him. I saw him."

She looked at me suspiciously. "I don't know what your racket is," she said through thin lips, "but I'm not buying any-thing. I'm not signing anything. I don't even want to talk to you." She was stubborn about it.

I apologized and mumbled something about maybe making a mistake.

"I should say you have," she rapped out tartly and shut the door in righteous indignation. Sincere, too. I could tell.

An employment agent who gets the reputation of being a right guy makes all kinds of friends. That poor old lady must have thought a plague of locusts had swept in on her for the next few days.

First the telephone repair man had to investigate an alleged complaint. Then a gas service man had to check the plumbing. An electrician complained there was a power short in the block and he had to trace their house wiring. We kept our fingers crossed hoping the old geezer had never been a construction man. There was a mistake in the last census, and a guy asked her a million questions.

That house was gone over rafter by rafter and sill by sill, attic and basement. It was precisely as she said. She and her husband lived there; nobody else.

In frustration, I waited three months. I wore out the side-walks haunting the neighborhood. Nothing.

Then one day my office door opened and Margie ushered a young man in. Behind his back she was radiating heart throbs and fluttering her eyes.

He was the traditionally tall, dark and handsome young fellow, with a ready grin and sparkling dark eyes. His per-sonality hit me like a sledge hammer. A guy like that never needs to go to an employment agency. Any employer will hire him at the drop of a hat, and wonder later why he did it.

His name was Einar Johnson. Extraction, Norwegian. The dark Norse strain, I judged. I took a chance on his thinking he had walked into a booby hatch.

"The last time I talked with you," I said, "your name was Joseph Hoffman. You were Teutonic then. Not Norse."

The sparkle went out of his eyes. His face showed exaspera-tion and there was plenty of it. It looked real, too, not painted on.

"All right. Where did I flunk this time?" he asked impa-tiently.

"It would take me too long to tell you," I answered. "Sup-pose you start talking." Strangely, I was at ease. I knew that underneath he was the same incomprehensible entity, but his surface was so good that I was lulled.

He looked at me levelly for a long moment. Then he said, "I didn't think there was a chance in a million of being recognized. I'll admit that other character we created was crude. We've learned considerable since then, and we've concentrated every-thing on this personality I'm wearing."

He paused and flashed his teeth at me. I felt like hiring him, myself. "I've been all over Southern California in this one," he said. "I've had a short job as a salesman. I've been to dances and parties. I've got drunk and sober again. Nobody, I say nobody, has shown even the slightest suspicion."

"Not very observing, were they?" I taunted.

"But you are," he answered. "That's why I came back here for the final test. I'd like to know where I failed." He was firm.

"We get quite a few phonies," I answered. "The guy drawing unemployment and stalling until it is run out. The geezik whose wife drives him out and threatens to quit her job if he doesn't go to work. The plain-clothes detail smelling around to see if maybe we aren't a cover for a bookie joint or something. Dozens of phonies."

He looked curious. I said in disgust, "We know in the first two minutes they're phony. You were phony also, but not of any class I've seen before. And," I finished dryly, "I've been waiting for you."

"Why was I phony?" he persisted.

"Too much personality force," I answered. "Human beings just don't have that much force. I felt like

I'd been knocked flat on my . . . well . . . back."

He sighed. "I've been afraid you would recognize me one way or another. I communicated with home. I was advised that if you spotted me, I was to instruct you to assist us."

I lifted a brow. I wasn't sure just how much authority they had to instruct me to do anything.

"I was to instruct you to take over the supervision of our final training, so that no one could ever spot us. If we are going to carry out our original plan that is necessary. If not, then we will have to use the alternate." He was almost didactic in his manner, but his charm of personality still radiated like an infrared lamp.

"You're going to have to tell me a great deal more than that," I said.

He glanced at my closed door.

"We won't be interrupted," I said. "A •personnel history is private."

"I come from one of the planets of Arcturus," he said.

I must have allowed a smile of amusement to show on my face, for he asked, "You find that amusing?"

"No," I answered soberly, and my pulses leaped because the question confirmed my conclusion that he could not read my thoughts. Apparently we were as alien to him as he to us. "I was amused," I explained, "because the first time I saw you I said to myself that as far as recognizing you, you might have come from Arcturus. Now it turns out that accidentally I was correct. I'm better than I thought."

He gave a fleeting polite smile in acknowledgment. "My home planet," he went on, "is similar to yours. Except that we have grown overpopulated."

I felt a twinge of fear.

"We have made a study of this planet and have decided to colonize it." It was a fiat statement, without any doubt behind it.

I flashed him a look of incredulity. "And you expect me to help you with that?"

He gave me a worldly wise look—almost an ancient look. "Why not?" he asked.

"There is the matter of loyalty to my own kind, for one thing," I said. "Not too many generations away and we'll be overpopulated also. There would hardly be room for both your people and ours on Earth."

"Oh that's all right," he answered easily. "There'll be plenty of room for us for quite some time. We multiply slowly."

"We don't," I said shortly. I felt this conversation should be taking place between him and some great statesman—not me.

"You don't seem to understand," he said patiently. "Your race won't be here. We have found no reason why your race should be preserved. You will die away as we absorb."

"Now just a moment," I interrupted. "I don't want our race to die off." The way he looked at me I felt like a spoiled brat who didn't want to go to bed time.

"Why not?" he asked.

I was stumped. That's a good question when it is put logically. Just try to think of a logical reason why the human race should survive. I gave him at least something.

"Mankind," I said, "has had a hard struggle. We've paid a tremendous price in pain and death for our growth. Not to have a future to look forward to would be like paying for something and never getting the use of it."

It was the best I could think of, honest. To base argument on humanity and right and justice and mercy would leave me wide open. Because it is obvious that man doesn't practice any of these. There is no assurance he ever will.

But he was ready for me, even with that one. "But if we are never suspected, and if we absorb and replace gradually, who is to know there is no future for humans?"

And as abruptly as the last time, he stood up suddenly. "Of course," he said coldly, "we could use our alternative plan: Destroy the human race without further negotiation. It is not our way to cause needless pain to any life form. But we can.

"If you do not assist us, then it is obvious that we will eventually be discovered. You are aware of

the difficulty of even blending from one country on Earth to another. How much more difficult it is where there is no point of contact at all. And if we are discovered, destruction would be the only step left."

He smiled and all the force of his charm hit me again. "I know you will want to think it over for a time. I'll return."

He walked to the door, then smiled back at me. "And don't bother to trouble that poor little woman in that house again. Her doorway is only one of many entrances we have opened. She doesn't see us at all, and merely wonders why her latch doesn't work sometimes. And we can open another, any-where, anytime. Like this . . ."

He was gone.

I walked over and opened the door. Margie was all prettied up and looking expectant and radiant. When she didn't see him come out she got up and peeked into my office. "But where did he go?" she asked with wide eyes.

"Get hold of yourself, girl," I answered. "You're so dazed you didn't even see him walk right by you."

"There's something fishy going on here," she said.

Well, I had a problem. A first-rate, genuine, dyed-in-the-wool dilemma.

What was I to do? I could have gone to the local authorities and got locked up for being a psycho. I could have gone to the college professors and got locked up for being a psycho. I could have gone to maybe the FBI and got locked up for being a psycho. That line of thinking began to get monotonous.

I did the one thing which I thought might bring help. I wrote up the happenings and sent it to my favorite science-fiction magazine. I asked for help and sage counsel from the one place I felt awareness and comprehension might be reached.

The manuscript bounced back so fast it might have had rubber bands attached to it, stretched from California to New York. I looked the little rejection slip all over, front and back, and I did not find upon it those sage words of counsel I needed. There wasn't even a printed invitation to try again some time.

And for the first time in my life I knew what it was to be alone—genuinely and irrevocably alone.

Still, I could not blame the editor. I could see him cast the manuscript from him in disgust, saying, "Bah! So another evil race comes to conquer Earth. If I gave the fans one more of those, I'd be run out of my office." And like the deacon who saw the naughty words written on the fence, saying, "And mis-spelled, too."

The fable of the boy who cried "Wolf! Wolf!" once too often came home to me now. I was alone with my problem. The dilemma was my own. On one hand was immediate ex-termination. I did not doubt it. A race which can open doors from one star system to another, without even visible means of mechanism, would also know how to—disinfect.

On the other hand was extinction, gradual, but equally cer-tain, and none the less effective in that it would not be per-ceived. If I refused to assist, then, acting as one lone judge of all the race, I condemned it. If I did assist, I would be arch traitor, with an equal final result.

For days I sweltered in my miasma of indecision. Like many a man before me, uncertain of what to do, I temporized. I de-cided to play for time. To play the role of traitor in the hopes I might learn a way of defeating them.

Once I had made up my mind, my thoughts raced wildly through the possibilities. If I were to be their instructor on how to walk unsuspected among men, then I would have them wholly in my grasp. If I could build traits into them, common ordinary traits which they could see in men all about them, yet which would make men turn and destroy them, then I would have my solution.

And I knew human beings. Perhaps it was right, after all, that it became my problem. Mine alone.

I shuddered now to think what might have happened had this being fallen into less skilled hands and told his story. Perhaps by now there would be no man left upon Earth.

Yes, the old and worn-out plot of the one little unknown guy who saved Earth from outer evil might yet run its course in reality.

I was ready for the Arcturan when he returned. And he did return.

Einar Johnson and I walked out of my office after I had sent a tearful Margie on a long vacation with fancy pay. Einar had plenty of money, and was liberal with it. When a fellow can open some sort of

fourth-dimensional door into a bank vault and help himself, money is no problem.

I had visions of the poor bank clerks trying to explain things to the examiners, but that wasn't my worry right now.

We walked out of the office and I snapped the lock shut behind me. Always conscious of the cares of people looking for work, I hung a sign on the door saying I was ill and didn't know when I would be back.

We walked down the stairs and into the parking lot. We got into my car, my own car, please note, and I found myself sitting in a sheltered patio in Beverly Hills. Just like that. No awful wrenching and turning my insides out. No worrisome nausea and emptiness of space. Nothing to dramatize it at all. Car—patio, like that.

I would like to be able to describe the Arcturans as having long snaky appendages and evil, slobbering maws, and stuff like that. But I can't describe the Arcturans, because I didn't see any.

I saw a gathering of people, roughly about thirty of them, wandering around the patio, swimming in the pool, going in and out of the side doors of the house. It was a perfect spot. No one bothers the big Beverly Hills home without invitation.

The natives wouldn't be caught dead looking toward a star's house. The tourists see the winding drive, the trees and grass, and perhaps a glimpse of a gabled roof. If they can get any thrill out of that, then bless their little spending money hearts, they're welcome to it.

Yet if it should become known that a crowd of strange-acting people are wandering around in the grounds, no one would think a thing about it. They don't come any more zany than the Hollywood crowd.

Only these were. These people could have made a fortune as life-size puppets. I could see now why it was judged that the lifeless Teutonic I had first interviewed was thought adequate to mingle with human beings. By comparison with these, he was a snappy song and dance man.

But that is all I saw. Vacant bodies wandering around, going through human motions, without human emotions. The job looked bigger than I had thought. And yet, if this was their idea of how to win friends and influence people, I might be successful after all.

There are dozens of questions the curious might want answered—such as how did they get hold of the house and how did they get their human bodies and where did they learn to speak English, and stuff. I wasn't too curious. I had important things to think about. I supposed they were able to do it, because here it was.

I'll cut the following weeks short. I cannot conceive of what life and civilization on their planet might be like. Yardsticks of scientific psychology are used to measure a man, and yet they give no indication at all of the inner spirit of him, likewise, the descriptive measurements of their civilization are empty and meaningless. Knowing about a man, and knowing a man are two entirely different things.

For example, all those thalamic urges and urgencies which we call emotion were completely unknown to them, except as they saw them in antics on TV. The ideals of man were also unknown—truth, honor, justice, perfection—all unknown. They had not even a division of sexes, and the emotion we call love was beyond their understanding. The TV stories they saw must have been like watching a parade of ants.

What purpose can be gained by describing such a civilization to man? Man cannot conceive accomplishment without first having the dream. Yet it was obvious that they accomplished, for they were here.

When I finally realized there was no point of contact between man and these, I knew relief and joy once more. My job was easy. I knew how to destroy them. And I suspected they could not avoid my trap.

They could not avoid my trap because they had human bodies. Perhaps they conceived them out of thin air, but the veins bled, the flesh felt pain and heat and pressure, the glands secreted.

Ah yes, the glands secreted. They would learn what emotion could be. And I was a master of wielding emotion. The dream of man has been to strive toward the great and immortal ideals. His literature is filled with admonishments to that end. In comparison with the volume of work which tells us what we should be, there is very little which reveals us as we are.

As part of my training course, I chose the world's great literature, and painting, and sculpture, and music—those mediums which best portray man lifting to the stars. I gave them first of all, the dream.

And with the dream, and with the pressure of the glands as kicker, they began to know emotion. I had respect for the superb acting of Einar when I realized that he, also, had still known no emotion.

They moved from the puppet to the newborn babe—a new-born babe in training, with an adult body, and its matured glandular equation.

I saw emotions, all right. Emotions without restraint, emotions unfettered by taboos, emotions uncontrolled by ideals. Sometimes I became frightened and all my skill in manipulating emotions was needed. At other times they became perhaps a little too Hollywood, even for Hollywood. I trained them into more ideal patterns.

I will say this for the Arcturans. They learned—fast. The crowd of puppets to the newborn babes, to the boisterous boys and girls, to the moody and unpredictable youths, to the matured and balanced men and women. I watched the metamorphosis take place over the period of weeks.

I did more.

All that human beings had ever hoped to be, the brilliant, the idealistic, the great in heart, I made of these. My little 145 I.Q. became a moron's level. The dreams of the greatness of man which I had known became the vaguest of wisps of fog before the reality which these achieved.

My plan was working.

Full formed, they were almost like gods. And training these things into them, I trained their own traits out. One point I found we had in common. They were activated by logic, logic carried to heights of which I had never dreamed. Yet my poor and halting logic found point of contact.

They realized at last that if they let their own life force and motivation remain active they would carry the aura of strangeness to defeat their purpose. I worried, when they accepted this. I felt perhaps they were laying a trap for me, as I did for them. Then I realized that I had not taught them deceit.

And it was logical, to them, that they follow my training completely. Reversing the position, placing myself upon their planet, trying to become like them, I must of necessity follow my instructor without question. What else could they do?

At first they saw no strangeness that I should assist them to destroy my race. In their logic the Arcturan was most fit to survive, therefore he should survive. The human was less fit, therefore he should perish.

I taught them the emotion of compassion. And when they began to mature their human thought and emotion, and their intellect was blended and shaded by such emotion, at last they understood my dilemma.

There was irony in that. From my own kind I could expect no understanding. From the invaders I received sympathy and compassion. They understood at last my traitorous action to buy a few more years for man.

Yet their Arcturan logic still prevailed. They wept with me, but there could be no change of plan. The plan was fixed, they were merely instruments by which it was to be carried out.

Yet, through their compassion, I did get the plan modified.

This was the conversation which revealed that modification.

Einar Johnson, who as the most fully developed had been my constant companion, said to me one day, "To all intents and purposes we have become human beings." He looked at me and smiled with fondness, "You have said it is so, and it must be so. For we begin to realize what a great and glorious thing a human is."

The light of nobility shone from him like an aura as he told me this. "Without human bodies, and without the emotion-intelligence equation which you call soul, our home planet cannot begin to grasp the growth we have achieved. We know now that we will never return to our own form, for by doing that we would lose what we have gained.

"Our people are logical, and they must of necessity accept our recommendation, as long as it does not abandon the plan entirely. We have reported what we have learned, and it is conceived that both our races can inhabit the universe side by side.

"There will be no more migration from our planet to yours. We will remain, and we will multiply, and we will live in honor, such as you have taught us, among you. In time perhaps we may achieve the greatness which all humans now have.

"And we will assist the human kind to find their destiny among the stars as we have done."

I bowed my head and wept. For I knew that I had won.

Four months had gone. I returned to my own neighborhood. On the corner Hallahan left the traffic to shift for itself while he came over to me with the question, "Where have you been?"

"I've been sick," I said.

"You look it," he said frankly. "Take care of yourself, man. Hey . . . Lookit that fool messing up traffic." He was gone, blowing his whistle in a temper.

I climbed the stairs. They still needed repairing as much as ever. From time to time I had been able to mail money to Margie, and she had kept the rent and telephone paid. The sign was still on my door. My key opened the lock.

The waiting room had that musty, they've-gone-away look about it. The janitor had kept the windows tightly closed and there was no freshness in the air. I half-hoped to see Margie sitting at her desk, but I knew there was no purpose to it. When a girl is being paid for her time and has nothing to do, the beach is a nice place to spend it.

There was dust on my chair, and I sank down into it without bothering about the seat of my pants. I buried my head in my arms and I looked into the human soul.

Now the whole thing hinged on that skill. I know human beings. I know them as well as anyone in the world, and far better than most.

I looked into the past and I saw a review of the great and fine and noble and divine torn and burned and crucified by man.

Yet my only hope of saving my race was to build these qualities, the fine, the noble, the splendid, into these thirty beings. To create the illusion that all men were likewise great. No less power could have gained the boon of equality for man with them.

I look into the future. I see them, one by one, destroyed. I gave them no defence. They are totally unprepared to meet man as he genuinely is—and they are incapable of understanding.

For these things which man purports to admire the most—the noble, the brilliant, the splendid—these are the very things he cannot tolerate when he finds them.

Defenseless, because they cannot comprehend, these thirty will go down beneath the ravening fury of rending and destroy-ing man always displays whenever he meets his ideal face to face.

I bury my head in my hands.

What have I done?

It takes some effort to conceive of intelligence in a machine, and even more (on the part of writer and reader both) to credit metal and current with the emotions of flesh and blood. Certainly, it should be easier to accept the fact of emotion and intelligence in an animal as highly evolved as a dog. And yet Mr. Christopher's story of just one more step in animal evolution is entirely credible as well as novel and unexpected.

Socrates

John Christopher

I HAD closed the lab for the afternoon and was walking down toward the front gate, meaning to take a bus into town, when I heard the squeals from the direction of the caretaker's cottage. I'm fond of animals and hate to hear them in pain, so I walked through the gate into the cottage yard. What I saw horrified me.

Jennings, the caretaker, was holding a young puppy in his hand and beating its head against the stone wall. At his feet were three dead puppies, and as I came through the gate he tossed a fourth among them, and picked up the last squirming remnant of the litter. I called out sharply, "Jennings ! What's going on ?"

He turned to face me, still holding the puppy in his hand. He is a surly-looking fellow at best, but now he looked thun-derous.

"What the hell do you think I'm doing?" he demanded. "Killing off a useless litter—that's what I'm doing." He held the pup out for me to observe.

"Here," he went on, "have a look at this and you'll see why."

I looked closely. It was the queerest pup I had ever seen. It had a dirty, tan coat and abnormally thick legs. But it was the head that drew attention. It must have been fully four times the size of any ordinary pup of its breed; so big that, although its neck was sturdy, the head seemed to dangle on it like an apple on a stalk.

"It's a queer one, all right," I admitted.

"Queer?" he exclaimed. "It's a monster, that's what it is." He looked at me angrily. "And I know the cause of it. I'm not a fool. There was a bit in the Sunday papers a couple of weeks back about it. It's them electrical X-ray machines you have up at the house. It said in the paper about X-rays being able to influence what's to be born and make monsters of them. And look at this for a litter of pedigree airedales; not one that would make even a respectable mongrel. Thirty quid the price of this litter at the very least."

"It's a pity," I said, "but I'm pretty sure the company won't accept responsibility. You must have let your bitch run loose beyond the inner gate and there's no excuse for that. It's too bad you didn't see that bit in the Sunday paper a few weeks earlier; you might have kept her chained up more. You know you've been warned about going near the plant."

"Yes," he snarled, "I know what chance I've got of getting money out of those crooks. But at least I can get some pleasure out of braining this lot."

He prepared to swing the pup against the wall. It had been quiet while we were talking, but now it gave one low howl and opened large eyes in a way that seemed frantically to suggest that it had been listening to our conversation, and knew its fate was sealed. I grabbed hold of Jennings' arm pretty roughly.

"Hold on," I said. "When did you say those pups were born?"

"This morning," he growled.

I said, "But its eyes are open. And look at the color! Have you ever seen an airedale with blue eyes before?"

He laughed unpleasantly. "Has anybody ever seen an aire-dale with a head like that before, or a coat like that? It's no more an airedale than I am. It's a cur. And I know how to deal with it."

The pup was whining to itself, as though realizing the futil-ity of making louder noises. I pulled my wallet out. "I'll give you a quid for it," I said.

He whistled. "You must be mad," he said. "But why should that worry me? It's yours for the money. Taking it now?"

"I can't," I said. "My landlady wouldn't let me. But I'll pay you ten bob a week if you will look after it till I can find it a place. Is it a deal?"

He put his hand out again. "In advance?"

I paid him.

"I'll look after it, guv'nor, even though it goes against the grain. At any rate it'll give Glory something to mother." At least once a day, sometimes twice, I used to call in to see how the pup was getting along. It was progressing amazingly. At the end of the second week Jennings asked for an increase of 2/6d in the charge for keeping it, and I had to agree. It had fed from the mother for less than a week, after which it had begun to eat its own food, and with a tremendous appetite.

Jennings scratched his unkempt head when he looked at it. "I don't know. I've never seen a dog like it. Glory didn't give it no lessons in eating or drinking. It just watched her from the corner and one day, when I brought fresh stuff down, it set on it like a wolf. It ain't natural."

Watching the pup eat, I was amazed myself. It seemed to have more capacity for food than its mother, and you could almost see it putting on weight and size. And its cleverness! It was hardly more than a fortnight old when I surprised it care-fully pawing the latch of the kennel door open, to get at some food that Jennings had left outside while going out to open the gates. But even at that stage I don't think it

was such superficial tricks that impressed me, so much as the way I would catch it watching Jennings and me as we leaned over the kennel fence discussing it. There was such an air of attentiveness about the way it sat, with one ear cocked, a puzzled frown on that broad-browed, most uncanine face.

Jennings said one day, "Thought of a name for him yet?" "Yes," I said. "I'm going to call him Socrates." "Socrates?" repeated Jennings. "Something to do with football?"

I smiled. "There was another great thinker with that name several thousand years ago. A Greek."

"Oh," Jennings said scornfully. "A Greek . . ."

One Friday, evening I brought a friend down to see Socrates—a man who had made a study of dogs. Jennings wasn't in. This didn't surprise me because he habitually got drunk at least one evening a week and Friday was his favorite. I took my friend around to the kennels.

He didn't say anything when he saw the pup, which was now, after three weeks, the size of a large fox terrier. He examined it carefully, as though he were judging a prize winner at Cruft's. Then he put it down and turned to me.

"How old did you say this dog is?" he asked.

I told him.

He shook his head. "If it were anyone but you who told me, I would call him a liar," he said. "Man, I've never seen any-thing like it. And that head. . . . You say the rest of the litter were the same?"

"The bodies looked identical," I told him. "That's what impressed me. You are liable to get queer freak mutations around these new labs of ours—double-headed rats and that sort of thing—but five the same in one litter! That looked like a true mutation to me."

He said, "Mutations I'm a bit shaky about, but five alike in one litter look like a true breed to me. What a tragedy that fool killed them:"

"He killed a goose that might have laid him some very golden eggs," I said. "Quite apart from the scientific importance of it—I should imagine a biologist would go crazy at the thought—a new mutated breed like this would have been worth a packet. Even this one dog might have all sorts of possibilities. Look!"

Socrates had pushed an old tin against the wall of the kennel and was using it in an attempt to scale the fence barring the way to the outer world. His paws scabbled in vain a few inches from the top.

"Good God!" my friend said. "If it can do that after a month . . ."

We turned and left the kennels. As we came out I collided with Jennings. He reeled drunkenly past us.

"Come to feed little Shocratesh," he said thickly.

I held his shoulder. "That's all right," I said. "We've seen to them."

When I dropped in the following day, I was surprised to see a huge, roughly painted sign hanging over the kennel door. It read:

"PRIVATE. NO ADMITTANCE."

I tried the door, but it was locked. I looked around. Jennings was watching me.

"Hello, Professor," he said. "Can't you read?"

I said, "Jennings, I've come for the pup. My friend is going to look after him at his kennels."

Jennings grinned. "Sorry," he said, "the dog's not for sale."

"What do you mean?" I exclaimed. "I bought him four weeks ago. And I've been paying you for his keep."

"You got any writing that says that, Professor?" he asked. "You got a bill of sale?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Jennings," I said. "Open the door up."

"You even got any witnesses?" he asked. He came over to me confidentially.

"Look," he said, "you're a fair man. I heard you telling your friend last night that dog's a gold mine. You know I own him by rights. Here, I'm a fair man myself. Here's three pounds five, the money I've had from you in the last four weeks. You know he's my gold mine by rights. You wouldn't try to do a man like me. You know I paid five quid stud fee for that litter."

"It was a bargain," I said. "You were going to throw the pup at the wall—don't forget that. You wouldn't even know the dog was anything out of the ordinary now, except for listening to a private

conversation last night." I found my wallet. "Here's ten pounds. That will make good the stud fee and a little extra profit for yourself into the bargain."

He shook his head. "I'm not selling, Professor. And I know my rights in the law. You've got no proof; I've got possession."

I said, "You idiot! What can you do with him? He will have to be examined by scientists, tested, trained. You 'don't know anything about it."

Jennings spat on the ground. "Scientists!" he exclaimed. "No, I'm not taking him to no scientists. I've got a bit of money saved up. I'm off away from here tomorrow. I'll do the training. And you watch the theaters for the big billboards in a few months' time—George Jennings and his Wonder Dog, Socra-tes! I'll be up at the West End inside a year."

It was only three months later that I saw the name on the bills outside the Empire Theater in Barcaster. There had been no word from Jennings during that time. As he had said he would, he had gone with the dog, vanishing completely. Now he was back, and the bill read as he had told me it would:

GEORGE JENNINGS
AND HIS WONDER DOG,
SOCRATES

I went in and bought a seat in the front row. There were some knockabout comedians fooling together on the stage; and after them a team of rather tired-looking acrobats. Jennings was the third in appearance. He strode on to a fanfare of trumpets, and behind him loped Socrates.

He was bigger and his rough, tan coat was shaggier than ever. His head was more in proportion to his body, too, but it was still huge. He looked nearer to a St. Bernard than any breed I could think of, but he was very little like a St. Bernard. He was just Socrates, with the same blue eyes blazing that had surprised me that afternoon four months before.

Jennings had taught him tricks, all right. As they reached the center of the stage, Socrates staggered up on to his hind legs, waddled to the footlights and saluted the audience. He swung effortlessly from the trapezes the acrobats had left, spelled out words in reply to Jennings' questions, pulling alpha-bet blocks forward with his teeth. He went through all the repertoire that trick dogs usually follow, capping them with an assurance that made the audience watch in respectful silence. But when he left, walking stiffly off the stage, the ovation was tremendous. They came back half a dozen times for encores, Socrates saluting gravely each time the mob of hysterical hu-mans before him. When they had left for the last time, I walked out, too.

I bribed the doorman to let me know the name of Jennings' hotel. He wasn't staying with the rest of the music-hall people, but by himself in the Grand. I walked over there late in the evening, and had my name sent up. The small, grubby page boy came back in a few minutes.

"Mr. Jennings says you're to go right up," he told me, and added the floor and room number.

I knocked and heard Jennings' voice answer, "Come in!"

He seemed more prosperous than the Jennings I had known, but there was the same shifty look about him. He was sitting in front of the tire wearing an expensive blue-and-gold dressing gown, and as I entered the room he poured himself whisky from a decanter. I noticed that his hand shook slightly.

"Why," he said thickly, "if it isn't the professor! Always a pleasure to see old friends. Have a drink, Professor."

He helped me to whisky.

"Here's to you, Professor," he said, "and to Socrates, the Wonder Dog!"

I said, "Can I see him?"

He grinned. "Any time you like. Socrates!"

A door pushed open and Socrates walked in, magnificent in his bearing and in the broad, intelligent face from which those blue eyes looked out. He advanced to Jennings' chair and dropped into immobility, head couched between powerful paws.

"You seen our show?" Jennings asked.

I nodded.

"Great, isn't it? But it's only the beginning. We're going to show them! Socrates, do the new trick."

Socrates jumped up and left the room, returning a moment later pulling a small wooden go-cart, gripping a rope attached to it in his teeth. I noticed that the cart had a primitive pedal arrangement near the front, fixed to the front wheels. Socrates suddenly leaped into the cart, and, moving the pedals with his paws, propelled himself along the room. As he reached the wall, the cart swerved and I noticed that his tail worked a rudderlike arrangement for steering. He went the reverse length of the room and turned again, but this time failed to allow enough clearance. The cart hit the side wall and Socrates toppled off.

Jennings rose to his feet in an instant. He snatched a whip from the wall, and, while Socrates cowered, thrashed him viciously, cursing him all the time for his failure.

I jumped forward and grappled with Jennings. At last I got the whip away from him and he fell back exhausted in the chair and reached for the whisky decanter.

I said angrily, "You madman! Is this how you train the dog?"

He looked up at me over his whisky glass. "Yes," he said, "this is my way of training him! A dog's got to learn respect for his master. He doesn't understand anything but the whip. Socrates!"

He lifted his whip hand, and the dog cowered down.

"I've trained him," he went on. "He's going to be the finest performing dog in the world before I'm through."

I said, "Look, Jennings, I'm not a rich man, but I've got friends who will advance me money. I'll get you a thousand pounds for Socrates."

He sneered. "So you want to cash in on the theaters, too?"

"I promise that if you sell Socrates to me, he will never be used for profit by anyone."

He laughed. "A hell of a lot I care what would happen to him if I sold him. But I'm not selling; not for a penny under £20,000. Why, the dog's a gold mine."

"You are determined about that?" I asked.

He got up again. "I'll get you the advance bills for our next engagement," he said. "Top billing already! Hang on; they're only next door."

He walked out unsteadily. I looked down to where Socrates lay, watching everything in the way that had fascinated me when he was a pup. I called to him softly:

"Socrates."

He pricked up his ears. I felt crazy, but I had to do it. I whispered to him, "Socrates, follow me back as soon as you can get away. Here, take the scent from my coat"

I held my sleeve out to him, and he sniffed it. He wagged his huge, bushy tail slowly. Then Jennings was back with his billheads, and I made my excuses and left.

I walked back—a matter of two or three miles. The more I thought, the more insane did it seem that the dog could have heeded and understood my message. It had been an irrational impulse.

I had found new accommodations in the months since Jennings' disappearance; in a cottage with a friendly old couple. I had brought Tess, my own golden retriever, from home, and they both adored her. She was sitting on the inside window ledge as I walked slowly up the garden path, and her barks brought old Mrs. Dobby to the door to let me in. Tess came bouncing to meet me and her silky paws were flung up toward my chest. I patted and stroked her into quietness and, after washing, settled down to a pleasant tea.

Two or three hours later, the Dobbys having gone to bed, I was sitting reading by the fire when I heard a voice at the door I called, "Who's there?"

This time it was a little more distinct, though still garbled, as though by a person with a faulty palate. I heard, "Socrates."

I threw the door open quickly. Socrates stood there, eyes gleaming, tail alert. I looked beyond him into the shadows.

"Who's brought you, old chap?" I asked.

Socrates looked up. His powerful jaws opened. I could see teeth gleaming whitely.

Socrates said, slurring the words, but intelligible, "Me. Can speak."

I brought him in, shelving my incredulity. Sitting in the Dobbys' cosy room in front of a glowing fire, it seemed more fantastic than ever. Half to myself, I said, "I can't believe it."

Socrates had sat down on the rug. "True, though," he said.

I asked, "Does Jennings know?"

Socrates replied, "No. Have told no one else. Would only make into tricks."

"But Jennings knows you can hear and understand things?"

"Yes. Could not hide. Jennings whips until I learn. Easier to learn at once."

His voice, a kind of low, articulate growling, became more readily understandable as I listened to it. After a few minutes it did not seem at all strange that I was sitting by the fire talking to a half-grown but large mongrel dog. He told me how he had practiced human speech by himself, forcing his throat to adapt itself to the complexities, succeeding through a long process of trial and error.

I said, in amazement, "But, Socrates, you are barely four months old!"

His brow wrinkled. "Yes. Strange. Everything goes so fast for me. Big—old . . ."

"Maturity," I supplied. "Of course there have been 'talking dogs' before, but they were just stunts, no real intelligence. Do you realize what a phenomenon you are, Socrates?"

The vast canine face seemed to smile. "How not realize?" he asked. "All other dogs—such fools. Why that, Professor?" I told him of his birth. He seemed to grasp the idea of X-ray mutation very easily. I suppose one can always swallow the facts of one's own existence. He remembered very little of that first month of infancy. When I told him of the fate of the rest of his litter, he was saddened.

"Perhaps best not to know that," he said. "Sad to think I might have had brothers and sisters like me. Not to be always a trick dog."

"You don't need to be a trick dog, Socrates," I said. "Look, we'll go away. I've got friends who will help. You need never see Jennings again."

Socrates said, "No. Not possible. Jennings the master. I must go back."

"But he beats you! He may beat you for going out now."

"He will," Socrates said. "But worth it to come see you."

"Look, Socrates," I said. "Jennings isn't your master. No free intelligence should be a slave to another. Your intelligence is much more advanced than Jennings'."

The big head shook. "For men, all right. Dogs different."

"But you aren't even Jennings' dog," I said. I told him the story of Jennings' trickery; how he had sold Socrates to me and then refused to acknowledge the sale. Socrates was not impressed.

"Always Jennings' dog," he said. "Not remember anything else. Must go back. You not dog—not understand."

I said halfheartedly, "We would have a fine time, Socrates. You could learn all sorts of things. And be free, completely free."

But I knew it was no use. Socrates, as he said, was still a dog, even though an intelligent one, and the thousands of years of instinctive slavery to a human master had not been quenched by the light that brought intelligence and reasoning to his brain.

He said, "Will come here to learn. Will get away often."

"And be beaten by Jennings every time you go back?"

Socrates shivered convulsively. "Yes," he said. "Worth it. Worth it to learn things. You teach?"

"I'll teach you anything I can, Socrates," I promised. "Can mutate more dogs like me?"

I hated to say it. "No, Socrates. You were a fluke, an accident. X-rays make monsters; once in a million, million times, perhaps, something like you happens."

The bushy tail drooped disconsolately. The huge head rested a moment between his paws. Then he stood up, four-legged, an outcast.

"Must go now. Will come again soon."

I let him out and saw him lope away into the night. I turned back into the warm firelit room. I thought of Socrates, running back through the night to Jennings' whip and I knew what anger and despair were.

Socrates came quite frequently after that. He would sit in front of me while I read to him from books. At first he wanted to be taught to read for himself, but the difficulty of turning pages with his clumsy paws

discouraged him. I read to him from all the books he wanted.

His appetite was voracious, but lay chiefly along non-technical lines; naturally enough, in view of the impossibility of his ever being able to do even the simplest manual experiments. Philosophy interested him, and I found my own education improving with Socrates as he led me deeper and deeper into mazes of idealism, epistemology and sublineation. He enjoyed poetry, too, and composed a few rough poems, which had the merit of a strange non-human approach. But he would not let me write them down; now I can remember only a few isolated lines.

His most intense interest was in an unexpected field. I mentioned casually one day some new development in physical research, and his mind fastened on the subject immediately. He told me he could see all sorts of queer things which he knew humans could at the best sense only vaguely. He spent nearly an hour one evening describing to me the movements of a strange spiral-shaped thing that, he said, was spinning around slowly in one corner of my room, now and then increasing and decreasing in size and making sudden jumps. I walked over to the place he indicated and put my hand through vacancy.

"Can hear it, too," Socrates said. "High, sweet noise."

"Some people have unusual senses and report similar things," I told him.

He made me read through every book I could find on para-normal phenomena, in search of explanations of the oddities that surrounded him, but they annoyed him.

"So many fools," he said wearily, when we put down one book that had painstakingly linked up poltergeists with angels. "They did not see. They only wanted to. They thought they did."

The Dobbys were a little curious at my new habit of reading aloud in my room, and once I saw them glancing suspiciously at Socrates when he changed his speech into a growl as they came into the house from the garden. But they accepted his strange appearances and disappearances quite easily, and always made a fuss of him when he happened to turn up during my absence.

We did not always read. At times we would go out into the fields, and he and Tess would disappear in search of rabbits and birds and all the other things that fascinate dogs in the country. I would see them a field away, breasting the wind together. Socrates badly needed such outings. Jennings rarely took him out, and, as Socrates spent all the time he could filch from Jennings' training activities with me, he saw no other dogs and had no other exercise. Tess was very fond of him and sometimes whined when we shut her out from my room, in order to read and talk undisturbed. I asked Socrates about her once.

He said, "Imagine all dogs intelligent; all men fools. You the only intelligent man. You talk to dogs, but you not like pretty women, even though they are fools?"

Then, for months, Socrates disappeared, and I learned that Jennings was touring the north of England, having a sensational success. I saw also the announcement that he was to return to Barcaster for a fortnight early in November. I waited patiently. On the morning before he was due to open, Socrates returned.

He was looking as fit as ever physically, but mentally the tour had been a strain for him. In philosophy he had always inclined to defeatism, but it had been defeat with a sense of glory. He had reveled in Stapledon's works, and drawn interesting comparisons between himself and Stapledon's wonder sheepdog. Now, however, there was a listlessness about him that made his defeatism a drab and unhappy thing. He would not read philosophy, but lay silent while I read poetry to him.

Jennings, I discovered, had steadily increased his bouts of drunkenness. Socrates told me that he had to carry the act by himself now; Jennings was generally too drunk to give even the most elementary instructions on the stage.

And, of course, with the drunkenness came the whippings. There were nasty scars on the dog's back. I treated them as well as I could, but increasingly I hated and dreaded the time when he would say, "Must go now," and I would see him lope off, tail low, to face Jennings' drunken fury.

I remonstrated with him again, begging him to come away with me, but it was beyond reason. The centuries of slavery could not be eradicated. He always went back to Jennings.

Then he came one afternoon. It had been raining for days, and he was wet through. He would not stay in front of the fire to dry. The rain was slackening a little. I took my raincoat, and, with Tess frisking beside us, we set out. We walked on in silence. Even Tess grew subdued.

At last, Socrates said, "Can't go on for long. Whipped me again last night. Felt something burn my mind. Almost tore his throat out. I will do it soon and they will shoot me."

"They won't shoot you," I said. "You come to me. You will be all right. Come now, Socrates. Surely you don't want to go on serving Jennings when you know you may have to kill him?"

He shivered, and the raindrops ran off his shaggy back.

"Talking no good," he said. "I must go back. And if he whips me too much, I must kill him. I will be shot. Best that way."

We had reached the river. I paused on the bridge that spanned it a few inches above the swirling currents of the flood, and looked out. The river was high after the rain, running even more swiftly than it usually did. Less than a quarter of a mile away was the fall, where the water cascaded over the brink into a raging turmoil below. I was looking at it abstractedly when I heard Jennings' voice.

He stood at the other end of the bridge. He was raging drunk.

He called, "So there you are! And that's what you've been up to—sneaking off to visit the professor. I thought I might catch you here."

He advanced menacingly up the bridge. "What you need, my lad, is a taste of the whip."

He was brandishing it as he walked. I waited until he had almost reached the place where Socrates was cowering on the boards, waiting for the blow, and then I charged him savagely. He fought for a moment, but I was sober and he was not. I caught one of his legs and twisted. He pulled viciously away, staggered, fell—and disappeared into the violently flowing river.

I saw his face appear a few yards down. He screamed and went under again. I turned to Socrates.

"It's all over," I said. "You are free. Come home, Socrates."

The head appeared again, and screamed more faintly. Socra-tes stirred. He called to Jennings for the first and last time, "Master!"

Then he was over the bridge and swimming down frantically toward the drowning man. I called after him, but he took no notice. I thought of jumping in myself, but I knew I could not last even to reach him. With Tess at my heels, I raced around the bank to the place where the water roared over the fall.

I saw them just as they reached the fall. Socrates had reached him, and was gripping the coat in his tea. He tried to make for the bank, but there was no chance. They swept over the edge and into the fury below. I watched for their reappearance for some time, but they did not come up.

They never came up.

I think sometimes of the things Socrates might have done if he had been given the chance. If only for those queer things he saw that we cannot see, his contribution to knowledge would have been tremendous. And when I think that he was less than a year old when he died, the lost possibilities awe and sadden me.

I cannot escape the conclusion that at his full maturity he would have outstripped all the specialists in the strange fields he might have chosen to work in.

There is just one thing that worries me still. His was a true mutation; the identical litter showed that. But was it a dominant one? Could the strength and vigor of his intelligence rise above the ordinary traits of an ordinary dog? It's a point that means a great deal.

Tess is going to have pups.

The presentation of this story is my good deed for the year. It was written some three years ago, and has never before been published. Mr. Manning was not satisfied with the story when he finished it, and in the course of the ensuing years, though he revised it several times, never submitted to a magazine.

As a writer, I know how easy it is to mis-judge one's own best work. As an anthologist, I feel fortunate indeed that I happened to see this yarn in manuscript, and was able to persuade Mr. Manning to let my judgment over-ride his own.

This too, is a story about some BEMs. But it's hard to say who they are; this time the humans are the alien invaders.

Good-bye, Ilha!
Laurence Manning

YOU ARE so punctual, Ilha, I know you will be here exactly one hour after dawn, as we arranged yesterday. I am leaving this letter to explain why I cannot meet you. You must report to World Resource headquarters. Be quick. Roll to the place we left the skid-plane; fly with throttle wide open; you should arrive before noon.

Claim emergency; get an immediate interview with the Di-rector.

Before the afternoon is over he is to blanket the whole area, quad 73:61 on the map, with infrared heat. Not to kill, tell him. Raise the absolute temperature only about 10 per cent, just enough to make it thoroughly uncomfortable. These visitors endanger our whole civilization, but I think that will drive them away. However, it may not, so at noon the next day push the power up to full killing temperatures for a few minutes.

He will object, but what if a few miles of sand are fused? You know the area. It was so thoroughly blasted during the Age of Wars that no more damage is possible, and anyway, it will be centuries before the reclamation engineers touch this part of our planet. You can—you must persuade him, Ilha!

It is rude, I know, to begin with such urgency, omitting the traditional greeting phrases, writing without Limik calmness or philosophy. But you may as well get used to it, for the creatures I write about are totally un-Limik—utterly out of this world!

I found them yesterday about where the disturbance showed on the magnetic map, near the center of the quad. Their rocket ship is much like the ancient ones in the museum at Prr, but larger and made of magnesium. I hid behind a sand dune until dark, when I could examine it safely. Light streamed from two round windows and also from a tall, narrow, opening—a door in spite of its fantastic shape (twice as high as it was broad)—opening from a small vestibule. There were two inner doors, one open and one closed. From the closed one came loud roarings and barkings as of wild animals, but modulated by a variety of smacks, gargles and splutterings. I soon realized these sounds were signals—a regular code language, like our own writing. I could sense the thought associated with each sound; but evidently the animals behind the door, though all present together, could not. They had to make these sound signals to understand each other. Curious and primitive, isn't it?

There were three voices, one much stronger than the other two. I caught thought phrases like "I am hungry," "Is not that drink cold yet?" and "When do we eat?" There were thoughts I sensed, which made no meaning to me. There were also sounds, many of them, that had no thought behind them at all: "WEL-IL-BEDAM" was one, "OG-O-AWN" was another, commonest of all was a sort of barking, "HAW-HAW-HAW." All meaning dissolved when they barked, their minds seemed pleased with themselves in a strange, bubbling, thought-free sort of way. "HAW HAW HAW" would go the biggest voice and the other two (no, not its mates; I still know nothing of their reproductive customs except that the wrappings on their bodies have something to do with it) would join "HAW HAW HAW" like so many flepas barking at the moon. Only flepas think sad hungry thoughts when they bark; these creatures stopped thinking altogether.

I stood there outside the door delighted with it. I suppose it doesn't sound attractive—though I ask you, can any Limik stop thinking—ever? But it is more than not thinking. It is the feeling that goes with it—a lifting of the spirits, refreshing, youthful . . . Oh well, I'll continue.

The open door showed a small empty room, its walls fitted with shelves and cabinets. I tip-probed in, hoping to learn something about this unknown species from its environment. A repulsive odor came from a bowl on the long shelf and I climbed up—burning myself, incidentally, for all that part of the shelf was hot. What do you suppose was in that bowl? Pieces torn from the bodies of living vegetables and animals, all stewing together in a revolting mixture. Their food! Our savage ancestors might have enjoyed it; I was filled with horror and retreated along the shelf to the other end of the room. Here stood a smaller metal bowl, icy cold, smelling like our own poggle fruit. You know me and poggles! I think the brightest page in Limik history is our treaty with the poggle-people--we enjoy the fruit, they have their seeds better distributed. The odor from this bowl was irresistible, contrasted with the grue-some stench from the other

end of the room. I dipped in my courtesy probe and drank.

It was not poggle juice, but some strange poison!

I wooshed, too late. My probe tip began to swell and throb; my fore-eye rolled so dizzily I had to somersault tail-over--feeler, putting my crippled probe in tail position. Even then I could not stand up, but fell several times. I thought I was going to die.

I know our literature demands that I pause here to detail the stream of consciousness and the philosophy. I cannot do more than outline. How invalid our pretty refinements are! If I had been brought up in a lower-class nest such social distinctions as courtesy, tail and feeler would not even exist—one probe would be no different from another. I had no time to elaborate these ideas. While I tumbled about on that shelf I knocked over a pile of plates. They fell to the floor with an enormous crash, and an instant later the closed door burst open and three amazing monsters thundered into the room.

They were about six probes high, scarcely one wide—weird, attenuated and huge. They had five probes. Two were feelers, or perhaps tails, kept covered (they call them "LAIGS"). Two were courtesy probes ("HANS") uncovered at the tips, which have no openings (I suppose the passages have atrophied) but are each slit into five small tentacles. The fifth probe was short, stubby, and has no counterpart in Limik anatomy. It ends in a great bristle of hairs; two of the monsters had brown hairs, one red. All had one huge opening set with even, white pieces of bone—a little like a grinding machine. Two eyes were in each of these probes (migrated here from the body? I don't know. Our old bio professor would be interested. There may be residual eyes left on the body, too. They keep them tightly wrapped so there is no way to find out).

They strode with enormous steps—sideways, not probe after probe like our amble—and swayed awkwardly as they came. I remember thinking that our own wheel-like rolling would out-distance them, if I could ever get a free start. But they stood between me and the door. I was caught. The whole room rolled and turned before my eyes.

They began to roar at each other sounds with no thought except surprise. "LOOKOOSERE, WEL-IL-BEDAM," they shouted. I expected to be seized and thrown into that boiling bowl and shrank back in despair. The only hope that occurred to me in this dreadful situation was that perhaps they would not kill me—at least not at once—if I could show them I was intelligent. But how show that? They could not read thoughts, remember. Well, Ilha, you know how baby Limikles bubble and gargle the soft flap in their probe passages, and snort by half-closing the tips? That infantile exercise saved my life. I imitated their sounds.

"LOOKOOSERE WEL-IL-BEDAM," I managed. Then I grew so dizzy I fell once again and wooshed all over the shelf.

There was an instant of portentous silence. Then they began barking like mad things.

"The little fellow's been at our cocktail, HAW HAW HAW," Big-voice roared and pointed to the bowl. They all burst out barking with him—LAFF is their word for it. Deafened and desperate, I raised my probe and LAFF-ed, too.

"HAW HAW" I gasped. That set them off louder than ever. Curiously, I felt better. Laff-ing spreads from mind to mind like fire in a pile of sticks.

Red-head came close and held out his "HANS," but Big-voice said "Look out. Even if he can't bite, he may sting!"

The third monster said, "AGO-AWN he's a gentle old fellow—aren't you? Just a little poisoned (their word is TITE) that's all." He picked me up to nestle on his courtesy probe, squeezed against his great body.

I was terrified. My eyes rolled up dizzily; but I managed to splutter "AGO-AWN HAW HAW HAW," and tried to add "gentle old fellow," but was nauseated again, so that unfortunately it came out "Shentle of WOOSH!"

My captor set me hastily back on the shelf. He did it gently though, and I felt safer anyway, for his "HANS" were not too certain a support and it was easily a three-probe fall to the floor.

They all went off into a wild storm of roaring, stamping about the room, striking each other on the back, gasping for breath—quite insane. Then they began crying, "Pour out the drinks," and all three

drank some of the poison, but were not ill; only a little redder and louder.

I had another bad moment when they dished out the food and began eating—suppose they found there was not quite enough to satisfy their hunger? I need not have worried. One of them even put a little dish of it in front of me. I drew back quickly, but the odor was too strong for my control. I was nauseated again.

"Try him with a little water, BILL," said Big-voice.

My captor, "Bill," brought a container and I drank eagerly and felt better at last. I was sure now that they did not intend to eat me. I leaned against the wall, watching them. The meal ended with boiling water and brown powder called "CUP-ACAWFEE"—another unpleasant odor. Bill brought from a shelf a small bowl filled with white grains which Big-voice called "PASSASHUGA" and they spooned a little of this into their hot brown drink. A few grains spilled on the shelf and I investigated. To my delight it was sugar. Sugar, Ilha! The basic food of nature from which all living tissue is derived, the synthesis of which has made possible our Limik way of life, but used by them as a condiment!

I was hungry. Greatly daring, I imitated their signal as well as I could: "PASSASHUGA." And it worked. They HAW-HAW-ed, but in a surprised and kindly way, and Bill put a little heap of it on the shelf so that I actually shared in their amazing meal after all, and enjoyed it too. I did not eat much, but of course I had to have exercise at once to restore my energy balance. I began to roll tail-over-courtesy all down the shelf and back.

Big-voice did not LAFF, though the others did. He looked suddenly thoughtful, said, "He can go fast, can't he," and reached out to shut the door. "We don't want to lose this fel-low. Get down the cage, Bill."

Bill brought out a huge cage—a very room made of wires. He said, "The door's too small; we'll have to take off the bot-tom to get him in. It hasn't been cleaned since the (something) died, has it?" He washed it and lifted me in. It was just about big enough to turn around in, but I didn't care, for I had gone into my digestive stupor by then and drowsed while they carried me, cage and all, into the other room.

Here they sprawled themselves out on cushioned frames, leaning their bodies against back supports. It looked uncom-fortable—halfway between standing and lying down. Then they put little white tubes into their mouths and set them on fire, blowing narcotic smoke about the room. They talked and I lis-tened.

Bill said, "Maybe this planet isn't all desert. We haven't seen it all."

Big-voice said, "That fellow in the cage could tell us if he wanted to."

Red-head blew smoke, then said, "I thought we had agreed to leave here tomorrow and try the other planet in this system?"

"Not if this one will do," put in Big-voice. "We wouldn't think much of our own world if we landed in one of the deserts."

"This desert is bigger than any on earth," objected Bit, "We saw enough to know that much. It covers half the planet, anyway. Still, the other half would be big enough, at that—but how, do we know this little chap isn't a desert animal?"

Big-voice said, "Maybe we can get him to talk tomorrow."

All the time their thoughts ran swiftly under the slow pace of their sound-signals—and I could read the thoughts. I sud-denly realized that these three were scouts. When they had found a good world they would guide a horde of other "HEW-MEN" to it. All they had come for was to find a planet worth the trouble of taking over; if ours proved desirable they would calmly kill its present inhabitants! I caught mental glimpses of the way they imagined other forms of life. There were only two kinds in their thoughts: those that could be eaten and those that should be destroyed as inedible nuisances!

It was a pretty grim moment, Ilha.

I had got over my first fright and had actually begun to en-joy being with them before this awful conviction was forced upon me. After that I knew I had to escape and warn our world.

They talked a long time. Every so often they would burst into a chorus of HAW HAW's without apparent reason. There is a contagious sort of charm in this LAFF-ing of theirs. Oh, not the sound—that is mere cacophony—but the soft dissolving of all serious thought that goes with it. I became very sad, lying there, thinking how unfortunate it was that such pleasant creatures had to be destroyed.

Then came a new thing. Red-head said, "I feel like MEW-SIK," and went to a corner of the room to turn on a machine of some kind. Oh Ilha! Such a burst of overpoweringly sweet sound came from it that my probe tips quivered in ecstasy. They are masters of sound, these HEW-MEN. Not in my life have I imagined such an art. There was a mathematically regulated change of pitch, recurring with an urgent feeling of logic; there was a blending of tones in infinite variety; there was a measured rhythm. But none of these will give you the slightest idea of the effect on me, when all were put together. We Limiks have nothing in the slightest like it. Oh well, the rhythm, perhaps. Limikles in their nest being taught numbers by beating sticks in 3-4-5-pattern do a little suggest that phase of this MEW-SIK---but only as a shadow suggests the solid.

When it stopped I was desperately unhappy. If these mon-sters were killed, I would never again hear this miracle. And yet they would certainly kill us if they stayed here.

Then my great idea was born—the Blue Planet!

The ghoulish and savage Gryptrrs, unless they have greatly changed since our last expedition there, deserve consideration from no Limik. Why could I not persuade these HEW-MEN to go there and settle? Certainly, if they once saw those lush landscapes they would far prefer it to ours. Would they not, cruel and selfish as they are, make far better neighbors than the untamable Gryptrrs? Moreover, they were half persuaded already. I had only to convince them that our world was even more unsuitable than it appeared.

I knew how to do that. Don't you see, Ilha? Remember in literature class that story of Vraaltr's—"The un-Limik Letter," I think it was called? To write one thing and think another is stupid among ourselves, because the true thought is revealed when next writer and reader come together. But these HEW-MEN cannot see thoughts at all. All they understand is the agreed meaning of arbitrary sounds. They even have a word ("FOOLME") for such spoken untruths. Their minds grope constantly in search of each other's meaning.

Well, tomorrow I shall talk their language. Not too freely; not enough to make them fear Limiks as dangerously intelligent; certainly I shall not tell them I can read their thoughts. I shall speak just as well enough to answer the questions they are certain to ask. And I shall answer them: Oh, we have the most dreadful heatwaves on this desert world, lasting weeks at a time; our lives are a struggle for bare existence with water our most valuable possession! (These things are untrue. What of it? They won't know that.)

So that's why I want the infrared heat—a foretaste of one of those "heat-waves" of ours. Please, Ilha, make it hot enough to discourage any lingering. I think this rocket ship will take off for the Blue Planet not later than tomorrow night, if you do your part.

Speaking of night, these monsters fall into a stupor there. Apparently they think of it as a regular thing, every night of their lives. Their stupor lasts all the dark hours. Last night their lights blazed a few hours, then they began to blink their eyes and gape—as we do after each meal. They said "GOOD NITE" to each other and went into another room, putting out all lights in the ship. That is when I escaped.

Nothing could have been simpler. I merely unfastened the cage and lifted it off me. The door of the room was dosed, but I could just reach its fastening when I stood on probe-tip. I was out on the desert sand!

I am not much of an athlete, but I rolled here in an hour. Of course, the desert is fairly smooth and the air cool at night. I shall have time to return more sedately, for it is still three hours before dawn and I have almost finished writing.

Oh yes, I am going back. Frankly, it is not just because my plan requires me to talk to them. It may be hard for you to understand, Ilha, but I want to return. I like them.

I suppose from my description they must seem horrible to you. In many ways they are horrible. I like them in spite of that. They are not always evenly balanced in their emotions, nor always reasonable like a Limik. They leap from love to hate and back again twenty times an hour over unimportant matters. We regard every form of life with unvarying benevolence; they do not. Either they bear a highly prejudiced affection toward others, or else they hold them in utter contempt. True, they kill remorselessly; but also true, they risk their own lives freely for those they happen to like—at least so I read Red-head's

unspoken thoughts toward Bill. No Limik, of course, could ever be capable of either extreme. On the whole, the average between their vices and virtues is not really very far from our own unchanging reasonableness; but if they happen to regard you as friendly, they are far more pleasant—to you—than any group of Limiks would be.

I am regarded as a friend—certainly by Bill and Red-head, though Big-voice is not quite sure yet. I could sense his thoughts, anticipating the trouble of feeding me, and caring for me if I were ill, resenting all that prospective effort and yet suspecting that I might be worth it. Why? Because I look harmless and LAFF-able! Even with a far better reason, no Limik would go to so much trouble for me—would you, Ilha?

I am back once again to their LAFF-ing. I wish I could explain the sort of thing it but I do not even know exactly what starts it. It might be something ridiculous, or clever, or even obviously untrue. I have noted a few examples, but they would not help you; it is utterly un-Limik and unreasonable. But it is contagious. I don't suppose I could LAFF by myself—oh, I could bark HAW HAW but that isn't it—I could not give myself that odd sparkling freedom of mind. It is the most refreshing experience I have ever had, for I have experienced it, or very nearly, when I was in the same room with these HEW-MEN. It warms me like a fire inside my cold consciousness. The mere chance that I may finally learn to LAFF as freely as they do is alone worth the risk of my life—worth it many times over. It is like being made young again for a few minutes.

Our sober, worrying, serious ways are no doubt admirable—certainly reasonable. But tell me this: how many of us ever die a natural death from old age? You know as well as I that every Limik, sooner or later, is driven by our racial melancholy to end his own life. Not me, though—not now! Yet I have been melancholy of late. Life has never seemed the same since my mate Wkap died. She was different from the other two. Mind you, they are splendid breeding partners, none better; but I won't miss them nor they me. Each has her two other con-sorts; they will find a third to take my place before next twin-ing-time.

So I am going back to these likable monsters. More than that, I am going to help them in every way I can—I intend to be a small but very loyal member of their crew. I may even learn to eat some of their food—after all, some forms of life on their world may be so low in the scale of evolution they cannot even think, perhaps not even feel. Just because no such life exists here does not mean it cannot elsewhere.

I am X-SITED—which means, I think, less than no calm-ness at all, if you can imagine such a state of mind. It has no equivalent in Limik writing, but then I am almost no longer Limik.

I hope I can persuade them to leave this planet before noon tomorrow, But you must not risk our entire civilization merely because I have taken a liking to these monsters—and it is a real risk, for they are truly dangerous. Killing heat tomorrow noon, remember. All I ask is that you make the heat really killing; I have no wish to fry slowly!

For if they stay I shall stay (and die) with them. So, either way it is . . .

Good-bye, Ilha.

In the early 'forties, for a regrettably brief period, there appeared a magazine of fantasy called Unknown Worlds. Its editorial personality was so individual and different that it gave its name to a whole new style of fantasy writing. "The Compleat Werewolf" first appeared in Unknown. Boucher, del Rey, Leiber, and others not represented here, were main-stays of the magazine. But among the most memorable of the Unknown stories were Theodore Sturgeon's; and when the magazine disappeared, Sturgeon went right on writing them. This one, which appeared just a few years ago in Weird Tales, is typical of his best work.

THE PERFECT HOST
by Theodore Sturgeon

I

As Told By RONNIE DANIELS

I WAS FOURTEEN then. I was sitting in the car waiting for dad to come out of the hospital. Dad was in there seeing mother. It was the day after dad told me I had a little sis-ter.

It was July, warm, and I suppose about four in the after-noon. It was almost time for dad to come out. I half opened the car door and looked for him.

Someone called, "Mister! Mister!"

There was a red squirrel arcing across the thick green lawn, and a man with balloons far down the block. I looked at him. Nobody would call me mister. Nobody ever had, yet. I was too young.

"Mister!"

It was a woman's voice, but rough; rough and nasty. It was strong, and horrible for the pleading in it. No strong thing should beg. The sun was warm and the red of the brick buildings was warm, too. The squirrel was not afraid.

The grass was as green and smooth as a jelly bean.

Mother was all right, dad said, and dad felt fine. We would go to the movies, dad and I, close together with a closeness that never happened when things were regular, meals at home, mother up making breakfast every morning, and all that. This week it would be raids on the icebox and staying up late sometimes, because dad forgot about bed-time and anyway wanted to talk.

"Mister!"

Her voice was like a dirty mark on a new collar. I looked up.

She was hanging out of a window on the second floor of a near ell of the hospital. Her hair was dank and stringy, her eyes had mud in them, and her teeth were beautiful.

She was naked, at least to the waist. She was saying "Mis-ter!" and she was saying it to me.

I was afraid, then. I got in the car and slammed the door.

"Mister! Mister! Mister!"

They were syllables that meant nothing. A "mis," a "ter"— sounds that rasped across the very wound they opened. I put my hands over my ears, but by then the sounds were inside my head, and my hands just seemed to keep them there. I think I sobbed. I jumped out of the car and screamed, "What? What?"

"I got to get out of here," she moaned.

I thought, why tell me? I thought, what can I do? I had heard of crazy people, but I had never seen one. Grown-up people were sensible, mostly. It was only kids who did crazy things, without caring how much sense they made. I was only fourteen.

"Mister," she said. "Go to—to....Let me think, now. ...Where I live. Where I live."

"Where do you live?" I asked.

"In Homeland," she said.

She sank down with her forehead on the sill, slowly, as if some big slow weight were on her shoulderblades. I could see only the top of her head, the two dank feathers of her hair, and the point of an elbow. Homeland was a new residential suburb.

"Where in Homeland?" It seemed to be important. To me, I mean, as much as to her.

"Twenty," she mumbled. "I have to remember it . . ." and her voice trailed off. Suddenly she stood bolt upright, look-ing back into the room as if something had happened there. Then she leaned far out.

"Twenty sixty-five," she snarled. "You hear? Twenty sixty-five. That's the one."

"Ron! Ronnie!"

It was dad, coming down the path, looking at me, looking at the woman.

"That's the one," said the woman again.

There was a flurry of white behind her. She put one foot on the sill and sprang out at me. I closed my eyes. I heard her hit the pavement.

When I opened my eyes they were still looking up at the window. There was a starved white nurse up there with her fingers in her mouth, all of them, and eyes as round and blank as a trout's. I looked down.

I felt dad's hand on my upper arm. "Ronnie!"

I looked down. There was blood, just a little, on the cuff of my trousers. There was nothing else.

"Dad...."

Dad looked all around, on the ground.

He looked up at the window and at the nurse. The nurse looked at dad and at me, and then put her hands on the sill and leaned out and looked all around on the ground. I could see, in the sunlight, where her fingers were wet from being in her mouth.

Dad looked at me and again at the nurse, and I heard him draw a deep quivering breath as if he'd forgotten to breathe for a while and had only just realized it. The nurse straightened up, put her hands over her eyes and twisted back into the room.

Dad and I looked at each other. He said, "Ronnie—what was—what ..." and then licked his lips.

I was not as tall as my father, though he was not a tall man. He had thin, fine obedient hair, straight and starting high. He had blue eyes and a big nose and his mouth was quiet. He was broad and gentle and close to the ground, close to the earth.

I said, "How's mother?"

Dad gestured at the ground where something should be, and looked at me. Then he said, "We'd better go, Ron."

I got into the car. He walked around it and got in and started it, and then sat holding the wheel, looking back at where we had been standing. There was still nothing there. The red squirrel, with one cheek puffed out, came bound-ing and freezing across the path.

I asked again how mother was.

"She's fine. Just fine. Be out soon. And the baby. Just fine." He looked back carefully for traffic, shifted and let in the clutch. "Good as new," he said.

I looked back again. The squirrel hopped and arched and stopped, sitting on something. It sat on something so that it was perhaps ten inches off the ground, but the thing it sat on couldn't be seen. The squirrel put up its paws and popped a chestnut into them from its cheek, and put its tail along its back with the big tip curled over like a fern frond, and began to nibble. Then I couldn't see any more.

After a time dad said, "What happened there just as I came up?"

I said, "What happened? Nothing. There was a squirrel."

"I mean, uh, up at the window."

"Oh, I saw a nurse up there."

"Yes, the nurse." He thought for a minute. "Anything else?"

"No. What are you going to call the baby?"

He looked at me strangely. I had to ask him again about the baby's name.

"I don't know yet," he said distantly. "Any ideas?"

"No, dad."

We rode along for quite a while without saying any-thing. A little frown came and went between dad's eyes, the way it did when he was figuring something out, wheth-er it was a definition at charades, or an income tax report, or a problem of my school algebra.

"Dad. You know Homeland pretty well, don't you?"

"I should. Our outfit agented most of those sites. Why?"

"Is there a Homeland Street, or a Homeland Avenue out there?"

"Not a one. The north and south ones are streets, and are named after trees. The east and west ones are avenues, and are named after flowers. All alphabetical. Why?"

"I just wondered. Is there a number as high as twenty sixty-five?"

"Not yet, though I hope there will be some day ... un-less it's a telephone number. Why, Ron? Where did you get that number?"

"I dunno. Just thought of it. Just wondered. Where are we going to eat?"

We went to the Bluebird.

I suppose I knew then what had gotten into me when the woman jumped; but I didn't think of it, any more than a redhead goes around thinking to himself "I have red hair" or a taxi-driver says to himself "I drive a cab."

I knew, that's all. I just knew. I knew the *purpose*, too, but didn't think of it, any more than a man thinks and thinks of the place where he works, when he's on his way to work in the morning.

II

As Told By BENTON DANIELS

RONNIE'S not an unusual boy. Oh, maybe a little quieter than most, but it takes all kinds. He's good in school, but not brilliant; averages in the low eighties, good in music and English and history, weak in math, worse in science than he could be if he cared a little bit more about it.

That day when we left the hospital grounds, though, there was something unusual going on. Yes, sir. I couldn't make head nor tail of it, and I must say I still can't.

Sometimes I think it's Ronnie, and sometimes I think it was something temporarily wrong with me. I'm trying to get it all straight in my mind, right from the start.

I had just seen Clee and the baby. Clee looked a little tired, but her color was wonderful. The baby looked like a baby—that is, like a little pink old man, but I told Clee she was beautiful and takes after her mother, which she will be and do, of course, when she gets some meat on her bones.

I came along the side path from the main entrance, toward where the car was parked. Ronnie was waiting for me there. I saw him as I turned toward the road, just by the north building.

Ronnie was standing by the car, with one foot on the running board, and he seemed to be talking with somebody in the second-floor window. I called out to him, but he didn't hear. Or he paid no attention. I looked up, and saw someone in the window. It was a woman, with a crazy face. I remember an impression of very regular white teeth, and scraggly hair. I don't think she had any clothes on.

I was shocked, and then I was very angry. I thought, here's some poor sick person gone out of her mind, and she'll maybe mark Ronnie for life, standing up there like that and maybe saying all sorts of things.

I ran to the boy, and just as I reached him, the woman jumped. I think someone came into the room behind her.

Now, look. I distinctly heard that woman's body hit. It was a terrible sound. And I remember feeling a wave of nausea just then, but for some reason I was sure then, and I'm sure now, that it had nothing to do with the thing I saw. That kind of shock-nausea only hits a person after the shock, not before or during. I don't even know why I think of this at all. It's just something I feel sure about, that's all.

I heard her body hit. I don't know whether I followed her body down with my eyes or not. There wasn't much time for that; she didn't fall more than twenty-five, maybe twenty-eight feet.

I heard the noise, and when I looked down—*there wasn't anything there!*

I don't know what I thought then. I don't know if a man does actually *think* at a time like that. I know I looked all around, looking for a hole in the ground or maybe a sheet of camouflage or something which might be covering the body. It was too hard to accept that disappearance. They say that a dog doesn't bother with his reflection in a mirror because he can't smell it, and he believes his nose rather than his eyes. Humans aren't like that, I guess. When your brain tells you one thing and your eyes

another, you just don't know what to believe.

I looked back up at the window, perhaps thinking I'd been mistaken, that the woman would still be up there.

She was gone, all right. There was a nurse up there in-stead, looking down, terrified.

I returned to Ronnie and started to ask him what had happened. I stopped when I saw his face. It wasn't shocked, or surprised, or anything. Just relaxed. He asked me how his mother was.

I said she was fine. I looked at his face and marveled that it showed nothing of this horrible thing that had hap-pened. It wasn't blank, mind you. It was just as if noth-ing had occurred at all, or as if the thing had been wiped clean out of his memory.

I thought at the moment that that was a blessing, and, with one more glance at the window—the nurse had gone—I went to the car and got in. Ronnie sat next to me. I started the car, then looked back at the path. There was nothing there.

I suppose the reaction hit me then—that, or the thought that I had had a hallucination. If I had, I was naturally worried. If I had not, what had happened to Ronnie?

I drove off, finally. Ronnie made some casual small talk; I questioned him about the thing, carefully, but he seemed honestly to know nothing about it. I decided to let well enough alone, at least for the time being. . . .

We had a quick dinner at the Bluebird, and then went home. I suppose I was poor company for the boy, because I kept finding myself mulling over the thing. We went to the Criterion, and I don't believe I heard or saw a bit of it. Then we picked up an evening paper and went home. He went to bed while I sat up with the headlines.

I found it down at the bottom of the third page. This is the item:

WOMAN DIES IN HOSPITAL LEAP

Mrs. Helmuth Stoye, of Homeland, was found yester-day afternoon under her window at Memorial Hospital, Carstairs. Dr. R. B. Knapp, head physician at the hos-pital, made a statement to the press in which he ab-solved the hospital and staff from any charges of negli-gence. A nurse, whose name is withheld, had just en-tered Mrs. Stoye's room when the woman leaped to her death.

"There was no way to stop her," said Dr. Knapp. "It happened too fast."

Dr. Knapp said that Mrs. Stoye had shown no signs of depression or suicidal intent on admission to the hos-pital four days ago. Her specific illness was not divulged.

Mrs. Stoye, the former Grace Korshak of Ferntree, is survived by her husband, a well-known printer here.

I went straight to the telephone and dialed the hos-pital. I heard the ringing signal once, twice, and then, be-fore the hospital could answer, I hung up again. What could I ask them, or tell them? "I saw Mrs. Stoye jump." They'd be interested in that, all right. Then what? "She disappeared when she hit the ground." I can imagine what they'd say to that. "But my son saw it too!" And the ques-tion from hospital officials, a psychiatrist or two....Ron-nie being questioned, after he had mercifully forgotten about the whole thing ... no. No; better let well enough alone.

The newspaper said Mrs. Stoye was found under her window. Whoever found her must have been able to see her.

I wonder what the nurse saw?

I went into the kitchen and heated some coffee, poured it, sweetened it, stirred it, and then left it untasted on the ta-ble while I put on my hat and got my car keys.

I had to see that nurse. First I tore out the newspaper article—I didn't want Ronnie, ever to see it.

III

As Told By

LUCILLE HOLDER

I HAVE seen a lot of ugly things as a trainee and as a nurse, but they don't bother me very much. It's not that the familiarity hardens one; it is rather that one learns the knack of channeling one's emotions around the ugly thing.

When I was a child in England I learned how to use this knack. I lived in Coventry, and though Herr Hitler's treatment of the city seems to have faded from the news and from fiction, the story is still vividly written on the memories of us who were there, and is read and reread more often than we care to say.

You can't know what this means until you know the grim happiness that the chap you've dug out of the ruins is a dead 'un, for the ones who still live horrify you so.

So—one gets accustomed to the worst. Further, one is prepared when a worse "worst" presents itself.

And I suppose that it was this very preparation which found me jolly well unprepared for what happened when Mrs. Stoye jumped out of her window.

There were two things happening from the instant I opened her door. One thing was what I did, and the other thing is what I felt.

These are the things I did:

I stepped into the room, carrying a washing tray on my arm. Everything seemed in order, except, of course, that Mrs. Stoye was out of bed. That didn't surprise me; she was ambulant. She was over by the window; I suppose I glanced around the room before I looked directly at her.

When I saw her pajama top lying on the bedclothes I looked at her, though.

She straightened up suddenly as she heard me, barked something about "That's the one!" and jumped—dived, rather—right out. It wasn't too much of a drop, really—less than thirty feet, I'd say, but she went down head first, and I knew instantly that she hadn't a chance.

I can't remember setting down the washing tray; I saw it later on the bed. I must have spun around and set it there and rushed to the window.

I looked down, quite prepared for the worst, as I've said.

But what I saw was so terribly much worse than it should have been. I mean, an ill person is a bad thing to see, and an accident case can be worse, and burn cases, I think, are worst of all. The thing is, these all get worse in one direction. One simply cannot be prepared for something which is bad in a totally unexpected, impossible way.

There was nothing down there at all. Nothing. I saw Mrs. Stoye jump out, ran to the window, it couldn't have been more than three seconds later; and there was nothing there.

But I'm saying now how I felt. I mean to say first what I did, because the two are so different, from this point on.

I looked down; there was no underbrush, no flowerbed, nothing which could have concealed her had she rolled. There were some people—a stocky man and a young boy, perhaps fourteen or fifteen—standing nearby. The man seemed to be searching the ground as I was; I don't remember what the boy was doing. Just standing there. The man looked up at me; he looked badly frightened. He spoke to the boy, who answered quietly, and then they moved off together to the road.

I looked down once more, still could not see Mrs. Stoye, and turned and ran to the signal-button.

I rang it and then rushed out into the hall. I must have looked very distraught.

I ran right into Dr. Knapp, all but knocking him over, and gasped out that Mrs. Stoye had jumped.

Dr. Knapp was terribly decent. He led me back into the room and told me to sit down. Then he went to the window, looked down and grunted. Miss Flaggon came in just then. I was crying.

Dr. Knapp told her to get a stretcher and a couple of orderlies and take them outside, under this window. She asked no questions, but fled; when Dr. Knapp gives orders in that voice, people jump to it. Dr. Knapp ran out, calling to me to stay where I was until he came back. In spite of the excitement, he actually managed to make his voice gentle.

I went to the window after a moment and looked down. Two medical students were running across the lawn from the south building, and the orderlies with their stretcher, still rolled, were pelting down the path. Dr. Knapp, bag in hand, was close behind them.

Dr. Carstairs and Dr. Greenberg were under the window and already shunting away the few curious visitors who had appeared as if from out of the ground, the way people do after an accident anywhere. But most important of all, I saw Mrs. Stoye's body. It was lying crumpled up, directly below me, and there was no doubt of it that her neck was broken and her skull badly fractured. I went and sat down again.

Afterward Dr. Knapp questioned me closely and, I must say, very kindly. I told him nothing about the strange disappearance of the body. I expect he thought I was crying because I felt responsible for the death. He assured me that my record was in my favor, and it was perfectly understandable that I was helpless to stop Mrs. Stoye.

I apparently went quite to pieces then, and Dr. Knapp suggested that I take my two weeks' leave—it was due in another twenty days in any case—immediately, and rest up and forget this thing.

I said, "Perhaps I will."

I went out to the Quarters to bathe and change. And now I had better say how I *felt* during all this....

I was terrified when Mrs. Stoye jumped. When I reached the window right afterward, I was exactly as excited as one might expect.

But the instant I looked down, something happened. It wasn't anything I can describe, except to say that there was a change of attitude. That doesn't seem to mean much, does it? Well, I can only say this; that from that moment I was no longer frightened nor shocked nor horrified nor anything else. I remember putting my hands up to my mouth, and I must have given a perfect picture of a terrified nurse.

I was actually quite calm. I was quite cool as I ran to the bell and then out onto the hall. I collapsed, I cried, I sobbed, I produced a flood of tears and streaks for my face. But during every minute of it I was completely calm.

Now, I knew that was strange, but I felt no surprise at it. I knew that it could be called dishonest. I don't know how to analyze it. I am a nurse, and a profound sense of duty has been drilled into me for years. I felt that it was my duty to cry, to say nothing about the disappearance of the body, to get the two weeks' leave immediately, and to do the other things which I have done and must do.

While I bathed I thought. I was still calm, and I suppose I behaved calmly; it didn't matter, for there was no one to see.

Two people had seen Mrs. Stoye jump besides myself. I realized that I must see them. I didn't think about the disappearing body. I didn't feel I had to, somehow, any more than one thinks consciously of the water in the pipes and heaters as one draws a bath. The thing was there, and needed no investigation.

But it was necessary to see that man and the boy. What I must do when I saw them required no thought either. That seemed all arranged, unquestionable, so evident that it needed no thought or definition.

I put away the white stockings and shoes with a feeling of relief, and slipped into underthings with a bit of lace on them, and sheer hose. I put on my wine rayon with the gored skirt, and the matching shoes. I combed my hair out and put it up in a roll around the back, cool and out of the way. Money, keys, cigarette case, knife, lighter, com-*pac*t. All ready.

I went round by the administration offices, thinking hard. A man visits the hospital with his boy—it was probably his boy—and leaves the boy outside while he goes in. He would be seeing a wife, in all probability. He'd leave the boy outside only if the woman's condition were serious or if she were immediately post-operative or post-partem.

So many patients go in and out that I naturally don't remember too many of them; on the other hand, I can almost always tell a new patient or visitor ... marvelous the way the mind, unbidden, clocks and

catalogs, to some degree, all that passes before it....

The chances were that these people, the man and the boy, were visiting a new patient. Maternity would be as good a guess as any, to start with.

It was well after nine o'clock, the evening of Mrs. Stoye's death, and the administration offices were deserted except for Miss Kaye, the night registrar. It was not unusual for nurses to check up occasionally on patients. I nodded to Miss Kaye and went back to the files. The maternity admission file gave me five names for the previous two days. I got the five cards out of the patients alphabetical and glanced over them. Two of these new mothers had other children; a Mrs. Korff, with three sons and a daughter at home, and a Mrs. Daniels who had one son. Here: "Previous children: One. Age this date: 14 yrs. 3 months." And further down: "Father age: 41."

It looked like a bull's eye. I remember feeling inordinately pleased with myself, as if I had assisted particularly well in an operation, or had done a bang-up job of critical first-aid.

I copied down the address of the Daniels family, and, carefully replacing all the cards, made my vacation check-out and left the building.

It seemed late to go calling, but I knew that I must. There had been a telephone number on the card, but I had ignored it. What I must do could not be done over the phone.

I found the place fairly easily, although it was a long way out in the suburbs on the other side of the town. It was a small, comfortable-looking place, set well back from the road, and with wide lawns and its own garage. I stepped up on the porch and quite shamelessly looked inside.

The outer door opened directly into the living room, with-out a foyer. There was a plate-glass panel in the door with a sheer curtain on the inside. I could see quite clearly. The room was not too large—fireplace, wainscoting, stairway in the left corner, big easy chairs, a studio couch—that sort of thing. There was a torn newspaper tossed on the arm of one fireside chair. Two end table lamps were lit. There was no one in the room.

I rang the bell, waited, rang again, peering in. Soon I saw a movement on the stairs. It was the boy, thin-looking and tousled, thumping down the carpeted steps, tying the cord of a dark-red dressing gown as he came. On the landing he stopped.

I could just hear him call "Dad!" He leaned over the banister, looking up and back. He called again, shrugged a shrug which turned into a stretch, and, yawning, came to the door. I hid the knife in my sleeve.

"Oh!" he said, startled, as he opened the door. Unaccountably, I felt a wave of nausea. Getting a grip on myself, I stepped inside before I spoke. He stood looking at me, flushing, a bit conscious, I think, of his bare feet, for he stood on one of them, trying to curl the toes of the other one out of sight.

"Daniels...." I murmured.

"Yes," he said. "I'm Ronald Daniels." He glanced quickly into the room. "Dad doesn't seem to be ... I don't ... I was asleep."

"I'm so sorry."

"Gosh, that's all right," he said. He was a sweet little chap, not a man yet, not a child—less and less of a child as he woke up, which he was doing slowly. He smiled.

"Come in. Let me have your coat. Dad ought to be here now. Maybe he went for cigarettes or something."

It was as if a switch had been thrown and a little sign had lit up within him— "Remember your manners."

Abruptly I felt the strangest compulsion—a yearning, a warming toward this lad. It was completely a sexual thing, mind you—completely. But it was as if a part of me belonged to a part of him . . . no; more the other way round. I don't know. It can't be described. And with the feeling, I suddenly knew that it was all right, it was all quite all right.

I did not have to see Mr. Daniels after all. That business would be well taken care of when the time came, and not by me. Better—much better—for him to do it.

He extended his hand for my coat. "Thank you so much," I said, smiling, liking him—more than liking him, in this inde-finable way—"but I really must go. I—if your father—" How could I say it? How could I let him know that it was different now; that everything might be spoiled if his father knew I had come here? "I mean, when your father comes back...."

Startlingly, he laughed. "Please don't worry," he said. "I won't tell him you were here."

I looked at his face, his round, bland face, so odd with his short slender frame. That thing like a sense of duty told me not to ask, but I violated it. "You don't know who I am, do you?"

He shook his head. "Not really. But it doesn't matter. I won't tell dad."

"Good." I smiled, and left.

IV

As Told By JENNIE BEAUFORT

YOU NEVER know what you're going to run up against when you're an information operator, I mean really, people seem to have the craziest idea of what we're there for. Like the man called up the other day and wanted to know how you spell conscientious—"Just conscientious," he says, "I know how to spell objector" and I gave him the singsong, you know, the voice with a smile, "I'm soreee! We haven't that infor-may-shun!" and keyed him out, thinking to myself, what a schmoe. (I told Mr. Parker, he's my super, and he grinned and said it was a sign of the times; Mr. Parker's always mak-ing jokes.) And like the other man wants to know if he gets a busy signal and hangs on to the line, will the signal stop and the bell ring when the party he is calling hangs up.

I want to say to him, what do you think I am, Alexander Graham Bell or something, maybe Don Ameche, instead of which I tell him "One moment, sir, and I will get that information for you?" (not that I'm asking a question, you raise your voice that way because it leaves the customers breathless) and I nudge Sue and she tells me, Sue knows everything.

Not that everything like that comes over the wire, any-thing is liable to happen right there in the office or in the halls to say nothing of the stage-door Johnnies with hair oil and cellophane boxes who ask all the girls if they are Op-erator 23, she has such a nice voice.

Like the kid that was in here yesterday, not that he was on the prowl, he was too young, though five years from now he'll be just dreamy, with his cute round face and his long legs. Mr. Parker brought him in to me and told me the kid was getting up a talk on telephones for his civics class in high school, and tells the kid to just ask Miss Beau-fort anything he wants to know and walks off rubbing his hands, which I can understand because he has made me feel good and made the kid feel good and has me doing all the work while he gets all the credit.

Not that I felt good just at that particular moment, my stomach did a small flip-flop but that has nothing to do with it; it must have been the marshmallow cake I had for my lunch, I should remember to keep away from the marsh-mallow when I have gravy-and-mashed, at least on week-days.

Anyway this kid was cute, with his pleases and his thank you's and his little almost-bows-from-the-waist like a regular Lord Calvert. He asked me all sorts of questions and all smart too, but he never asked them right out, I mean, he would say, "Please tell me how you can find a number so *fast*?" and then listen to every word I said and squiggle something down in his notebook. I showed him the alpha-beticals and the central indexes and the assonance file (and you can bet I called it by its full

name to that nice young-ster) where we find out that a number for Meyer, say, is listed as Maior. And he wanted to know why it was that we never give a street address to someone who has the phone number, but only the other way around, and how we found out the phone number from just the street address.

So I showed him the street index and the checking in-dex, which has the numbers all in order by exchanges with the street addresses, which is what we use to trace calls when we have to. And lots more. And finally he said he wanted to pretend he was me for a minute, to see if he understood everything. He even blushed when he said it. I told him to go ahead and got up and let him sit down. He sat there all serious and bright-eyed, and said, "Now, suppose I am you, and someone wants to know the number of—uh—Fred Zimmerman, who lives out at Bell Hill, but they have no street number."

And I showed him how to flip out the alphabetical, and how to ask the customer which one he wants if there should be more than one Fred Zimmerman. He listened so care-fully and politely, and made a note in his book. Then he asked me what happens if the police or somebody has a phone number and wants the address, we'll say, out in Homeland, like Homeland 2050. I showed him the nu-merical index, and he whipped it out and opened it like an old hand. My, he caught on quickly. He made another note in his book ... well, it went on like that, and all in twenty minutes.

I bet he could take over from me any time and not give Mr. Parker a minute's worry, which is more than I can say for some of the girls who have been working here for years, like that Patty Mawson with her blonde hair and her awful New Look.

Well, that boy picked my brains dry in short order, and he got up and for a moment I thought he was going to kiss my hand like a Frenchman or a European, but he didn't. He just thanked me as if I had given him the crown jewels or my hand in marriage, and went out to do the same for Mr. Parker, and all I can say is, I wish one-tenth of the customers showed as much good house breaking.

V

As Told By HELMUTH STOYE

GRACE ... Grace . . . *Grace!*

Oh, my little darling, my gentle, my soft little bird with the husky voice. Miss Funny-Brows. Little Miss Teeth. You used to laugh such a special laugh when I made up new names for you, Coral-cache, Cadenza, Viola-voice . . . and you'll never laugh again, because I killed you.

I killed you, I killed you.

Yesterday I stopped all the clocks.

I couldn't stand it. It was wrong; it was a violation. You were dead. I drew the blinds and sat in the dark, not really believing that it had happened—how *could* it happen? You're *Grace*, you're the humming in the kitchen, the quick foot-falls in the foyer as I come up the porch steps.

I think for a while I believed that your coming back was the most real, the most obvious thing; in a moment, any moment, you would come in and kiss the nape of my neck; you would be smelling of vanilla and cut flowers, and you'd laugh at me and together we'd fling up the blinds and let in the light.

And then Tinkle struck—Tinkle, the eight-foot grandfather's clock with the *basso profundo* chime. That was when I knew what was real. It was real that you were dead, it was real. . . .

I got angry at that violation, that sacrilege, that clock. What right had the clock to strike, the hands to move? How could it go on? It was wrong. I got up and stopped it. I think I spoke to it, not harshly, angry as I was; I said, "You don't know, do you, Tinkle? No one's told you yet," and I caught it by its

swinging neck and held it until its ticking brain was quiet.

I told all the clocks, one by one, that you were dead—the glowing Seth Thomas ship's clock, with its heavy threads and its paired syllables, and Drowsy the alarm, and the cuckoo with the cleft palate who couldn't say anything but "hook-who!"

A truck roared by outside, and I remember the new surge of fury because of it, and then the thought that the driver hadn't been told yet ... and then the mad thought that the news would spread from these silent clocks, from these drawn blinds, spread like a cloud-shadow over the world, and when it touched birds, they would glide to the ground and crouch motionless, with no movement in their jeweled eyes; when it touched machines, they would slow and stop; when it touched flowers they would close themselves into little soft fists and bend to knuckle the earth; when it touched people they would finish that stride, end that sentence, slowing, softening, and would sink down and be still.

There would be no noise or confusion as the world slipped into its stasis, and nothing would grow but silence. And the sun would hang on the horizon with its face thickly veiled, and there would be eternal dusk.

That was yesterday, and I was angry. I am not angry today. It was better, yesterday, the sitting in turmoil and uselessness, the useless raging up and down rooms so hol-low, yet still so full of you they would not echo. It got dark, you see, and in good time the blinds were brighter than the walls around them again. I looked out, squinting through grainy eyelids, and saw a man walking by, walking easily, his hands in his pockets, and he was whistling.

After that I could not be angry any more, not at the man, not at the morning. I knew only the great cruel pressure of a fact, a fact worse than the fact of emptiness or of death—the fact that nothing ever stops, that things must go on.

It was better to be angry, and to lose myself in useless-ness. Now I am not angry and I have no choice but to think usefully. I have lived a useful life and have built it all on useful thinking, and if I had not thought so much and so carefully Grace would be here with me now, with her voice like a large soft breeze in some springtime place, and perhaps tickling the side of my neck with feather-touches of her moving lips ... it was my useful, questing, thirsty thought which killed her, killed her.

The accident was all of two years ago—almost two years anyway. We had driven all the way back from Springfield without stopping, and we were very tired. Grace and Mr. Share and I were squeezed into the front seat.

Mr. Share was a man Grace had invented long before, even before we were married. He was a big invisible fat man who always sat by the right-hand window, and al-ways looked out to the side so that he never watched us.

But since he was so fat, Grace had to press up close to me as we drove.

There was a stake-bodied truck bowling along ahead of us, and in the back of it was a spry old man, or perhaps a weatherbeaten young man—you couldn't tell—in blue dunga-rees and a red shirt. He had a yellow woolen muffler tied around his waist, and the simple strip of material made all the difference between "clothes" and "costume."

Behind him, lashed to the bed of the truck just back of the cab, was a large bundle of burlap. It would have made an adequate seat for him, cushioned and out of the wind. But the man seemed to take the wind as a heady beverage and the leaping floor as a challenge.

He stood with his arms away from his sides and his knees slightly flexed, and rode the truck as if it were a live thing. He yielded himself to each lurch and bump, brought him-self back with each recession, guarding his equilibrium with an easy virtuosity.

Grace was, I think, dozing; my shout of delighted laugh-ter at the performance on the bounding stage before us brought her upright. She laughed with me for the laugh alone, for she had not looked through the windshield yet, and she kissed my cheek.

He saw her do it, the man on the truck, and he laughed with us.

"He's *our* kind of people," Grace said.

"A pixie," I agreed, and we laughed again.

The man took off an imaginary plumed hat, swung it low toward us, but very obviously toward

Grace. She nodded back to him, with a slight sidewise turn of her face as it went down that symbolized a curtsey.

Then he held out his elbow, and the pose, the slightly raised shoulder over which he looked fondly at the air over his bent arm, showed that he had given his arm to a lady. The lady was Grace, who, of course, would be charmed to join him in the dance . . . she clapped her hands and crowed with delight, as she watched her imaginary self with the courtly, colorful figure ahead.

The man stepped with dainty dignity to the middle of the truck and bowed again, and you could all but hear the muted minuet as it began. It was a truly wonderful thing to watch, this pantomime; the man knew the ancient stately steps to perfection, and they were unflawed by the careening surface on which they were performed. There was no mockery in the miming, but simply the fullness of good, the sheer, unspoiled sharing of a happy magic.

He bowed, he took her hand, smiled back into her eyes as she pirouetted behind him. He stood back to the line waiting his turn, nodding slightly to the music; he dipped ever so little, twice, as his turn came, and stepped grace-fully out to meet her, smiling again.

I don't know what made me look up. We were nearing the Speedway Viaduct, and the truck ahead was just about to pass under it. High up over our heads was the great span, and as my eyes followed its curve, to see the late after-noon sun on the square guard posts which bounded the elevated road, three of the posts exploded outward, and the blunt nose of a heavy truck plowed through and over the edge, to slip and catch and slip again, finally to teeter to a precarious stop.

Apparently its trailer was loaded with light steel girders; one of them slipped over the tractor's crumpled shoulder and speared down toward us.

Our companion of the minuet, on the truck ahead, had finished his dance, and, turned to us, was bowing low, smiling, looking up through his eyebrows at us. The girder's end took him on the back of the head. It did not take the head off; it obliterated it. The body struck flat and lay still, as still as wet paper stuck to glass. The girder bit a large piece out of the tailgate and somersaulted to the right, while I braked and swerved dangerously away from it. Fortunately there were no cars coming toward us.

There was, of course, a long, mixed-up, horrified sequence of the two truck drivers, the one ahead and the one who came down later from the viaduct and was sick. Ambulances and bystanders and a lot of talk . . . none of it matters, really.

No one ever found out who the dead man was. He had no luggage and no identification; he had over ninety dollars in his pocket. He might have been anybody—someone from show business, or a writer perhaps, on a haywire vacation of his own wild devising. I suppose that doesn't matter either. What does matter is that he died while Grace was in a very close communion with what he was doing, and her mind was wide open for his fantasy. Mine is, generally, I suppose; but at that particular moment, when I had seen the smash above and the descending girder, I was wide awake, on guard. I think that had a lot to do with what has happened since. I think it has everything to do with Grace's—with Grace's—

There is no word for it. I can say this, though. Grace and I were never alone together again until the day she died. Died, died, Grace is dead.

Grace!

I can go on with my accursed useful thinking now, I suppose.

Grace was, of course, badly shaken, and I did what I could for her over the next few weeks. I tried my best to understand how it was affecting her. (That's what I mean by useful thinking—trying to understand. Trying and trying—prying and prying. Arranging, probing, finding out. Getting a glimpse, a scent of danger, rooting it out—bringing it out into the open where it can get at you.) Rest and new clothes and alcohol rubdowns; the theater, music and music, always music, for she could lose herself in it, riding its flux, feeling and folding herself in it, following it, sometimes, with her hushed, true voice, sometimes lying open to it, letting it play its colors and touches over her.

There is always an end to patience, however. After two months, knowing her as I did, I knew that there was more here than simple shock. If I had known her less well—if I had cared less, even, it couldn't have mattered.

It began with small things. There were abstractions which were unusual in so vibrant a person. In a

quiet room, her face would listen to music; sometimes I had to speak twice and then repeat what I had said.

Once I came home and found supper not started, the bed not made. Those things were not important—I am not a fuss-pot nor an autocrat; but I was shaken when, after calling her repeatedly I found her in the guest room, sitting on the bed without lights. I had no idea she was in there; I just walked in and snapped on the light in the beginnings of panic because she seemed not to be in the house; she had not answered me.

And at first it was as if she had not noticed the sudden yellow blaze from the paired lamps; she was gazing at the wall, and on her face was an expression of perfect peace. She was wide awake—at least her eyes were. I called her: "Grace!"

"Hello, darling," she said quietly. Her head turned casually toward me and she smiled—oh, those perfect teeth of hers!—and her smile was only partly for me; the rest of it was inside, with the nameless things with which she had been communing.

I sat beside her, amazed, and took her hands. I suppose I spluttered a bit, "Grace, are you all right? Why didn't you answer? The bed's not—have you been out? What's happened? Here—let me see if you have a fever."

Her eyes were awake, yes; but not awake to me, to here and now. They were awake and open to some *elsewhere* matters. . . . She acquiesced as I felt her forehead and cheeks for fever, and while I was doing it I could see the attention of those warm, pleased, living eyes shifting from the things they had been seeing, to me. It was as if they were watching a scene fade out while another was brought in on a screen, so that for a second all focusing points on the first picture were lost, and there was a search for a focusing point on the second.

And then, apparently, the picture of Helmuth Stoye sitting next to her, holding one of her hands, running his right palm across her forehead and down her cheek, came into sharp, true value, and she said, "Darling! You're home! What happened? Holiday or strike? You're not sick?"

I said, "Sweetheart, it's after seven."

"No!" She rose, smoothed her hair in front of the mirror. Hers was a large face and her appeal had none of the doll qualities, the candy-and-peaches qualities of the four-color ads. Her brow and cheekbones were wide and strong, and the hinges of her jaw were well-marked, hollowed underneath. Her nostrils were flared and sensuously tilted and her shoulders too wide to be suitable for fashion plates or pin-ups. But clothes hung from those shoulders with the graceful majesty of royal capes, and her breasts were large, high, separated and firm.

Yet for all her width and flatness and strength, for all her powerfully-set features, she was woman all through; and with clothes or without, she looked it.

She said, "I had no idea . . . after seven! Oh, darling, I'm sorry. You poor thing, and no dinner yet. Come help me," and she dashed out of the room, leaving me flapping my lips, calling, "But Grace! Wait! Tell me first what's the matter—"

And when I got to the kitchen she was whipping up a dinner, efficiently, deftly, and all my questions could wait, could be interrupted with "Helmuth, honey, open these, will you?" "I don't know, b'loved; we'll dig it out after supper. Will you see if there're any French fries in the freezer?"

And afterward she remembered that "The Pearl" was playing at the Ascot Theater, and we'd missed it when it first came to town, and this was the best night . . . we went, and the picture was fine, and we talked of nothing else that night.

I could have forgotten about that episode, I suppose. I could have forgotten about any one of them—the time she turned her gaze so strangely inward when she was whipping cream, and turned it to butter because she simply forgot to stop whipping it when it was ready; the times she had the strong, uncharacteristic urges to do and feel things which had never interested her before—to lose herself in distances from high buildings and tall hills, to swim underwater for long, frightening minutes; to hear new and ever new kinds of music—saccharine fox-trots and atonal string quartets, arrangements for percussion alone and Oriental modes.

And foods—rattlesnake ribs, moo goo gai pan, curried salmon with green rice, *Paella*, with its

chicken and clams, headcheese, *canolas*, sweet-and-pungent pork; all these Grace made herself, and well.

But in food as in music, in new sensualities as in new activities, there was no basic change in Grace. These were additions only; for all the exoticism of the dishes, for ex-ample, we still had and enjoyed the things she had always made—the gingered leg of lamb, the acorn squash filled with creamed onions, the crepes suzettes.

She could still be lost in the architecture of Bach's "Pas-sacaglia and Fugue" and in the raw heartbeat of the Hag-gard-Bauduc "Big Noise from Winnetka." Because she had this new passion for underwater swimming, she did not let it take from her enjoyment of high-board diving. Her occa-sional lapses from efficiency, as in the whipped cream epi-isode, were rare and temporary. Her sometime dreaminess, when she would forget appointments and arrangements and time itself, happened so seldom, that in all justice, they could have been forgotten, or put down, with all my vaunted un-derstanding, to some obscure desire for privacy, for alone-ness.

So—she had everything she had always had, and now more. She was everything she always had been, and now more. She did everything she had always done, and now more. Then what, what on earth and in heaven, was I both-ered, worried, and—and afraid of?

I know now. It was jealousy. It was—one of the jealousies.

There wasn't Another Man. That kind of poison springs from insecurity—from the knowledge that there's enough wrong with you that the chances are high that another man—any other man—could do a better job than you in some department of your woman's needs. Besides, that kind of thing can never be done by the Other Man alone; your woman must cooperate, willfully and consciously, or it can't happen. And Grace was incapable of that.

No; it was because of the sharing we had had. My mar-riage was a magic one because of what we shared; because of our ability to see a red gold leaf, exchange a glance and say never a word, for we knew so well each other's pleasure, its causes and expressions and associations. The pleasures were not the magic; the sharing was.

A poor analogy: you have a roommate who is a very dear friend, and together you have completely redecorated your room. The colors, the lighting, the concealed shelves and drapes, all are a glad communion of your separated tastes. You are both proud and fond of your beautiful room . . . and one day you come home and find a new tele-vision set. Your roommate has acquired it and brought it in to surprise you. You are surprised, and you are happy, too.

But slowly an ugly thing creeps into your mind. The set is a big thing, an important, dominating thing in the room and in the things for which you use the room. And it is *his*—not mine or ours, but *his*. There is his unspoken, unde-manded authority in the choice of programs in the evenings; and where are the chess games, the folk singing with your guitar, the long hours of phonograph music?

They are there, of course, ready for you every moment; no one has taken them away. But now the room is differ-ent. It can continue to be a happy room; only a petty mind would resent the new shared riches; but the fact that the source of the riches is not shared, was not planned by you both. This changes the room and everything in it, the col-ors, the people, the shape and warmth.

So with my marriage. A thing had come to Grace which made us both richer but I did not share that source; and damn, damn my selfishness, I could not bear it; if I could not share it I wanted her deprived of it. I was gentle; be-ginning with, "How do you feel, sweetheart? But you aren't all right; what were you thinking of? It couldn't be 'noth-ing' . . . you were giving more attention to it than you are to me right now!"

I was firm; beginning with, "Now look, darling; there's something here that we have to face. Please help. Now, ex-actly why are you so interested in hearing that Hindemith sketch? You never used to be interested in music like that.

It has no melody, no key, no rhythm; it's unpredictable and ugly. I'm quoting you, darling; that's what you used to say about it. And now you want to soak yourself in it. Why? Why? What has changed you? Yes—people must grow and change; I know that. But—growing so fast, so quickly, in so many different directions! Tell me, now. Tell me exactly why you feel moved to hear this thing at this time."

And—I was angry, beginning with, "Grace! Why didn't you answer me? Oh, you heard me, did you? What did I say? Yes; that's right; you did . . . then why didn't you answer? Well? Not important? You'll have to realize that it's important to me to be answered when I speak to you!"

She tried. I could see her trying. I wouldn't stop. I began to watch her every minute. I stopped waiting for openings, and made them myself. I trapped her. I put on music in which I knew she would be lost, and spoke softly, and when she did not answer, I would kick over my chair with a shout and demand that she speak up. She tried.... Sometimes she was indignant, and demanded the peace that should be her right. Once I struck her.

That did it. Oh, the poor, brutalized beloved!

Now I can see it; *now!*

She never could answer me, until the one time. What could she have said? Her "I don't know!" was the truth. Her patience went too far, her anger not far enough, and I know that her hurt was without limits.

I struck her, and she answered my questions. I was even angrier after she had than I had been before, for I felt that she had known all along, that until now she had withheld what she knew; and I cursed myself for not using force earlier and more often. I did. For not hitting *Grace* before!

I came home that night tired, for there was trouble at the shop; I suppose I was irascible with the composers, but that was only because I had not slept well the night before, which was because—anyway, when I got home, I slammed the door, which was not usual, and, standing there with my raincoat draped over one shoulder, looking at the beautiful spread on the coffee table in front of the fireplace, I demanded, "What's that for?"

There were canapes and dainty round and rolled and tri-angular sandwiches; a frosty bluish beverage twinkling with effervescence in its slender pitcher; there were stars and flowers of tiny pickles, pastes and dressings, a lovely coral potato chip, and covered dishes full of delicate mysteries.

There were also two small and vivid bowls of cut blooms, beautifully arranged.

"Why, for us. Just for us two," she said.

I said, "Good God. Is there anything the matter with sitting up to a table and eating like a human being?" Then I went to hang up the coat.

She had not moved when I came back; she was still standing facing the door, and perhaps a quarter of her welcoming smile was frozen on her face.

No, I said to myself, no you don't. Don't go soft, now. You have her on the run; let's break this thing up now, all at once, all over the place. The healing can come later. I said, "Well?"

She turned to me, her eyes full of tears. "Helmuth ..." she said weakly. I waited. "Why did you ... it was only a surprise. A pretty surprise for you. We haven't been together for so long . . . you've been . . ."

"You haven't been yourself since that accident," I said coldly. "I think you like being different. Turn off the tears, honey. They'll do you no good."

"I'm *not* different!" she wailed; and then she began to cry in earnest. "I can't stand it!" she moaned, "I can't, I can't . . . Helmuth, you're losing your mind. I'm going to leave you. Leave you ... maybe for just a while, maybe for .."

"You're going to *what?*" I whispered, going very close to her.

She made a supreme effort and answered, flatly, looking me in the eye, "I'm going, Helmuth. I've got to."

I think if she'd seen it coming she would have stood back; perhaps I'd have missed her. I think that if she'd expected it, she would have fled after I hit her once. Instead she stood still, unutterably shocked, unmoving, so it was easy to hit her again.

She stood watching me, her face dead, her eyes, and, increasingly, the flames of the fingermarks on her bleached cheeks burning. In that instant I knew how she felt, what her mind was trying frantically to do.

She was trying to think of a way to make this a dream, to explain it as an accident, to find some excuse for me; and the growing sting in her beaten cheeks slowly proved and reproved that it was true. I

know this, because the tingling sting of my hands was proving it to me.

Finally she put one hand up to her face. She said, "Why?"

I said, "Because you have kept a secret from me."

She closed her eyes, swayed. I did not touch her. Still with her eyes closed, she said:

"It wants to be left alone. It feeds on vital substance, but there is always an excess . . . there is in a healthy person, anyway. It only takes a small part of that excess, not enough to matter, not enough for anyone but a jealous maniac like you to notice. It lives happily in a happy person, it lives richly in a mind rich with the experiences of the senses, feeding only on what is spare and extra. And you have made me unfit, forever and ever, with your prodding and scarring, and because you have found it out it can never be left alone again, it can never be safe again, it can never be safe while you live, it can never be content, it can never leave me while I live, it can never, it can never, it can never."

Her voice did not trail off—it simply stopped, without a rise or fall in pitch or volume, without any normal human aural punctuation. What she said made no sense to me.

I snarled at her—I don't think it was a word—and turned my back. I heard her fall, and when I looked she was crumpled up like a castoff, empty, trodden-on white paper box.

I fought my battle between fury and tenderness that night, and met the morning with the dull conclusion that Grace was possessed, and that what had possessed her had gone mad . . . that I didn't know where I was, what to do; that I must save her if I could, but in any case relentlessly track down and destroy the—the— No, it hadn't a name . . .

Grace was conscious, docile, and had nothing to say. She was not angry or resentful; she was nothing but—obedient. She did what she was told, and when she finished she stopped until she was told to do something else.

I called in Doc Knapp. He said that what was mostly wrong with her was outside the field of a medical doctor, but he didn't think a little regimented rest and high-powered food therapy would hurt.

I let him take her to the hospital. I think I was almost glad to see her go. No I wasn't. I couldn't be glad. How could I be glad about anything? Anyway, Knapp would have her rested and fed and quieted down and fattened up and supplied with two alcohol rubs a day, until she was fit to start some sort of psychotherapy. She always liked alcohol rubs. She killed her—she died just before the second alcohol rub, on the fourth day . . . Knapp said, when he took her away, "I can't understand it, Helmuth. It's like shock, but in Grace that doesn't seem right at all. She's too strong, too alive."

Not any more, she isn't.

My mind's wandering. Hold on tight, you . . . Hold. . .

Where am I? I am at home. I am sitting in the chair. I am getting "up. Uh! I have fallen down. Why did I fall down? Because my leg was asleep. Why was it asleep? Because I have been sitting here all day and most of the night without moving. The doorbell is ringing. Why is the doorbell ringing? Because someone wants to come in. Who is it? Someone who comes visiting at two o' eight in the morning, I know that because I started the clock again and Tinkle says what time it is. Who visits at two o' eight in the morning? Drunks and police and death. There is a small person's shadow on the frosted door, which I open. "Hello, small person, Grace is dead."

It is not a drunk it is not the police it is Death who has a child's long lashes and small hands, one to hold up a blank piece of paper for me to stare at, one to slide the knife between my ribs, feel it scrape on my breastbone . . . a drama, Enter Knife Left Center, and I fall back away from the door, my blood leaping lingering after the withdrawn blade, Grace, Grace, treasure me in your cupped hands—

VI

As Told By LAWRENCE DELEHANTY

I GOT THE call on the car radio just before half-past two. Headquarters had a phone tip of some funny business out on Poplar Street in Homeland. The fellow who phoned was a milk truck dispatcher on his way to work. He says he thought he saw someone at the door of this house stab the guy who came to the door, close the door and beat it.

I didn't see anyone around. There were lights on in the house—in what seemed to be the living room, and in the hallway just inside the door. I could see how anyone pass-ing by could get a look at such a thing if it had happened.

I told Sam to stay in the prowl car and ran up the path to the house.

I knocked on the door, figuring maybe there'd be prints on the bell push. There was no answer. I tried again, and finally opened the door, turning the knob by the shaft, which was long enough for me to get hold of without touching the knob.

It had happened all right. The stiff was just inside the door. The guy was on his back, arms and legs spread out, with the happiest look on his face I ever saw. No kidding—that guy looked as if he'd just been given a million dollars. He had blood all over his front.

I took one look and went back and called Sam. He came up asking questions and stopped asking when he saw the stiff. "Go phone," I told him, "and be careful. Don't touch nothin'."

While he was phoning I took a quick squint around. There was a few dirty dishes in the kitchen sink and on the table, and half a bottle of some liqueur on an end table in the living room, sitting right on the polished wood, where it'd sure leave a ring. I'd say this guy had been in there some time without trying to clean up any.

I inched open the drawer in the big sideboard in the dining room and all the silver was there. None of the drawers in the two bedrooms were open; it looked like a grudge killing of some kind; there wasn't no robbery I could see.

Just as I came back down the stairs the doorbell rang. Sam came out of the front room and I waved him back. "There goes our prints on the bell," I said. "I'll get it." I pussyfooted to the door and pulled it wide open, real sud-den.

"Mr. Stoye?" says a kid standing there. He's about four-teen, maybe, small for his age. He's standing out there, three o'clock in the morning, mind you, smiling real polite, just like it was afternoon and he'd come around to sell raffle tickets. I felt a retch starting in my stomach just then—don't know why. The sight of the stiff hadn't bothered me none. Maybe something I ate. I swallowed it down and said, "Who are you?"

He said, "I would like to see Mr. Stoye."

"Bub," I said, "Mr. Stoye isn't seeing anybody just now. What do you want?"

He squinted around me and saw the stiff. I guess I should've stopped him but he had me off guard. And you know, he didn't gasp or jump back or any of the things you expect anyone to do. He just straightened up, and he smiled.

"Well," he says, sort of patting his jacket pocket, "I don't s'pose there's anything I can do now," and he smiles at me, real bright. "Well, good night," he says, and turns to go.

I nabbed him and spun him inside and shut the door. "What do you know about this?" I asked him. He looked at the stiff, where I nodded, and he looked at me. The stiff didn't bother him.

"Why, nothing," he said. "I don't know anything at all. Is that really Mr. Stoye?"

"You know it is."

"I think I did know, all right," he said. "Well, can I go home now? Dad doesn't know I'm out."

"I bet he doesn't. Let's see what you got in your pockets."

He didn't seem to mind. I frisked him. Inside the jacket pocket was a jump knife—one of those

Army issue paratrooper's clasp knives with a spring; touch the button and *click!* you've got four and a half inches of razor steel sticking out of your fist, ready for business. A lot of 'em got out in war surplus. Too many. We're always finding 'em in carcasses.

I told him he'd have to stick around. He frowned a little bit and said he was worried about his father, but I didn't let that make no difference. He gave his name with-out any trouble. His name was Ronnie Daniels. He was a clean-cut little fellow, just as nice and polite as I ever saw.

Well, I asked him all kinds of questions. His answers just didn't make no sense. He said he couldn't recall just what it was he wanted to see Stoye about. He said he had never met Stoye and had never been out here before. He said he got the address from knowing the phone number; went right up to the telephone company and wormed it out of one of the girls there. He said he didn't remember at all where he got the number from. I looked at the number just out of curi-osity; it was Homeland 2065, which didn't mean nothing to me.

After that there wasn't anything to do until the homicide squad got there. I knew the kid's old man, this Daniels, would have to get dragged into it, but that wasn't for me to do; that would be up to the detective looey. I turned the kid over to Sam.

I remember Sam's face just then; it turned pale. I asked him what was the matter but he just swallowed hard and said he didn't know; maybe it was the pickles he had with his midnight munch. He took the kid into the front room and they got into a fine conversation about cops and murders. He sure seemed to be a nice, healthy, normal kid.

Quiet and obedient—you know. I can't really blame Sam for what happened.

The squad arrived—two carloads, sirens and all, making so much noise I thought sure Stoye would get up and tell 'em to let him rest in peace—and in they came—photogs, print men, and the usual bunch of cocky plainclothesmen. They swarmed all over.

Flick was the man in charge, stocky, tough, mad at every-body all the time, especially on the night detail. Man, how he hated killers that worked at night and dragged him away from his pinochle!

I told the whole story to him and his little book.

"His name's Tommy," I said, "and he says he lives at—"

"His name's Ronnie," says Sam, from behind me.

"Hey," I says. "I thought I told you to stay with him."

"I had to go powder my nose," says Sam. "My stomach done a flip-flop a while back that had me worried. It's okay. Brown was dusting in the room there when I went out. And besides, that's a nice little kid. He wouldn't—"

"Brown!" Flick roared.

Brown came out of the living room. "Yeah, chief."

"You done in the front room?"

"Yeah; everything I could think of. No prints except Stove's, except on the phone. I guess they'd be Sam's."

"The kid's all right?"

"Was when I left," said Brown, and went back into the living room. Flick and me and Sam went into the front room.

The kid was gone.

Sam turned pale.

"Ronnie!" he bellows. "Hey you, Ronnie!"

No answer.

"You hadda go powder your big fat nose," says Flick to Sammy. Sam looked bad. The soft seats in a radio car feel good to a harness bull, and I think Sam decided right then that he'd be doing his job on foot for quite a while.

It was easy to see what had happened. Sammy left the room, and then Brown got finished and went out, and in those few seconds he was alone the kid had stepped through the short hall into the kitchen and out the side door.

Sam looked even worse when I suddenly noticed that the ten-inch ham slicer was gone from the

knife rack; that was one of the first things I looked at after I saw Stoye had been stabbed. You always look for the kitchen knives in a home stabbing.

Flick turned to Sam and opened his mouth, and in that moment, believe me, I was glad I was me and not him. I thought fast.

"Flick," I said, "I knew where that kid's going. He was all worried about what his old man would think. Here—I got his address in my book."

Flick snapped, "Okay. Get down there right away. I'll call what's-his-name—Daniels—from here and tell him to wait for the kid and hold him if he shows up before you do. Get down there, now, and hurry. Keep your eyes peeled on the way; you might see him on the street. Look out for that knife. Kelly, get a general alarm out for that kid soon's I'm off the phone. Or send it from your car."

He turned back to me, thumbed at Sam. "Take him with you," he says, "I want him out of my sight. And if his hot damned nose gets shiny again see he don't use your sum-mons book."

We ran out and piled into the car and took off. We didn't go straight to Daniels' address. Sam hoped we would see the kid on the way; I think he had some idea of a heroic hand-to-hand grapple with the kid in which maybe he'd get a little bit stabbed in line of duty, which might quiet Flick down some.

So we cut back and forth between Myrtle Avenue and Varick; the kid could've taken a trolley on one or a bus on the other. We found out soon enough that he'd done nei-ther; he'd found a cab; and I'd like to know who it was drove that hack.

He must've been a jet pilot.

It was real dark on Daniels' street. The nearest streetlight was a couple hundred feet away, and there was a big maple tree in Daniels' yard that cast thick black shadow all over the front of the house. I missed the number in the dark and pulled over to the curb; I knew it must be somewhere around here.

Me and Sam got out and Sam went up on the nearest porch to see the house number; Daniels was two doors away. That's how it was we happened to be far to the left of the house when the killer rang Daniels' bell.

We both saw it, Sam and me, that small dark shadow up against Daniels' front door. The door had a glass panel and there was some sort of a night light on inside, so all we saw was the dark blob waiting there, ringing on the bell. I guess Daniels was awake, after Flick's phone call.

I grabbed Sam's arm, and he shook me free. He had his gun out. I said, "What are you gonna do?" He was all hopped up, I guess.

He wanted to make an arrest or something. He wanted to be The Man here. He didn't want to go back on a beat. He said, "You know how Stoye was killed. Just like that."

That made sense, but I said, "Sam! You're not going to shoot a kid!"

"Just wing him, if it looks—"

Just then the door opened. There wasn't much light. I saw Daniels, a stocky, balding man with a very mild face, peer-ing out. I saw an arm come up from that small shadowy blob. Then Sam fired twice. There was a shrill scream, and the clatter of a knife on the porch. I heard Ronnie yell, "Dad! Dad!"

Then Sam and I were pounding over to the house. Dan-iels was frozen there, staring down onto the porch and the porch steps.

At the foot of the steps the kid was huddled. He was unconscious. The ham slicer gleamed wickedly on the steps near his hand.

I called out, "Mr. Daniels! We're the police. Better get back inside."

And together Sam and I lifted up the kid. He didn't weigh much. Going inside, Sam tripped over his big flat feet and I swore at him.

We put the kid down on the couch. I didn't see any blood. Daniels was dithering around like an old lady. I pushed him into a chair and told him to stay there and try to take it easy.

Sam went to phone Flick. I started going over the kid.

There was no blood.

There were no holes in him, either; not a nick, not a graze. I stood back and scratched my head.

Daniels said, "What's wrong with him? What happened?"

Inside, I heard Sam at the phone. "Yeah, we got 'im. It was the kid all right. Tried to stab his old

man. I winged him. Huh? I don't know. We're looking him over now. Yeah."

"Take it easy," I said again to Daniels. He looked rough. "Stay fight there."

I went to the door, which was standing open. Over by the porch rail I saw something shining green and steel blue. I started over to it, tripped on something yielding, and went flat on my face. Sam came running out. "What's the—*uh!*" and he came sailing out and landed on top of me. He's a big boy.

I said, "My goodness, Sam, that was careless of you," or words to that effect, and some other things amounting to maybe Flick had the right idea about him.

"Damn it, Delehanty," he says, "I tripped on something. What are you doing sprawled out here, anyway?"

"I was looking for—" and I picked it up, the green and steel blue thing. It was a Finnish sheath knife, long and pointed, double razor edges, scrollwork up near the hilt. Blood, still a bit tacky, in the scrollwork.

"Where'd that come from?" grunted Sam, and took it "Hey! Flick just told me the medic says Stoye was stabbed with a two-edged knife. You don't suppose—"

"I don't suppose nothin'," I said, getting up. "On your feet, Sam. Flick finds us like this, he'll think we're playing mumblety-peg . . . tell you what, Sam; I took a jump knife off the kid out there, and it only had a single edge."

I went down the steps and picked it up. Sam pointed out that the kid had never had a chance to use the ham slicer.

I shrugged that off. Flick was paid the most for think-ing—let him do most of the thinking. I went to the side of the door, and looked at the bell push to get an idea as to how it might take prints, and then went inside. Sam came straight in and tripped again.

"Pick up ya feet!"

Sam had fallen to his knees this time. He growled some-thing and, swinging around, went to feeling around the porch floor with his hands. "Now it's patty-cake," I said. "For Pete's sake, Sam—"

Inside Daniels was on the floor by the couch, rubbing the kid's hands, saying, real scared like, "Ronnie! Ronnie!"

"*Delehanty!*"

Half across the room, I turned. Sam was still on his knees just outside the door, and his face was something to see. "Delehanty, just come here, will you?"

There was something in his voice that left no room for a wisecrack. I went right to him. He motioned me down be-side him, took my wrist and pushed my hand downward.

It touched something, *but—there was nothing there.*

We looked at each other, and I wish I could write down what that look said.

I touched it again, felt it. It was like cloth, then like flesh, yielding, then bony.

"It's the Invisible Man!" breathed Sam, bug-eyed.

"Stop talking nonsense," I said thickly. "And besides, it's a woman. Look here."

"I'll take your word for it," said Sam, backing away. "Any-how, I'm a married man."

Cars came, screaming as usual. "Here's Flick."

Flick and his mob came streaming up the steps.

"What's going on here? Where's the killer?"

Sam stood in front of the doorway, holding his hands out like he was unsnarling traffic. He was shaking. "Walk over this side," he said, "or you'll step on her."

"What are you gibbering about? Step on who?"

Sam flapped his hands and pointed at the floor. Flick and Brown and the others all looked down, then up again. I don't know what got into me. I just couldn't help it. I said, "He found a lady-bug and he don't want you to step on it."

Flick got so mad, so quick, he didn't even swear.

We went inside. The medic was working over the boy, •who was still unconscious. Flick was demanding, "Well! Well? What's the matter with him?"

"Not a thing I can find out, not without a fluoroscope and some blood tests. Shock, maybe."

"Shot?" gasped Daniels.

"Definitely not," said the M.O.

Flick said, very, very quietly, "Sam told me over the phone that he had shot the boy. What about this, Delehanty? Can you talk sense, or is Sam contagious?"

I told him what we had seen from the side of the house. I told him that we couldn't be sure who it was that rang the bell, but that we saw whoever it was raise a knife to strike, and then Sam fired, and then we ran up and found the kid lying at the bottom of the steps. We heard a knife fall.

"Did you hear him fall down the steps?"

"No," said Sam.

"Shut up, you," said Flick, not looking at him. "Well, Delehanty?"

"I don't think so," I said, thinking hard. "It all happened so fast."

"It was a girl."

"What was a girl? Who said that?"

Daniels shuffled forward. "I answered the door. A girl was there. She had a knife. A long one, pointed. I think it was double-edged."

"Here it is," said Sam brightly.

Flick raised his eyes to heaven, moved his lips silently, and took the knife.

"That's it," said Daniels. "Then there was a gunshot, and she screamed and fell."

"She did, huh? Where is she?"

"I—I don't know," said Daniels in puzzlement.

"She's still there," said Sam smugly. I thought, oh-oh. This is it.

"Thank you, Sam," said Flick icily. "Would you be good enough to point her out to me?"

Sam nodded. "There. Right there," and he pointed.

"See her, lying there in the doorway," I piped up.

Flick looked at Sam, and he looked at me. "Are you guys trying to—*uk!*" His eyes bulged, and his jaw went slack.

Everyone in the room froze. There, in plain sight on the porch, lay the body of a girl. She was quite a pretty girl, small and dark. She had a bullet hole on each side of her neck, a little one here and a great big one over here.

VII

Told by the Author

THEODORE STURGEON

I DON'T much care for the way this story's going.

You want to write a story, see, and you sit down in front of the mill, wait until that certain feeling comes to you, hold off a second longer just to be quite sure that you know exactly what you want to do, take a deep breath, and get up and make a pot of coffee.

This sort of thing is likely to go for days, until you are out of coffee and can't get more until you can pay for same, which you can do by writing a story and selling it; or until you get tired of messing around and sit down and write a yarn purely by means of knowing how to do it and applying the knowledge.

But this story's different. It's coming out as if it were be-ing dictated to me, and I'm not used to that.

It's a haywire sort of yarn; I have no excuses for it, and can think of no reasons for such a plot having unfolded itself to me. It isn't that I can't finish it up; far from it—all the plot factors tie themselves neatly together at the end, and this with no effort on my part at all.

This can be demonstrated; it's the last chapter that bothers me. You see, I didn't write it. Either someone's playing a practical joke on me, or— No. I prefer to believe someone's playing a practical joke on me.

Otherwise, this thing is just too horrible.

But about that demonstration, here's what happened:

Flick never quite recovered from the shock of seeing that sudden corpse. The careful services of the doctor were not required to show that the young lady was dead, and Flick recovered himself enough to start asking questions.

It was Daniels who belatedly identified her as the nurse he had seen at the hospital the day Mrs. Stoye killed herself. The nurse's name was Lucille Holder. She had come from England as a girl; she had a flawless record abroad and in this country. The head doctor told the police on later investigation, that he had always been amazed at the tremendous amount of work Miss Holder could turn out, and had felt that inevitably some sort of a breakdown must come. She went all to pieces on Mrs. Stoye's death, and he sent her on an immediate vacation.

Her movements were not difficult to trace, after she left the administrative office, where she ascertained Mr. Daniels' address. She went first to his house, and the only conclusion the police could come to was that she had done so on purpose to kill him. But he was not there: he, it seems, had been trying to find her at the hospital at the time! So she left. The following night she went out to Stoye's, rang the bell, and killed him.

Ronnie followed her, apparently filled with the same unaccountable impulse, and was late. Miss Holder went then to Daniels' house and tried to kill him, but was shot by the policeman, just as Ronnie, late again, arrived.

Ronnie lay in a coma for eight weeks. The diagnosis was brain fever, which served as well as anything else. He remembered little, and that confused. He did, however, vouch for the nurse's visit to his home the night of Mrs. Stoye's death. He could not explain why he had kept it a secret from his father, nor why he had had the impulse to kill Mr. Stoye (he admitted this impulse freely and without any horror), nor how he had happened to think of finding Stoye's address through the information operator at the telephone company.

He simply said that he wanted to get it without asking any traceable questions. He also admitted that when he found that Mr. Stoye had already been killed, he felt that he must secure another weapon, and go and kill his father.

He says he remembers thinking of it without any emotion whatsoever at the time, though he was appalled at the thought after he came out of the coma.

"It's all like a story I read a long time ago," he said. "I don't remember doing these things at all; I remember seeing them done."

When the policeman shot Miss Holder, Ronnie felt nothing; the lights went out, and he knew nothing until eight weeks later.

These things remained unexplained to the participants:

Mrs. Stoye's disappearing body. The witnesses were the two Daniels and Miss Holder. Miss Holder could not report it; Ronnie did not remember it; Mr. Daniels kept his own counsel.

Lucille Holder's disappearing body. Daniels said nothing about this either, and for the rest of his life tried to forget it. The members of the homicide detail and the two prowler car men tried to forget it, too. It was not entered in the records of the case. It seemed to have no bearing, and all concerned were happy to erase it as much as possible. If they spoke of it at all, it was in terms of mass hypnosis—which was reasonably accurate, at that. . . .

Lucille Holder's motive in killing Mr. Stoye and in trying to kill Mr. Daniels. This could only be

guessed at; it was simple to put it down to the result of a nervous break-down after overwork.

Mrs. Stoye's suicide. This, too, was attributed to a mounting mental depression and was forgotten as quickly as possible.

And two other items must be mentioned. The radio patrolman Sam was called on the carpet by Detective Lieutenant Flick for inefficiency in letting the boy Ronnie go. He was not punished, oddly enough. He barely mentioned the corpse of Lucille Holder, and that there were witnesses to the fact that *apparently* the lieutenant had not seen it, though he had stepped right over it on the way into Daniels' house. Flick swore that he was being framed, but let Sam alone thereafter.

The other item has to do with Miss Jennie Beaufort, an operator in the Information Office of the telephone company. Miss Beaufort won a prize on a radio quiz—a car, a plane, two stoves, a fur coat, a diamond ring, a set of SwingFree Shoulder pads, and a 38-day South American cruise. She quit her job the following day, took the cruise, enjoyed it mightily, learned on her return that income tax was due on the valuation of all her prizes, sold enough to pay the tax, and was so frightened at the money it took that she went back to work at her old job.

So, you see, these tangled deaths, these mad actions, were all explained, forgotten, rationalized—made to fit familiar patterns, as were Charles Fort's strange lights and shapes in the night, as were the Flying Discs, the disappearance of Lord Bathurst, the teleportation of Kaspar Hauser, and the disappearance of the crew of the *Mary Celeste*.

I leave it to the reader to explain the following chapter. I found it by and in my typewriter yesterday afternoon (I'd been writing this story all the previous night). Physically, it was the most extraordinary looking manuscript I have ever seen.

In the first place the paper bails had apparently been re-leased most of the time, and letters ran into each other and lines crossed and recrossed each other with wild abandon. In the second place there were very few capital letters; I was reminded of Don Marquis's heroic Archy the cockroach, who used to write long effusions while Mr. Marquis was asleep, by jumping from one key to the other.

But Archy was not heavy enough to operate the shift key, and so he eschewed the upper case characters. In the third place, the spelling was indescribable. It was a mixture of phonetics and something like Speed-writing, or ABC shorthand. It begins this way:

i mm a thngg wch livz n fansy whr tru fansy z fond n th mynz v mn.

I couldn't possibly inflict it all on you in its original form. It took me the better part of two hours just to get the pages in order—they weren't numbered, of course.

After I plowed through it myself, I undertook a free translation. I have rewritten it twice since, finding more rhythm, more fluidity, each time, as I become familiar with the extraordinary idiom in which it was written. I think that as it now stands it closely follows the intent and mood of the original. The punctuation is entirely mine; I regard punctuation as inflection in print, and have treated this accordingly, as if it were read aloud.

I must say this: there are three other people who could conceivably have had access to this machine while I was asleep. They are Jeff and Les and Mary.

I know for a fact that Jeff, who is an artist, was busy the entire time with a nonobjective painting of unusual vividness and detail; I know how he works, and I know what the picture looked like when I quit writing for the night, and what it looked like when I woke up, and believe me, he must have been painting like mad the entire time—he and no one else.

As for Les, he works in the advertising department of a book publisher and obviously has not the literary command indicated by this manuscript.

And Mary—I am lucky enough to be able to say that Mary is very fond of me, and would be the last person in the world to present me with such a nasty jolt as is innate in this final chapter. Here it is; and please forgive me for this lengthy but necessary introduction to it, and for my intrusion; this sort of thing is strictly against the rules.

VIII

"?"

I AM A THING which lives in fantasy, where true fantasy lives in the minds of men.

What fumbling is this, what clumsiness, what pain. . . I who never was a weight, who never turned, coerced, nor pressed a person, never ordered, never forced—I who live with laughter, die with weeping, rise and hope and cheer with man's achievements, yet with failure and despair go numb and cold and silent and unnoticeable—what have I to do with agony?

Know me, mankind, know me now and let me be.

Know the worst. I feed on you. I eat and breathe no substance but a precious ether. No, not souls (but where a soul is strong and clean I live my best). I take this guarded essence where I can, and thrive on it; and when I choose a host I am imprisoned, for I may not leave him while he lives, and when he dies I must locate another to inhabit. And I have . . . powers.

But know this too: The thing that I take is the essence of joy—and in joy is created an excess of that which I need. I drink in your reservoir, yes; but when there is drought and the level is low, and your needs are increased, and the water turns bitter with flavors of worry, and anger, and fear, then I shrink and I soften, and lose all my hunger; and then if you grieve, if your spirit is broken, if you should forget all the pleasure and glory and wonder of being a man—then I die. . . .

Such a death is not death as you know it. It is more a waiting unmoving within a soul's winter, to wake with the spring of the heart. But where people grieve over years, or let fear share their souls with me, then I must wait for the walls of my prison to crumble.

Then, after the death of my host I go drifting, seeking another. That is my Search, and in it, for me, is the ultimate cold. No human can know such a thing, for death, for a human, is kinder.

I am and I am not a parasite. I feed on your substance; yet what living thing in the world does not feed on the substance of others? And I take only excess—take only that which you radiate gaily when you feel joy.

When you feel otherwise, then I must wait, or must sleep, or must die. Where is the evil in being a parasite, when I take only a product which you never need? I demand only sustenance; that is the right of all living things. I ask in addition a thing which is simple enough—I ask to be left to myself, to encyst or to flower or sleep or be joyful, without any devilish probing.

I do not know how old I am; I do not know if there are others like me. I do not know how many hosts I have inhabited, or whether I was born or hatched, or whether, like a human, I must one day truly die. I shall, no doubt; I am alive, and nothing lives forever. I know my years are thousands, and my hosts have been in scores of hundreds. I have no interest in statistics.

Yet you must know me.... I think my origins were like a plant's—an accidental seed of sensuality perhaps. My infancy was passed in dreams, in sightless stirrings when the stimulation merited, and blacknesses between. I think that when my hosts passed on, my knotted insubstantial cyst just drifted like a petal on a roiling stream, it bumped and nuzzled and at last slipped in when chance presented hosts which qualified.

To qualify, in those uncaring phases, men had but to show an openness and nothing more. And when I gained experience and consciousness increased, and realization came to me, and I was grown and had ability to choose, I gained as well the power of rejection.

And after that I was no longer bound to sickly children, open to me through their thirst for colors, senses, odors, vivid to them through unsaid convictions that the end was near. I became increasingly

meticulous in choosing; I be-came an expert in detecting signs of whimsy-richness in its earliest potential. I have powers. . . .

You have powers too, you human ones. You can change the color of a life by vicious striking at a stranger-child. You can give away a thing you treasure, making memories which later might compose a symphony. You can do a thousand thousand things you never do; you never try; there is no reason to depart from paths you have established. When, however, circumstances force you into it, you do the "su-perhuman."

Once my host was Annabelle, a woman on a farm. (She loved the birds!) In a blizzard she was lost; she was old and had a crippled knee, and could not find the road, and could not last the night. She stumbled on a post which stood erect and lonesome on the prairie, and, without a con-scious thought of bravery, or what mankind might say to her, she put a hand upon the weathered wood, and in the blowing snow and bitter cold, she walked around the post— around and around, in spite of age and pain and growing numbness, walked around the post until the sun came up in blowing gray, then growing cold.

They found her and they saved her, when in truth she saved herself. There was about her such a cloud of pure achievement, such a joy at having cheated wind and cold! (I fed that day; I still possess the energies she radiated!) ... I have powers; all have powers, when we're forced to use them. I have powers, you have too, which you have never cataloged.

I have powers—now I use them!

I have no host. Such bitterness and agony as I have just experienced I never want again. My Search, this time, will be a thorough one and for it, now, I make my sacrifice. I am unknown; but with this script, these purposely hypnotic words, *I shall be known!* I sacrifice my privacy, my yearn-ing for the pleasant weightless dark where I have dwelt. I challenge mankind's probing, for, through these bright words and burnished continuities, I shall locate a host who will defend me!

I had a man—he had me, possibly—who would have fought for me. And after him I dwelt within a woman's mind—the richest and most magical to all. The man was one of those who, on maturing, never lost the colorful ability to wonder like a child. And one day, miming, imitating a precise and dainty minuet in joyful incongruity (he danced alone upon the bouncing platform of a truck) a falling girder struck him and he died. I had no warning and no way to make a Search; I flung myself into the mind of one who was nearby in close communion with my dead host's whimsy.

Grace had a mind that was magic throughout. Never in thousands of years have I seen such a shimmering jewel; never in thousands of pages of words found in thousands of languages could such a trove be described. All that she saw was transmuted in sibilant subtleties; all that she heard was in breath-taking colors and shapes. What she touched, what she said, what she saw, what she felt, what she thought—these were all blended in joy.

She was the pinnacle; she was the source of the heady exuberant food which in flavor eclipsed my most radiant memories. She, like the blizzard of Annabelle—she was the suitable circumstance, bringing about the release of the pow-ers I held all untried.

I stirred in her mind. I found I could reach out and touch certain sources of hunger—sights that she never had seen and sensations she never had turned to, things which should surely delight such a sensitive soul.

I found to my joy that with care I controlled them, the hungers for things I remembered in hosts less responsive. I practiced this skill as she broadened her life, and I led her to music and poems and thoughts which she never, per-haps, could have found by herself. She had every reason for happiness with all these riches, and I—oh, I gloried in bringing things to her, as many a gifted composer has brought a new music to some virtuoso.

But her husband was Stoye.

Stoye was a devil. He hated me for what I was, before he could define it. His mind was quite as rich as hers, but something curbed it. Growing with her was impossible; he sensed with rare perception that a Thing had come to her, and since that Thing was not of him, he hated it. It mat-tered not to him that she was better for it. Brutally he turned away from sharing what I brought into his home.

And she—I could not take her from him. How I tried! Poor treasure trove, she was at last a

battleground between that questing creature and myself. He hounded me through her, and I struck, back by taking her to rare enchantments in which he could not share.

He was the first—the very first—of all the humans I have known, to recognize me and to seek me out. This recognition was intolerable; all my life I have avoided it, and lived in war and secret joyfulness. He goaded me until I evi-denced myself; I never realized I could make a human speak, but Grace spoke for me when she said that "It wants only to be let alone."

She might as well have died, right then and there, for all the sustenance I got from here thereafter. I knew that she would kill herself; between us, her and me, there was a madness caught from Stoye.

Stoye put her, numb and docile, in the hospital. I started to encyst, for Grace's well was dry to me. I found a likely subject in the nurse, who seemed as sensitive as Grace (but lacked that fine capacity for whimsy) and I poised myself to make the change. While waiting, then, I thought of Stoye—and realized that, with Grace's death, he would not rest until he found me and destroyed me, either by at-tacking all my hosts, or if he learned the way of it, by closing minds against me by his printed propaganda. He had to be destroyed.

Grace killed herself; her one blind foolishness, her love for Stoye, and all her stupid thoughts that she had lost it, made her do it. I might have stopped her; but why should I, when I needed a release from all her bitterness? Believe me, it was just as strong as all her joys had been . . . be-fore she leaped she tried to warn him, tried to send some crazy message to him through a youngster standing down below.

My connection with her was not close just then; I am not sure; she still was set on death as an escape but wished her husband to be watchful and protect himself. And then she leaped.

And then it came—that awful amputation.

I could not know that Ronnie was so strong a host, po-tentially—that so well suited to me was he that, as I flashed upward to the nurse, to take possession, I was torn apart!

I have no substance; yet I am an entity, with limits and with boundaries. These were ruptured; while my greater . part found room within the nurse's mind, a fragment nes-tled into Ronnie's.

At first I felt a transcendental pain and dizziness; and then I did the things I could to be protected. I hid the crumpled body with a forced hypnotic wave (this is no subtle mystery; a thousand men can do it) to keep the wave of terror all confused with curiosity, for terror undiluted quite inhibits my possession of a host.

I settled into Lucille Holder's mind and tested the controls which Stoye had forced me to develop. Lucille was far less strong than Grace had been, and forcing her was easy. I was wounded, I was maddened, and at last I drank, with purpose and a new dark joy, the thing called hate.

Stoye had to die. The man called Daniels, Ronnie's fa-ther, saw Grace leap and was a witness. Possibly he might become too curious, with his son possessed, and be another probing devil. He must die. Ronnie had a part of me, and I did not think he could release it while he lived. So he must die.

To test my new controls, I seitt the nurse at first to do the minor task. The elder Daniels was not there; and when I found myself confronted with that other part of me, I nearly died of yearning. And I realized, in that closeness, that the boy could be controlled as well, and that he could destroy his father quite at my convenience, while Lucille could kill him later. Satisfied, I went away.

I spent that night and all next day securing my controls, and practicing. And late the night that followed, I killed Stoye, and two strange things happened.

One was when Stoye died; I felt a wave of powerful protectiveness about him as he fled his body, and I sensed again the fullest, richest magic that was Grace. I was ter-rified of it; I had never known before that humans could outlive their carcasses . . .

The other thing was the arrival of Ronnie, apparently moved by the part of me carried within him. Yet since he possessed but a fragment, his effort was late and his mo-tive was weak, and I feared that he might make a botch of the killing of Daniels. I therefore sent Lucille to do it; Ron-nie, again weak and tardy, followed my orders.

The gunshot, the bullet which shattered the neck of the nurse, were quite unexpected. I was flung unprepared into cold, in my nakedness, cold indescribable, cold beyond bearing. Yet I was glad; for the fraction of me that was Ronnie's came streaming toward me as I was exploded away from the nurse. The

wrench it gave Ronnie must have been dreadful; when I settle into a host all my roots go down deep.

I hid Lucille's body and searched all the minds in the house for a suitable host. Ronnie was perfect, unconscious and closed. Daniels was fretful; I can't abide fear. I fought back the cold, drew inward, contracted, and formed, at long last, a new cyst. I let Lucille's body be seen, and ignoring the others—their whimsy was as flat as their oversized feet—I withdrew.

And I have been thinking.

Some things were important that now cannot matter. I am different because of the searchings of Stoye—I blame him for all that has happened, and that is a thing which can no longer matter.

I know how to hate now, and how to make murder; the taste of these things is still bitter, but so is the taste of good stout when first taken, and stout has a taste worth acquiring. Like Grace I still have all my earlier qualities—the sun on a mountain or watching the curve of the wing of a gull (through a host) certainly has all the zest for me that it has ever had. Now I have more, though; and that is a thing which can matter very much indeed.

I have been selfish. It never occurred to me, back in the days of the man who did minuets joyfully, that I might do something *for* him whom I choose as a host. Grace taught me that, purely by feeding me richly through her experiences, purely by being a subject for my schooled suggestions. There may have been many who carried me, who were susceptible to my control.

I could not know without trying, and I never tried this command until Grace took me in. And since then I hunger, I thirst for the richness and beauty and shifting and changing of colors and sounds which she brought me, and never again will rest and be fed and be happy to have just enough to sustain me.

I drift, now, encysted, but testing my powers when never before had I thought of them. I find I am mobile; also, to certain degrees, I can move things—this writing machine, for example, though it is slow and laborious. I find I can whisper to humans and fit some strange thoughts and ideas to each other.

I have looked for a host for a weary, cold while, and my energies seem to be dwindling. I still have enough, though, to search for a time, and soon now I'll have what I need.

I'll find, soon, a person, a man or a woman, or even a sensitive child. This one will be mine and I'll lead him to wonders of sense and of music and heady adventure. I think I am learning to savor the tartness of terror, the bloody salt flavor of killing with purpose. My host will exist in a series of colorful pageants and move in a world of emotional riches, all of my carefulest choosing.

And for this I sacrifice that which I guarded—my passion for quiet and secret enjoyments. I say to you, Know me! Suspect me! for by your suspicion you open yourself to my coming. And when some great mural is painted by some-one who never did passable work in his life before that, suspect me. And when in a prison some cringing psychotic says, over and over, "A voice said to do it!" suspect me.

Whenever you walk in the street and feel a strange spasm of nausea, suspect me indeed; for then I am injured, and what you have seen is a part-host like Ronnie; and know that that person must die—and can kill if I will it.

I am so cold. . . .

I write this because in my search for a host who is perfect, I find that one segment of humans is almost entirely open. These are the readers and tellers of tales of the dark and of terror and madness. The one who has written these chapters would serve as a host—but I fear he would turn on me, feed on my memories, use me for piddling profit in plying his trade.

Besides, he's a bit superficial for one of my tastes. I know his intentions, however, and what he will do with this script. I know he is frightened because of the way this long tale has unfolded, I know, too, that nothing will keep him from seeing it printed.

When it is read, though, by thousands of like-minded people over the world, and he hears of the music and murder created by someone who fell to me only through reading it, then he will curse and will wish he were dead, and wish he had torn this to pieces.