19 ASTOUNDING STORIES OF SCIENCE FICTION and FANTASY

Beyond the Barriers of Space and Time

A NEW COLLECTION
Edited by JUDITH MERRIL
INTRODUCTION BY
THEODORE STURGEON

RAY BRADBURY • J. C. FURNAS • ISAAC ASIMOV
JOHN COLLIER • ANTHONY BOUCHER • JOHN WYNDHAM
AGATHA CHRISTIE • ROBERT SHECKLEY • and others

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Space and Time

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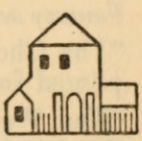

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Contents

Introduction *by Theodore Sturgeon*

A man I know (a regular hero he is) was walking down the street one day when he suddenly roared like an animal, jumped on the back of a little old lady he didn't know, knocked her down, rolled her into the gutter, and started slapping her head.

There's someone else (whose veracity I wouldn't dare question) who claims to be able to know exactly what a man is thinking five thousand miles away at the moment he thinks it, who can describe shops and gardens and people in cities he's never visited as accurately as if he were walking there, and who can hear the voices of the dead.

Given my faithful assurance that the acts of the first man and the claims of the second are exactly and truthfully reported, you will conclude that the first is a scoundrel and the second a liar.

Please don't.

That first one, now, walking along the street, looked up just in time to see a heavy piece of machinery break loose and slide down a loading ramp and across a warehouse platform, where it struck a drum of gasoline, which ignited. Some of the foaming liquid splashed on the old lady's coat. With great presence of mind, and at considerable personal sacrifice, my friend knocked her off her feet, rolled her into a convenient puddle to wet the coat, and beat out the flames on her *babushka* with his hands.

As to the second one, the one with the remarkable ability to see and hear around the world and beyond the grave, the fellow who claims to have conquered the barriers of space and time (and who is of unquestioned credibility), why it's you, friend, looking at your TV set, phoning long distance, or listening to a Caruso record.

You see, my first two paragraphs were, statement by statement, absolutely true. Their truth, however, was incomplete, therefore inadequate and misleading.

Here's another true story. About a hundred and seventy years ago some peasants in the south of France saw a monstrous meteorite smash down out of the overcast and bury itself amongst the truffles at the edge of a wood. So insistent were these good people that they had seen a stone fall from the sky that the word spread until it reached Paris.

In the interests of enlightenment, a couple of *savants* from the Sor-

bonne journeyed to the scene and surveyed it carefully. Courteously concealing their amusement, they then explained to the peasants that the latter were obviously mistaken, as anyone might be in the face of a great flash of lightning. Stones, they said, could not conceivably fall from the sky because, there being nothing to hold them up, they most certainly would all have fallen long ago, if there had ever been any, which, of course, there had not.

"But do not feel too badly," they concluded, "for we who understand the phenomenon of electricity, and its identity with lightning, can assure you that it has a great affinity for metals; and—observe!—here in the very place where this indubitable lightning struck the ground is a deposit of nickel-iron, the only such metal in this area, and the obvious target for Monsieur Franklin's heavenly fire." Whereupon the peasants, who had seen the object fall with their own excellent eyes, recanted, admitted their error, and thanked the wise men for adding to their understanding.

Apparently, even when we have all the *available* facts, we may still have an incomplete sum of truth. Tangible evidence, plus established authority, plus unshakeable and self-evident theorizing, *can* add up to nonsense.

Most people, in most eras, seem to be convinced that in their time the end of knowledge is at hand. *We,* of course, suffer from no such *malaise.* We have seen, in our own lifetimes, how little it mattered to the automobile that once the blacksmith laughed. What, in the long run, did the electric motor care that the shuffling walking-beam engine once called itself *the* power plant?

Some of us today may be so bemused by nuclear energy that we cannot imagine how primitive, how laughable, it may seem one day soon. But most of us have come to regard a state of flux, at least in the physical sciences, as a new kind of status quo. Last year's machine retooling, the plant manager knows, will be obsolete next fall. Five years ago, we rushed to be among the first owners of television sets; now we hesitate before buying, thinking, "It might be best to wait for color."

Science fantasy and this new frame of mind go together. In part, the early science fiction of twenty and thirty years ago, with its dramatically stimulating effect on the imaginations of its adolescent readers, has been responsible for our new tolerance toward the idea of continual change. Now, in turn, the open-minded "modern" attitude is providing a new adult readership for the more mature science-fantasy fiction of today.

Now, as then, imaginative literature is a vehicle for those who cannot help being curious about the next turn in the road, for curious people who are convinced that we have yet to learn *all* about anything. The

twenty-one writers of the stories in this book, and others like them, are not content to reaffirm the obvious and evident truths already clear to us; it is their purpose instead to postulate new possibilities for enlarging our concept of what the truth may be.

You might think of the writers of these stories as so many present-day Davids, slinging pebbles of wonder and speculation from elastic imaginations at the giant unknown that always looms against the horizon.

For there is a new giant stirring now within our species. He's still a child, but he's growing fast. He is to be seen in the conflict which is beginning to overshadow that of machine against machine, of materialism against materialism. Like all children, he expresses himself in contradictory and divergent ways.

He is driving more and more of us to church. He is driving us increasingly to psychology and psychiatry. He causes overflow attendance at philosophy courses for adults; he finds ways to wash our brains, and he will find a shield against brainwashing.

He tries to divert and divide us with floods of words and twisted concepts; he lies, he worships, he bewilders, he instructs. And like steam and electricity, electronics and nuclear power, he is a natural force—which is to say, a devil, a god, and above all a blabbermouth, eager to tell his secrets to anyone with the ears to hear and the mind to listen.

He is Mind, that odd faculty we have which has been denied the other animals on earth, and he constitutes the new direction and the greater goal of our race.

As electricity begat electronics which begat atomic fission, so this newcomer may express himself through what has preceded him, and men may first communicate from mind to mind through some sort of manufactured transmitter, detector and amplifier. Or he might come to us through the discovery of a science as far beyond us now as atomics was beyond the *savants* of France when they studied the meteor. Or he may arrive self-equipped like the Messiah, when enough of us have the faith and the sense of brotherhood to support him.

When he does come, by whatever road, he will no longer be a giant (though there will then be a new giant on a new horizon, an unknown quantity to question and worry at). What we know and comprehend cannot overawe us. It is what we do not know that frightens us. Today we have cast just enough light on the nature of Mind so that we can judge the extent of our ignorance; and in our apprehension of the unknown, we magnify its shadow to the proportions of a Goliath.

Here in this book are nineteen views of Mind and its possible manifesta-

tions. To my mind, no other kind of fiction can offer the same excitement to be found here. Miss Merril's extraordinary taste and erudition assure us beforehand of a notable helping of sheer entertainment; any book with her name on it, whether as author or editor, is guaranteed good reading. Add to this the ever present prospect that any *one* of the stories here may contain the sharp-edged insight that will start the job of whittling the giant of Mind down to size—and I believe you will agree that the only thing wrong with it is that it is far too short.

Editor's Preface *by Judith Merril*

I have just had a most unusual experience. . . .

Fine traditional words, these, in a collection of stories dealing with the curious and controversial phenomena known as the "*psi* powers." I'm afraid, though, that the traditional approach in this book begins *and* ends with that familiar line. Our object here is neither to horrify with the Unknown, nor to enlighten concerning the Esoteric—but rather to entertain, as best we can, with a varied program of sentiment, spoofing and speculation, provided by nineteen talented writers of unusual stories.

We—the writers and the editor—offer you here neither the revelations of the séance room nor the statistics of the psychological laboratory. And what we ask of you is neither open-mouthed credulity nor tight-eyed cynicism, but only a free hand on the reins of (our) imagination.

As for my own personal experience, I must confess it was in no way supradimensional, extrasensory, parapsychological or otherworldly; it consisted simply and entirely of the fascinating job of putting this book together.

Psi is the twenty-third letter of the Greek alphabet; it is used for the sound *ps,* as in *saps, hopes* and *epsom* salts. It is also used, today, to name a field of little knowledge and much emotional conviction, covering a multitude of myths, uncertainties and possible great discoveries.

It is not within the scope of this book (and certainly not of its editor) to attempt to evaluate the work of those scientists and other investigators who have undertaken the Augean task of uncovering whatever shreds of honest evidence may be buried in the welter of magic and miracle, superstition, fear and forthright fraud with which the field of *psi* has been inundated. The writer is concerned, as is the scientist, with the search for truth, but our methods and our definitions are both different. Instead of exposing falsehood (as fraud), we may be accused of deliberately disseminating it (as fantasy). Yet the means is quite suitable to the end, for the realities we seek are not so much "solid facts," best studied in the strongest light, but rather a more elusive kind of knowledge that is most clearly seen in the reflection of (and on) human behavior.

John Keats is out of style today, and most of us are a little uncom-

fortable with such a phrase as "beauty is truth, truth beauty." So we say instead, every bit as accurately, that whatever the psychological motivations of the writer may be, the primary and proper purpose of his story is entertainment.

Not the smallest part of my personal pleasure in collecting these stories was in my correspondence with the authors, and with other writers whose work is not actually reprinted here, either because of limitations of space or of too frequent previous publication elsewhere. I had hoped to be able to include most of these vigorous and interesting expressions of attitude here—but the letters have piled up till they would make almost a separate volume of their own.

The opinions on the validity of *psi* as such ranged from an emphatic, "I wouldn't believe it even if it were true," to an equally assertive, "Why I am so sure this trait exists is puzzling to me, and consists of no stronger proof than just 'knowing.'" Most of the statements, however, were more cautious: "It seems to me this is a situation that calls for a willing suspension of both belief and disbelief. . . ." "I'm willing to believe, but only after I see the evidence (and I mean evidence, not 'reports'). . . ." "I think a full-bodied psi-science is more probable than time travel, and maybe a little more probable than faster-than-light flight, but I won't go much further."

Even more interesting to me, however, were the discussions of *psi*—and telepathy in particular—not as a real or hypothetical fact, but as a literary device.

"It seems to me the subject of *psi* was picked up by science fiction to nourish the neurotic adolescent fears common in thoughtful people in these times," wrote one author. "The psi-individual is used as a psychological symbol to represent 'superior man' in the Nietzschean sense . . . that *psi* as a subject is a new bottle in which the old élite-fascistic-leader-aristocracy wine has been poured . . ."

And on the other side of the fence: "Telepathy is the shape of a human yearning. . . . The yearning to communicate fully and completely with other human beings is perhaps the most universally compelling desire of mankind. . . . This basic and profound human concern with expression, communication, understanding, is often projected in science fiction into a telepathy framework, as an idealized form of 'perfect direct communication.'"

I was also especially intrigued by the variety and scope of the reading matter referred to in these letters, in answer to my request for titles that might be included in the bibliography at the back of the book. To all the writers who contributed their time and effort to these suggestions

and statements, I should like now to express my thanks—and in particular to James Blish, Alfred Bester and Dr. J. A. Winter, whose stories are *not* included in this collection.

My grateful acknowledgment, also, to editors Anthony Boucher, Horace and Evelyn Gold, and Sam Mines, for their suggestions and assistance in obtaining stories; to Groff Conklin, whose generosity in opening his library and files to me went far beyond the call of duty to a "rival" anthologist; to Stephen's Book Service, for assistance with the bibliography; and for their interest, encouragement, and assistance-in-general, to Jean Potts, Katherine MacLean, Herman W. Mudgett, and most particularly, to Milton Amgott.

Beyond the Barriers of Space and Time *Edited by Judith Merril*

In these fantastic stories you will come upon . . .
a "flying" professor who found he could float on air
two girls who, having experienced the same continuing dream, wrote identical books about it—and then discovered that hundreds of other women had had that very same dream
a man who found a four-foot snake in his bathtub
an Indian girl who could bring down rain by dancing on a medicine drum
a bomber pilot in love with a lovely image named La who came to him all too clearly in his dreams
an automatic house of the future, with a unique African nursery
a beautiful French medium whose astounding proficiency brought her to a fateful climactic moment

As Theodore Sturgeon points out in his introduction: "Here in this book are nineteen views of Mind and its possible manifestations. . . . No other kind of fiction can offer the same excitement to be found here."

These, then, are stories dealing with mental powers—in mass hypnosis, telepathy, séances, precognition, levitation, predestination, ghosts and magic. Even more, they are a rich harvest of outstandingly good reading entertainment from the typewriters of nineteen of today's top-flight authors.

Walt Miller started writing during an enforced vacation, following an automobile accident, during his last year of G. I. college. He subsequently took his degree in electrical engineering, then settled down to a full-time writing career of magazine fiction and video drama, all of it characterized by a unique personal blend of mystic-poetic intensity and hard-headed practicality. His much reprinted story of a frightened woman's furious rejection of telepathy, "Command Performance," is considered by many readers a classic science-fictional treatment of the subject.

"Wolf Pack" is pure fantasy. No rationale is provided for the occurrences set forth; you may decide for yourself whether "La" is a clairvoyant image or a psychoneurotic symptom. Either way, "Wolf Pack" is, typically, a story of tenderness and sensitivity, set against a backdrop of violence and brutality.

Wolf Pack *by Walter M. Miller, Jr.*

He gasped and sat up, spilling blankets from sleep-hot shoulders. He shivered a moment in darkness, shaking his head in his hands. Bixby snored faintly on the other cot. Engines were coughing to life on the flight line as the ground crews pre-flighted the waiting ships. The breath of morning came icy through the tent-flaps to shock him into full wakefulness.

He glanced at the luminous flare of his watch dial. It was nearly killing time.

He swung his legs out of bed, felt the gritty earth under his bare feet, groped under the cot for fleece-lined boots. He lit a cigarette, then a candle, stared at Bixby for a moment. Bixby's mouth was working and a sliver of drool lay over his chin.

Mark Kessel hauled his lanky frame to its feet, and stepped over to Bixby's bunk. He lifted one end of the cot two feet from the floor and dropped it hard. Then he went outside to finish dressing in the olive grove while Bixby spluttered and fought the bedclothes.

Dew was in the olive trees, and it glistened faintly in the dim light from other tents in the grove where men grumbled before the dawn and crawled into coveralls and flight jackets, stuffed candy bars and bail-out

kits in their knee pockets, buckled low-slung forty-fives about their waists, tucked a scented letter inside their shirts, and stalked away with a lazy slouch to fly and kill in the dawn.

"I've got a feeling," came Bixby's muffled voice from the tent.

"Yeah?" Mark grunted, not wanting to talk. He dumped frigid water from a jerry can into a steel helmet and began sloshing his face and head.

"This one'll be a bitch," said Bixby.

"Maybe."

"This your forty-sixth, Mark, or -seventh?"

Mark Kessel glowered for a moment into darkness. "Dry up, will you, Bix? I don't feel like gab."

"Hung over?"

"Uh-uh."

"Dreams again, huh? About the dame."

"Just dry up."

"Okay, Skipper. Sorry."

A stupid mistake, he decided, telling Bix about the dreams and about La. A drunkenly stupid mistake. Bix made noises like a green flight surgeon with delusions of psychiatry, and, having memorized the symptoms of flight fatigue, was always ready to gig a fellow fly-boy with a diagnosis, prognosis, or post mortem. And he couldn't understand about La.

An orderly-room corporal came prowling through the grove, splashing a flashlight's beam among the trees and bellowing, "All bombardier-navigators, report immediately to briefing. All bombigators, early briefing."

A tent flap parted, revealing a slit of light with a head in it. "Hey, Corp!" it called. "What's the target?"

"Not sure, Lieutenant. Heard it's Perugia."

Listening, Mark Kessel froze, his face dripping.

"Hell, we just hit Prujie last week," growled the head.

"Zat so?" answered the corporal indifferently. "All bombigators, report immediately to briefing! All bombigators . . ." The corporal wandered on.

Mark stood rocking slightly, towel halfway to his face, remembering Perugia. He heard Bix coming outside, and began drying himself.

"He say Perugia?" Bix grunted.

"Yeah."

"Told you this one'll be a bitch."

"Yeah."

"Well, Pappy, he was yelling at me. See you later."

"Yeah. Take it easy."

Bix shuffled away toward the orderly room, unzipped boots making cocky flapping sounds about his ankles. Mark sighed and went back into the tent to stretch out on his cot and think. A preliminary bombardier's briefing meant that he had a half-hour or so before pilots and enlisted crews were called. The group had done a lousy job on Perugia last week, and the colonel probably meant to rumble about it to the men who manned the bombsights. It was decreed that the city should die.

Mark lay blowing slow smoke at the candle flame and wondered what the hell had happened to him in eight months of war. Once he was sick when he saw the long hungry strip of bomb bursts trace a belt of billowing death across a small Italian village. Once he howled in the cockpit when a flitting Focke-Wulf slashed in and down from five o'clock high, leaving the plexiglass turret of his wing ship coated crimson from inside. The turret was partially shattered, and the slip stream dried the crimson to ugly brown and flaked it away before wheels touched home ground.

Now he felt nothing. I am a machine, he thought. Or a part of a machine. A machine with five human parts geared in with the aluminum, glass, and steel. They screw us into our places and we function like pistons, or cogs, or vacuum tubes. We, who were five, become one, and that beats hell out of the Trinity.

Listen, Kessel, he told himself, you're getting to be a sad sack of cemented *merde*. You got four missions to go and they send you home. Why bitch about it now?

But he closed his eyes and watched a mental bomb pattern trace a mental stripe of hell across a small mental village, and it all looked quietly familiar and unfrightening to him. He dived down through billowing dust to peer at crushed things lying in the rubble, and still he felt nothing.

Mark Kessel stubbed out his cigarette in the dirt floor of the tent and asked himself almost indifferently what had happened to his soul? Or whatever it was.

He stared at the candlelight flickering on the canvas canopy above him and struggled to feel something besides emptiness.

He thought of La. She brought a faint tickling to his scalp and a pleasant pulsing of the temples. For a long time he lay basking in the warmth of La. She was sleeping. She lay curled in a feather bed, dark hair tangled across an oversized pillow, lips parted, an arm under her head. He scented the faint musky warmth about her, watched her lazy breathing, noted the paleness of a shaven armpit. She stirred in her sleep and smiled faintly. She was dreaming of him. He slipped quietly into her

dream, and they wandered along a sunny lake shore, watching the ducks skimming low over water that scintillated in the breeze.

"Will they read the banns tomorrow?" she whispered.

"Tomorrow at every Mass."

Mark shook his head and sat up. There was paper in his valpack at the end of the cot. He dragged it out and lay on his side to write with the stationery box on the edge of the cot. He usually wrote her a letter before a mission, if there were time enough.

He told her about his crew, and about Lecce and San Pancrazio and the way the old Italian women came to catch lizards and snails in the vineyard and cooked them over charcoal fires along rubbled streets in the village. He told her about the olive grove and the vineyards and the donkey carts painted in carnival colors, and about how he had tasted a donkey steak in a San Pancrazio café. He told her about the little girl with the festering shrapnel wound, and the bullet-pocked walls of once-fascist buildings whose megalomaniac inscriptions in praise of *Italia* and *Giovannezza* had been daubed over with red paint and obscenity. And . . .

Listen, babe, this one's got me down. I haven't talked about such stuff before, but this time's different. I'm scared as hell. This mission gives me the shakes. Maybe it's only because I'm nearly finished with my tour. Maybe it's because I'm about ready to go back. But it's more like being scared for you, baby, not for myself. I felt like this the last time we hit this target.

The words surprised him. He had felt no conscious fear, but as words poured forth, he knew that fear was there.

I love you, La.

He stared at the letter for a time, then held it toward the candle flame, watched soot collect on its underside, watched a charred spot appear, crack, and catch fire.

The last ashes were fluttering to the floor when the tent flaps slapped apart and a bulldog face thrust itself inside.

"Whatthehell, Kessel, you think we oughta hold the goddam war up for you? Get your lazy butt out to the truck!"

"Sorry, Major. I didn't hear the call."

Major Gladin's hammy face put on a fanged smirk. "Well you got my personal invitation now, Lieutenant. Shall I send a staff car for you, Lieutenant, or can you walk?"

Kessel reddened and rolled off the bunk. Major Gladin stalked away, mumbling about the "fifty-mission heebies" and temperamental goddam airplane jockeys who needed wet nurses.

He scraped the ashes of the letter into the dirt with his foot. Maybe you'll know I wrote it anyhow, babe. Maybe you'll get it somehow, even if I don't know just where to mail it.

A brisk dawn wind had risen, and clouds gathered in a gory dawn. A pair of Limey trucks hauled the flight crews of the 489th Squadron from the tent area along the winding bumpy road to the old barracks that served as a briefing room. Narrowed eyes watered in the wind, and men sandwiched their chapped faces between the fleece-skin lapels of their jackets. Men huddled behind the cabs of the trucks, trading occasional insults, or smoking in silence while hair whipped about their eyes and foreheads.

Mark Kessel listened to the briefing officer with half an ear. Much was routine, and much was of interest chiefly to the squadron leaders and lead bombardiers. Wing men hugged the formation and followed the lead ship. Wing bombardiers toggled off the five hundred pounders upon signal from the goose at the head of the vee. He listened with interest to weather data, flak and fighter reports, and information on the target.

Perugia was a bulge in an artery that fed the *Wehrmacht* fist. They wanted the arteries burst and bled. They wanted a tourniquet around Italy, a tourniquet to numb the South and enfeeble it. They wanted an amputation.

"The marshaling yards are the principal target," the colonel called curtly, "but stretch the pattern over the town. Give Jerry something to do, shoveling rubble. Any questions?"

You take five hundred pounds of TNT, thought Kessel, and you dump it on a plain stone house with gypsum floors and charcoal foot warmers and coral Virgins looking down from wall niches, a house with photographs of Babe Ruth and Primo Carnera flanking an eighteenth-century crucifix, a house that had seen ten generations of human birth and growth and love and death, a house with antipasto furnishings and oil-and-vinegar atmosphere and girl-at-the-piano warmth about the living room. A house rich with the odor of blood-red wine and moon-pale cheese, with the savor of garlic and anisette, with the aroma of healthy, perspiring women, and on holy days the smell of candle flames, mingled with baking cakes. You bombed it, you clobbered it, you reduced it, you shattered and wrecked and crumbled it into a rubble heap where a bit of cloth caught between the stones fluttered in a dusty breeze. You took the house and kicked it apart into the street so that Jerry would have to spend his time and his bulldozers clearing it out of the way. You never see the house, or the dozens of others like it. You only know it's there

somewhere in the ugly belt of dust and belching hell ten thousand feet beneath you, but not seeing it, you feel only a puzzled concern.

There were no questions.

Men in fleece skins and parachute harnesses slouched out of the briefing room and milled toward the squadron trucks. There was no laughter. Quietly, around the corner of the building, a gunner knelt for a chaplain's blessing, and quickly strode away. Trucks grumbled away, nosed onto a taxi strip, headed for the aircraft dispersal area.

Mark Kessel stared at the eagles crouched in the olive grove and thought about La. The eagles' wing racks were loaded with bombs and their bellies were full of thunder. La was combing her hair and smiling softly at her thoughts. She was thinking of a dream. She crossed her legs, and the satin robe fell from her thighs as she sat before the vanity. Brown and slender, and a muscle twitched as she absently swung a foot and laughed softly to herself.

He caught her shoulders gently, and she came up to him with a low purr of pleasure. Her bosom snuggled close and her shoulders hunched forward against him.

"O Marco! Che bello questo momento!" she murmured.

Mark chuckled at his own inventions. He had not seen an English-speaking woman in so long that even the image of La spoke Italian.

The dun-colored eagles looked hungry on their concrete emplacements. There is something anxious and eager in the three-legged stance of a B-25, with its blunt and squarish features and the gull-like set of its wings. They're more alive than most aircraft, he thought, and full of a childlike enthusiasm. They performed their tasks with innocence.

There were certain advantages to being a machine, he thought. Certain comforts in mindlessness and guiltlessness. The light of dawn was red on their wings and flaring on their plexiglass blisters.

"Hell, Kessel!" barked a voice. "Wake up! Shake it, will ya?"

He came out of a daze, glanced around, saw the rest of his crew already out of the parked truck and walking toward the ship. Bixby grinned back at him over his shoulder.

"Come on, Pappy! We need a driver."

He growled something sour at the men remaining in the truck, vaulted over the tail gate, and sauntered after his crew. The truck lumbered on, delivering parcels of men at each parking station. He checked over the crew chief's report, signed the slip, listened to the crew chief's usual straight-faced remark: "Perugia, huh? Milk run again, eh, Pappy?"

"Sure. Care to come along for the ride?"

"Guess not. Think I'll go to town for a little excitement."

"Take off."

They parted still wearing straight faces.

The turret gunner and the radio op were already crawling into the rear hatch. Mark turned for a moment to glance over the ship with its "Prince Albert" sign on the nose. It had acquired its name when a North African ground crew had used a tobacco can to patch a bullet hole in the fuselage. The ship was scarred and decrepit, but he knew every inch of it, and he suspected that it would fall to pieces in other hands than the knowing ones of its present ground and flight crews. He loved the old rattling wreck. Almost the way he loved La.

"Damn it to hell, Pappy!" called Surges, his copilot. "Do we fly today, or don't we?"

"Keep your war drawers on, Junior Birdman. Pappy's comin'."

He hiked toward the forward hatch, and moments later inverters whined in the cockpit. Engines coughed to life.

"Interphone check. Bixby?"

"Loud and clear, Pappy," answered the voice in his headsets.

"Radio?"

"Burnes, loud and clear."

"Turret?"

"Sparley, ditto, Pappy."

"Tail?"

"Winters, okay, sir."

"The class is now in session. Be seated, gentlemen."

Preliminary patter brought a sense of oneness somehow, like a man prodding himself to make sure he was still in one piece. Mark lost his black mood as he taxied the Prince from the revetment and into line on the strip. There was thunder of engines in the morning, and the trees whipped in the prop wash at every turning. The eagles lumbered single file to the end of the runway. The eagles took off in pairs, wheels folding gracefully, almost daintily, as they roared aloft and circled for assembly in the sky. Twenty-seven ships gleamed golden in the early sun. A flying wolf pack that rallied by twos and formed in flights of three, three flights in echelon, three squadrons in a staggered vee.

The wolf pack turned east toward the open sea, and the Adriatic fluttered with blinding gold in the direction of a blazing sun.

Mark Kessel felt Surges watching him occasionally, gave him a questioning glance. Surges was a dark little man with a sour smirk and a

quick nervousness that made Mark wonder sometimes why they'd packed him in a twenty-five instead of a Mustang or a Thunderbolt.

"Feeling better, Pappy?" Surges asked over the interphone.

"Better than what?" grunted the pilot.

"Don't hand me that horse manure, Skipper. I can read you like a tech order."

"Then read and shut up. There's a war on, you know."

"And if I may echo the immortal words of Sherman, war is a crock of crap."

The formation thundered northwestward along the broad blue tongue of the Adriatic. Kessel's crew fell silent, each of them aware of the other's presence and functions, each filling his place in the total Mechanthrope. War, thought Mark, was paradoxical proof that men by nature are co-operative social beings, functioning best as teams. Unfortunately, teams were not necessarily co-operative with other teams.

Hearken to the wisdom of a washed-out flak dodger, he mused sourly. Once, when he was a sophomore math and philosophy student, he could tolerate his own solemn intellectualizings. Now, when they happened accidentally, he felt the need to boil himself in sarcasm and forget it. Nothing seemed sillier than searching for subtle meanings when the only meaning left in life was how to stay alive. He needed no rationalizations about his reasons for being where he was and what he was. Idealism was for the crumbs who never got there. He liked to fly, and he liked to play the game, and if the rules were dirty, then it would be more embarrassing to refuse to fight than it was to play the rotten game. People were proud of him for playing it, and he was glad they were proud, for no reason other than that it felt good.

He grinned acidly at Surges. "Hey, Surgie. I just realized that we are the 'Mothers'-Sons-Who-Fought-and-Bled' that they talk about on the Fourth."

"Jeez, whattay know!" Surges mused for a moment. "Say, you thinking about doing another tour?"

Mark spat an obscenity.

"I know," said Surges. "You're feeling guilty about not bleeding."

"True, possibly true."

"A small scar would probably help."

"Help what?"

"Life, liberty and the pursuit of women. You could always show her your scar as a way of breaking the ice."

"Not necessary. No ice . . ."

Around La, he finished under his breath, and fell silent again. Gloomily silent. Maybe I'm really getting psycho, he considered, realizing how much he believed in La. How could he explain about La to somebody like Bixby or Surges? *There was this dame, see, and her name was Ruth, and she came from Seattle, and she was blonde, pale-eyed and creamy, see? And she's waiting for me, but it's no damn good any more, because I can't see her. I see only La, and La is a ghost, a figment, a myth made by a haunted spirit.*

She had grown like a strange moth in the chrysalis of his mind, born of a slow metamorphosis that began with a memory image of Ruth. The metamorphosis had changed a pleasant, comfortable, homey sort of a girl into a sleek, intense, moody creature of tender passion, whom he called "La" or "La Femme" because he knew she was no longer Ruth. But who was this wraith who came to him across the frozen tundra of his psyche?

Don't kid yourself, fly-boy, it's happened to other guys. Idealization, they call it. You revise Ruth because you're not quite satisfied with the way she is. You substitute the thing you want for the thing that's true, and if you didn't have a pocketful of pictures for reference, you'd think your La was Ruth, you stupid ape. Guys have thought it before, and it's a helluva shock, they say, to bump buck teeth with the girl you remembered as a delectable siren instead of a toothy frump. La is an idealized Ruth, and a part of you damn well knows it.

But he couldn't sell himself. It hurt. There was a La somewhere, and he had to believe in her. He groped for ways to support the belief: telepathy—or a chance meeting that lingered in unconscious memory without details of time and place. She came to him in dreams with such clarity that he was frequently certain that somewhere he had seen her. Perhaps one of those brief meetings at some moronic party where two people meet and chat and sense some strong attraction between them, but never manage to get beyond the usual polite inanities because of surging friends with cocktail glasses and the restrained sub-note of hysteria that pervades a roomful of yammering humanity which is having a lousy time but pretending to enjoy itself. So maybe he met La that way, and she haunted him.

She was a physical touch in the night, a whispered voice in lonely moments. He knew her moods, her weaknesses, her strengths. They fitted his own, and the two halves dovetailed into one flesh, one spirit. There was a lock, and a key to fit it—a sword, and a sheath to match. There were two clocks, running back to back, keeping the same time by heart-

beat pendulums. But she was lonesome and frightened, and he knew not why.

The fighters came sidling in out of the hot blue sky, friendly killers that met the wolf pack off the coast near Bari to escort it northward for the strike. A Lockheed Lightning slipped in close to Kessel's flight, throttled back, waggled its wings. Kessel exchanged a thumbs up with the fighter jockey, then watched the haughty killer flip away and climb to fly far out at nine o'clock high, guarding the pack against steel-beaked falcons of the Luftwaffe.

The sun poured into the cockpit and warmed it. The sun washed the coastline far off to the left below. The sun baked the dun-colored ships and made the formation a thing of beauty against the Mediterranean blue. Sky and sea were full of turquoise peace that made the waiting violence seem unreal, a battle game played under the auspices of a jovial Wotan who saw that killing was not for keeps.

Kessel gave the controls to Surges while he lit a cigarette and settled back to relax for a while. He stared down at the lace-fringed sea where triremes had sailed and Caesar's ships had sped toward other wars. It was the same. Add wings and replace the slaves with 1750-horsepower radial engines, and the catapults with demolition bombs. It was always the same. It was destructive, but because it was patterned and planned, because it was systematized and rhythmic, because it was dynamic and flowing toward a goal, it was somehow creative through its functioning. Through crucifixion came redemption; through war, new pattern and synthesis.

"*Pilot to crew,*" he called over the interphone. "*We're coming onto posted property. Better test your guns.*"

La would not like what he was feeling now, he thought. She hated the whole bloody mess, and would be unable to understand his own mixed feelings and ambivalences. Look through my eyes, my La. See what I am seeing and feel my feelings while I am a part of this Mechanthrope. For here we fail to fit, and though here be difference between us, so must there be understanding. Look with my eyes! See the sleek wolf pack running across cold sky, feel the icy air that leaks in around my feet, and the warm sun on the slippery leather of my jacket. Look north to the clear horizon where death will soon meet death and a city shall be consumed. Know that we in the pack must move and live as brothers, even though we must kill our brothers down below, whom we will never see—never know.

Do you feel me, La? For I know that you are sitting on a stone bench

beneath a trellis with a book in your lap, gazing dreamily out toward the lake where we walk in the breeze by night. A small child plays at your feet, and he is your cousin.

But it was no good. He could never seem to drag her to him while he flew. It was as if she resisted knowing what he was and what he did.

The ship's guns burped above the thunder of the engines as Burnes, Bixby, Sparley and Winters each rattled off a few rounds from the fifty-caliber guns in their respective positions. Mark nosed the ship down slightly and squeezed the firing stud for the fixed nose guns. A belch shuddered up through the cockpit, and a momentary haze flickered up across the plexiglass, and four streaks of tracers squirted out ahead to vanish toward the ocean. Other ships were doing the same. A flexing of the muscles before the brawl.

If only the target were not Perugia! Perhaps it was the length of the mission and the time over enemy territory that made him uneasy, but Sofia and Ploesti were even farther and they gave him no such discomfort. He had a quick knotting of his belly with the bombing of Perugia, and there was no logic in it. Maybe it was something about the countryside that stirred some old memory of home, but it was as if the reproving eyes of monks and urchins and old women were upon him, as if hatred were a palpable thing, radiating up from the land below. As if the Christ that was suffused in the flesh of Italian masses called softly in rebuke to the wolf pack.

O my people, what have I done to thee?
In what have I grieved thee?
Answer me,
For I gave thee a royal scepter,
And thou hast given to me a scourge.

"Hey, Pappy, this is Bix," croaked his headsets.

"Yeah?"

"Look at the coastline—up about eleven o'clock low. See those specks?"

Mark leaned close to the window and stared down for a few seconds. Three gnats were flitting out across the water, close to the drink. "Fighters," he answered absently.

"Maybe our own, boss."

"Maybe. . . . Pilot to crew, you get that?"

They answered in turn that they got it.

"Burnes, you keep your eyes on them. The rest of you keep looking around."

He switched his jackbox to command radio and called the escort craft. "Hello Jackknife, this is Eggbeater. Sharks at curfew time below. Over."

"Roger, Eggbeater. Out," came the reply.

But the fighters remained close to the formation, except for two that broke away and began climbing instead of diving. Mark watched them for a moment, then called the crew again.

"Everybody but Burnes—keep an eye out above. Those may be decoys down below. Don't get caught with your pants down if a bunch of pigeons come out of the sun."

"Say, Pappy," Burnes called five minutes later. "I think those are P-47s. They're heading on south."

"Roger, but watch it. Jerry knows we're coming."

The wolf pack came to Fermo and turned inland, feinting toward Terni. Over the coast, hell broke. The first black blossom of flak opened suddenly inside the formation, blotting Mark's view of the 487th Squadron for an instant, then dropping behind. The wolf pack spread quickly apart, the ships weaving and swaying evasively while they kept the general shape of the formation. The inky flak bursts followed the pack, and Mark felt an occasional *thud* shiver the ship from a close burst. The death blossoms trailed behind as they drove inland, and a few miles from the coast the blossoms were gone.

Ahead lay the snow-blanketed slopes of the Apennines with villages like eagles' nests on their sides. Mark stared down at the land. "Enemy," he told himself. If you had to bail out, these hillbillies would gut you and flay you and hang you by the heels in the market place. But you couldn't hate them for that. You could only figure that maybe you deserved it.

Cut the horse manure, fly-boy. This is business, and it's during office hours. That's the turning point up there, and there's hell beyond the mountains.

"BANDITS AT SEVEN O'CLOCK HIGH!" howled a sudden voice in the intercom.

And an instant later, Sparley loosed a three-second burst from the upper turret. Burnes got a burst from the waist, and then Mark saw the Focke-Wulf zipping down and turning sharply into a dive at about eight hundred yards, while two P-38s stabbed toward it. Another Focke-Wulf crossed like a flash in a pursuit curve aimed at the squadron just ahead and above. Bixby slashed at it with the flexible nose gun, as it cut back and under, out of sight.

The interphone was yammering as Mark's crew stabbed out at the flitting falcons. He saw a plume of smoke trailing earthward about two miles away, but the range was too great to recognize it as friend or foe.

One ship in the lead flight had a slightly chewed-up tail, but no ships dropped out of the pack.

Flak began bursting around the ship when they were still five minutes from target, and six Messerschmitts whipped out of the sun, screaming in slashing arcs across the rear of the formation. One went down, but a twenty-five began trailing smoke, fell from formation, one wing blazing. White silk puffs flowered beneath it. It fell into the blazing wing and spun earthward. The black death flowers rocked the ship with their blooming, and Mark Kessel's nostrils quivered at the scent of cordite as the Prince ploughed through the smoke balls of a steady barrage. The wolf pack waved and dodged. The wolf pack tumbled across the sky in seeming consternation, but the pattern lingered as in a frightened flock of geese. Ahead lay the city, and beyond it the marshaling yards, the arterial bulge in the long flow to the South. It was wide and hard to miss. And beyond the marshaling yards—the broad blue waters of Lake Trasimeno.

The lake, it reminded him of La. His scalp crawled, and his hands were fists on the controls. Surges sat smiling sourly at the flak bursts, chin propped on one elbow, smoking a lazy cigarette. Mark glared at him and cursed under his breath. Voices were tense on the interphone.

"Bandit, four o'clock low—no, it's a Spitfire. One of ours."

"Hey! Flak heavy at one o'clock low, Pappy."

"Get a burst on this Focke-Wulf, Burnes."

"Goddam it, bomb bays open! The stupid bastard, he'll make this a long one!"

"Rake him! Rake hell out of him!"

"Bomb bays open, Pappy."

"Straight and level."

"Lead man's bucking for a Purple Heart."

"Shut up and watch your business!"

"Blow it, Pappy."

"Damn! Surges! Take it!"

"What's wrong, Pappy?"

"Just take it and shut up!"

Surges gave him a look and grabbed the controls. The wolf pack had plunged from fifteen to nine thousand feet, and whipped toward the target with the instruments hugging the red line. The crack of a bull whip snapped through the ship as a shard of shrapnel stung the fuselage.

"That one bite anybody?" Surges called.

"Nope, nope. Goddam, get it over with!"

Mark Kessel sat panting, fists clenched and pressed together. She was

with him now, for the first time she was with him, and her meanings, if not her voice came to him like a savage song:

"Che brutto! . . . How hateful you are. I hate you hate you hate you hate you! You goddam murderer, you killed my mother! You wrecked my church, and you shattered my city, and now you come again! They'll get you, they'll rake you and rip you and slash you to ribbons. You gutless apes! *Che brutto!"*

She stood under the trellis with her fists clenched, her hair in the wind, ignoring the black hell in the sky that rained spent shrapnel over the city. Her breasts were sharp and proud and heaving. Her face was flushed with fury. Near by, a frightened child was wailing.

He saw her, and she was with him like a scourge, and she knew that it was he. He swallowed a sick place in his throat and grabbed for his throat mike switch.

"Bixby! Close the bomb bays!"

"What's that, Pappy?"

"Close 'em, goddam you!"

"Pappy, you're out of your head."

Mark cursed and grabbed for the salvo lever. Surges knocked his arm aside and slapped him hard across the mouth.

"Pappy! Get the hell out of here. You're blowing your top!"

Mark doubled his fist and drove it hard against the copilot's cheekbone. The ship fell out of formation as Surges dropped both hands from the controls and shook his head dizzily. Mark swung again, but Surges caught it on his shoulder.

Suddenly the muzzle of a forty-five jammed his ribs, and Surges hissed, "Damn you, Pappy, I'll blow your guts halfway to Naples. Sit still, or I'll kill you. We've got six men aboard."

He swung again. Surges let the ship go, jammed a foot against Mark's side, pistol-whipped him until the pilot fell bleeding against the side of his seat.

La, La! his mind whimpered.

The only answer was a tempest of hatred that engulfed him.

La, I couldn't know!

But he *could* have known. He had flown this mission before. He knew about the lake, and it was the same lake. He knew about her language and her mannerisms. He knew down deep—who she was, and where she was, and what she was.

Then he heard Bixby howl *"Finally!"* as the lead ship began toggling its bombs. One . . . two . . . three . . . and the Prince lost weight in gulps of five hundred pounds. He felt them leave the ship, and he wanted

to dive after them. Looking back, he saw that the radio op had crawled atop the bomb bays for a sneak look through the hatch at the plummeting projectiles. The man was grinning. *"Bombs away!"* and the formation banked sharply.

I'll beat Burnes till his face is pulp, he thought. But *La* called out, *It's you, it's you, Marco, you foul coward.*

I'm not after your city, La! It's Jerry we're trying to kill! I can't help it, none of us can help it! For God's sake, La. For God's sake!

Yes, Marco, for God's sake.

He kept staring back at the city, waiting for the hell to break. Twenty-four seconds after bombs away, it broke. Thunder walked across the city and over the marshaling yards. Hell plumed up from a festered wound of fire and belching dust.

La—La with your wind-tossed hair and slender moon-blessed face, with your grace and your love and your laughter. La—La, in your plain stone house with gypsum floors and charcoal foot warmers and coral Virgins that look down from wall niches, a house of human birth and growth and death. La—La—it was us. I'm sorry. If I'd known . . . He choked off, feeling the grinding pain.

If you had known, came a feeble whisper, *would all be spared for the sake of one?*

It stabbed him in a clenched belly, and it was mockery. He spat a shard of broken tooth from Surges' pistol-work, and he was sick. Because her question was demanded of a god.

No, Marco, only of men.

And the flak trailed away behind them, as did the last whisper of her consciousness.

He crawled out of the cockpit and lay on the floor just forward of the bomb bays. He lay choking and panting and spitting blood. There was a black fog, full of fractured steel and bright red death that throbbed within it. There was fear, and the face of a woman. He was priest at a screaming ritual, and the dull blade bit a blue-fringed wound.

There was a rubble heap where a bit of cloth was caught between broken stones, and a shattered wall where once had been a garden and a trellis. It was finished now, all finished.

"You can relax, Pappy, you're okay now."

"Man, you're lucky, Pappy! They'll send you home right away. Hell, no need to finish those last four missions."

"Combat fatigue? Hell, Pappy, it could happen to anybody."

He was in the hospital. He sat up and looked around. There was

Burnes, and Surges—hanging back—and Winters and Bix and Sparley. He shook his head and tried to remember.

La was gone. And her absence was sufficient proof that she had been there.

"It was a good strike, Pappy. We clobbered half the town."

He wanted to order them out. He got them out as quick as he could, but loneliness was no better.

With stories, as with jobs and homes and people, those that are hardest to come by are likely to be most prized.

I read this first when it appeared in the Saturday Evening Post *in the spring of 1948. I liked it and clipped it for filing.*

Since then, I have several times taken out the tear sheets, reread them, and—till now—reluctantly returned them because till now the story didn't quite fit the book I was doing.

It is unusual for a story to improve so much upon rereading. I was, then, all the more dismayed when a letter from the SEP *regretfully informed me that Mr. Thompson had died shortly after the publication of this story, and that the whereabouts of his heirs were unknown.*

I turned sleuth: tracked down the names of other magazines in which Mr. Thompson's work had appeared, and the name of a possible collaborator of his; prepared a letter to the Registrar of Wills in the city where he had lived; and wrote again to the SEP. *Each lead brought me to a new dead end—until the second reply from the* Post *came to say that "by a happy coincidence" my letter had "landed on the desk of possibly the only editor here" who had personal knowledge of the author's family.*

The story is reprinted here with a certain sense of triumph, and with my warm thanks to the unknown editor at the Saturday Evening Post, *as well as to Miss Clara Belle Thompson and Mrs. Grace Thompson.*

No One Believed Me *by Will Thompson*

It's late, awfully late, two o'clock. I guess really I should be tired, but I'm not. Standing here by my window, looking out at the night, I don't see the stars or the shapes of the trees, or hear the rustling of the leaves. I know they are all there, but they don't seem to count. What does count is, there are no bars across this window. For tonight I am not at Green Mills.

You've heard of Green Mills; probably every once in a while seen something about it in the newspapers. That would be when a patient escaped and was at large for a day or two. For, you see, Green Mills Hospital handles the tough ones, the incurables—the psychopathics.

But I don't think you'll see anything about my case in the papers; I don't think those doctors will talk.

I am not alone in this room; there is a dog with me—a dog named Charneel. He is asleep now on the rug beside my bed. Yet I cannot sleep, for something happened today that could not happen. I am not asking you to believe me; I can hardly believe it myself. But this is the way it came about:

This morning at Green Mills I was standing, looking through the bars of my window, when the queerness of the day began. It was just after my breakfast tray had been taken out, and as the key turned again in the lock, I became coldly furious. This unscheduled visit could mean but one thing: more of their damnable questioning.

When I heard the door open, I didn't even turn around. Three men, I knew, would step in; two, of course, would be the nurses; the third, one of the staff doctors. The springs of my cot creaked. That would be the doctor sitting down. For we nuts have no chairs, no table, no furnishings of any kind with which we might hurt ourselves.

I steeled myself for the session. But this man didn't start out with a quick fire of questions like the others; this man surprised me. For a while he just sat; maybe waiting for me to turn around.

Finally: "Captain Blanchard," a quiet voice said, "I spent yesterday at Cranton, at the Coast Hospital."

I squared my jaw; he wasn't going to get one word out of me. They hadn't believed me at Coast; they weren't ever going to believe me here.

"Tell me, Captain," my visitor went on, "this strange power you seem to possess, this ability of yours to talk to animals, did it come as a result of your wound?"

I said nothing. If he'd spent the day checking at Coast Hospital, as he said, then he already knew the whole business; about the robin—everything. Certainly it must have been the result of the wound. But it hadn't surprised me at first, because I was so ill. Actually, this sudden ability to talk to animals had seemed the only natural thing that was happening to me. I know that may sound odd, but, you see, all my life I had had animals around me. As a boy, there had been dogs, cats, chickens, pet squirrels and rabbits, and always there had been this feeling, when they looked up into my eyes, that they were trying to say things to me, get their thoughts across to me. And sometimes it had been so strong, so overwhelming, that I felt I was just on the verge of understanding.

But I had told all that to those Coast Hospital doctors, over and over again. And it didn't faze them. They'd cross-questioned me and grilled me until they had me fairly shouting at them. Yet I had talked to a

robin, I had talked to a mouse. First they'd said it was a dream; then hallucinations; and then they'd sent me to Green Mills.

But I had talked to a robin! It was as fresh in my mind as if it had happened yesterday. At first I hadn't paid any attention to the little bird; I was so bewildered at finding myself in bed between cool, clean sheets, with the air so still and calm. My mind was all mixed up, too, for the last thing I remembered was leading a detachment down a ravine to wipe out an artillery observation post. Yet there I was in bed, strangely weak, and as if I'd just come up out of a deep black pit. But the robin on my window ledge had kept on crying— Well, not exactly crying; I guess you'd say mourning, about her eggs. When I asked what was wrong, she told me about a big black-feathered bird that had snatched the eggs from her nest and deliberately dropped them on the ground.

That's when the nurse came into the room—just as I was answering the robin. The nurse had looked at me, startled; and in a moment was back with a doctor. I should have known something was wrong, for the doctor's line of questioning was so odd: What was my name? . . . William Ralph Blanchard. . . . Where was I born? . . . Milton, Kentucky. . . . How old was I? . . . Twenty-five. . . . My rank? . . . Captain.

He stood up. "Captain," he said, "you've surprised us all. I wouldn't have given a plugged nickel for your recovery." But I was the one who was surprised. I learned I'd been lying there for thirty-three months; thirty-three months in a semicoma, eyes wide open, but never once saying a word. That doctor told me other things too. Of the wound in my head, now healed; of the skillful job the surgeons had done, and of the metal plate at the base of my skull just behind my right ear. Then we got into the business of the robin, and without knowing it, I took my first step toward Green Mills.

"By the way, Captain"—the doctor was at the door, but paused a moment—"when you came to, you were saying something about a blackbird, and calling for a gun. Why?"

So, if this man now sitting on my cot had looked into my case history at Coast, he had a far fuller account than I could give. For I wasn't the one that said I was crazy; it was those doctors at Coast.

But my visitor was not taking my silence as an answer, and his next remark literally spun me around.

"Captain," he said, "did any of the doctors at Coast ever check about the doors on the garbage bins?"

"No!" And I heard myself screaming it. "Not one of them!"

"Well, I did," he said evenly.

It was then I looked at him, my mind working like a trip hammer. This was some kind of trap, I thought, to get me talking.

Yes, there was the little notebook he was just drawing from his pocket. "You can put that back, Doctor," I said. "You're not getting anything from me today."

He didn't pay attention. Instead, he turned to the two nurses, standing alertly at the foot of my bed. "What takes place in this room this morning," he said to them, "may affect Captain Blanchard's whole future. I want you two men to listen carefully to everything I have to say to him. Take notes if necessary."

He opened the notebook and glanced down at it. "Captain, at two o'clock in the morning—the morning of May the ninth—while you were still at Coast Hospital, you summoned a nurse and asked for a piece of cheese—a small piece of cheese."

"Okay, okay!" I burst out. "And she wouldn't believe me! She said there wasn't a mouse in the hospital. And I told her there were mice all over the place and that they hadn't had a bite to eat since morning. And if she didn't believe me, ask the mouse; he was right there in the room under the dresser. So, please, bring me that cheese, so I could get to sleep. Yes, Doctor, that's just what I told her!"

The doctor nodded. "Captain"—and he flicked his little book shut—"I have one item to add to what you have just said—an item I picked up at Coast, all right, but not from the medical files. This item I got from the Maintenance Department records."

He paused a moment. "On May eighth," he went on, "while you were still in a sixth-floor room, confined to your bed and helpless, a crew of men, according to the records of the Maintenance Department, went to work in the kitchen basement, took the wooden doors off the garbage bins and replaced them with steel ones; doors which no mouse could ever gnaw through."

It staggered me. At last, was here someone who believed?

Half an hour later I was stepping into a car in front of the main building. But we weren't making this trip alone; we had with us two guards, a sergeant and a private. Both were wearing their service pistols. The doctor put me in the back seat with the sergeant; he and the private were in the front, and on the whole trip he said not a word to me.

Where he was taking me, or why, I didn't know. But there was a thrill in being out on the open road, if only for a brief while; to get the tang of fresh air and space, and see green grass and trees that didn't belong to any hospital.

Finally we entered a town, a quiet little place; big lawns and houses

substantially built. There was plenty of money here. Presently the car stopped, and then I learned that this man was no psychiatrist but a regular medical doctor. For the little sign in the window read: "H. E. Wilson, M.D."

Our feet hardly touched the concrete of the front walk when a dog began barking inside the house. Dr. Wilson led us directly to his office, and had me sit down in the chair at his desk.

"Can you use a typewriter?" he asked.

I nodded.

He got paper from a drawer, regular typing paper, and counted off some twenty-five sheets.

"Captain Blanchard," he said, "if you can talk to animals, you'll be doing quite a bit of typing within the next hour, but I think this should be enough." And next he did something which caused the two guards to exchange a quick glance. He asked them to examine both sides of each sheet, making certain they were blank, then produced his pen for them to put their initials in the top corner of each page. "Just to make certain," he explained tersely, "that nobody switches these sheets." With that, he left the room.

I could sense a new wariness in the guards as their initials went down on page after page.

The men had hardly finished when Dr. Wilson was back. With him was a dog, tawny, golden-haired; a magnificent animal. I wouldn't know just how to class him, but certainly there were strains of German police in him, and, perhaps, collie. But what struck me most was the complete command Dr. Wilson had over his dog. For big as it was, it didn't come lunging or romping into the room, but stepping close behind the doctor's heels and, at a flick of the doctor's hand, it stopped stock-still in the center of the room.

"Captain, there's not a doctor at the hospital," Dr. Wilson began, "who believes you can talk to animals. Frankly—— Well, this is Charneel."

I got my assignment then, my first inkling of what he had in mind for me to do.

"I want you to talk to Charneel if you can." He spoke quietly, soberly. "Charneel recently was involved in a very serious matter. Deliberately I'm not telling you what it is, for that would defeat my whole purpose in bringing you here. But this much I will tell you: there is a court order out for Charneel to be shot."

"Doctor——" I hesitated. And all kinds of thoughts were going through my mind. How did I know whether I could talk to this dog? I'd never talked to one before. And suppose I did. What would happen to me

then? Would those men at Green Mills use that as just one more blot on my case to keep me locked up for life? No matter what happened, I was still in a jam. "No, Doctor," I said, "I'm sorry. You'd better just take me back to the hospital."

A long moment he looked at me, his eyes holding mine. "I know what you're thinking," he said, "and I don't blame you. But let's put it this way, son: If you do talk to my dog, and convince me of it, I'll do something about your case; and I'll take it all the way to Washington, if necessary."

I heard his words, but at first I didn't get it. Then all of a sudden I did, and something inside me seemed to swell up and choke me. I could hardly take it in—here at last was someone who was willing to fight for me. Without realizing it, I had taken a step forward and was grasping Dr. Wilson's hand.

He smiled reassuringly. "Captain, in talking to Charneel, I don't want it to be just a conversation. What I want is for you to find out certain specific facts from him. So, in order to get you started in the right direction, I guess the thing to do is to give you a clue, a word, a key word: Habel. Find out from Charneel just what happened to Habel. And, man, how I wish you luck!"

With that, he left me.

Whether Habel was a man, a woman or another dog, the doctor had not said. But one thing I did know: I wasn't going to risk trying to talk to a dog in front of these guards. Not if I could help it.

So I said, "Does it matter whether you're inside this room with me or outside, just so long as I can't escape?"

So outside the door the sergeant took up his station. And a moment later, through the windows, I could see Private Howard. Certainly there'd be no getting away, and no one could communicate with me without their knowing it. Charneel and I were alone in the room.

On the desk was the stack of paper, blank but for the initials in the corner. I picked up the top sheet; rolled it into the machine. Then I turned to Charneel, and I wondered just how to go about talking to a dog.

"Charneel"—and I phrased it like a question—"you heard what he said?"

Charneel looked up. "No," he said. "I heard the master talking to you, but I could not understand his words."

"But you understand me. So, tell me, Charneel. What about Habel?"

At the word "Habel," Charneel's fangs bared, his ruff bristling.

"Habel is dead!" he said. "As he should be!"

So we talked, Charneel and I. And, gradually, I began to get straight in my own mind what had happened, and why. And soon even I was hating Habel, just as Charneel did. This Habel; he was a man. But not like the master. Always Habel had been cruel. Charneel's first memory of him was as a killer, and never had he forgotten that moment when he and his sister Tolei, two helpless puppies nursing in the woods, had heard the blast of a gun and seen their mother drop in her tracks. Habel was the one who had fired that gun, and Habel was the one who had come up and savagely kicked the little she-puppy into the stream to drown.

I guess I must have been in that room two full hours talking to Charneel. Of course it wasn't straight talking all the time, and asking questions. For there would come moments, baffling moments, when I couldn't quite seem to get what Charneel was saying. He'd be speaking, and suddenly the whole thought would seem to fade out, and I wouldn't get it. Then I'd wait a few minutes, concentrating, and presently ask him again. These interruptions, they bothered me; for Dr. Wilson wanted Charneel's whole story—that's what he'd said.

Just exactly who Habel was, I was never quite sure, but I gathered he must have been a servant in a wealthy home. For Charneel spoke of the little house to which Habel had taken him and where Habel lived, and of the big house where the two kind men lived. One of these men was young and his name was Buddy, said Charneel; and the other, the older man, they called the judge. And it was only because of Buddy that Charneel would stay on the same property with Habel.

But always Charneel drew away from Habel, avoided him, and Habel hated him more and more. One day, Charneel knew, he and Habel would fight, and only one would live. But that would have to wait until his muscles were strong and his teeth long and sharp. Habel knew how Charneel felt, for he would strike out at him, hit him. And finally, when Charneel was half grown, Habel struck for the last time. He'd used a chain, too; a heavy one. Charneel had not picked that fight, but Habel was trying to corner him, cripple him. So he had fought back. "And but for Buddy's coming," said Charneel, "I would have killed him."

"But the master, Dr. Wilson," I said, reminding Charneel.

The fight with Habel had changed things, Charneel went on. For after this fight, after Habel had been bandaged up, a man came, and Charneel went off to live with him. "It was the master," said Charneel.

Now I began to get a picture of Dr. Wilson and Charneel, of the team the two of them made, how closely knit they had become. For Charneel told me of long walks with the master, with the master talking to him—

talking and talking—trying desperately hard to teach him his language. And Charneel had learned a few words: "Guard, stand, heel"—words like that; commands which, when spoken by the master, could never be disobeyed.

"And when I learned to obey," said Charneel, "never did I wear a leash again, and we went farther and farther into the fields and woods."

Too, Charneel told me of something even the master did not know: he told me of Tolei. For Charneel's little sister Tolei had not drowned; she had lived, and the woods were her home, and often in his ranging Charneel came across her. But there was something about Tolei that puzzled Charneel—she distrusted all men, even the master.

"I have learned of men from Habel," Tolei had said. And she had warned Charneel, "Habel often is in the woods, Charneel; I hear often the report of his gun. But I run not as other animals," she had boasted.

"That is foolish," Charneel had counseled.

"No, Charneel; it is wise; very wise," Tolei had replied. "No, Tolei shall never bleed! For Tolei runs to the noise, not away from it; and stalks the hunter, keeping him ever in sight, herself ever unseen."

And then, the evening Habel died. The air was crisp that late afternoon, and Charneel and the master had ranged far. It was almost time to turn back. One more little foray and they'd set their steps toward home. Dr. Wilson had led the way, parting the strands of the fence bordering the road, and began skirting the low stone wall that separated the woods from the field. Now and then he would pause to glance around, for to him all life was beautiful, but wild life, sleek of coat and lithe of muscle, was lovely beyond words. The flick of a bunny's heels, the rising whir of a partridge, the wheeling blur of a young fox—"These," said Charneel, "were the sights the master loved."

It was natural for the doctor to pause at the opening in the wall where the stones had fallen away, and to gaze down that narrow trail leading into the woods. No doubt it looked inviting. Dr. Wilson lifted a foot to step over; then paused, foot still in mid-air. Charneel had snarled.

The doctor had looked down at Charneel. Again Charneel's warning had sounded, low and deep-throated. For Habel had just walked that path—Habel and Buddy—and Charneel could smell death in the air.

Evidently the master had but half understood Charneel. For he stooped and picked up a broken branch, testing it for strength. "Quiet!" he had ordered. Then: "Heel!"

Slowly he led the way; and I could picture them; Charneel crowding his every step, a bristling, steeled dynamo of restraint. They reached the bend in the narrow trail, paused, bore on toward the clearing dimly

ahead. Then it came! The blast of a gun . . . the choked human cry . . . and that awful silence.

My fingers moved faster and faster. This was unbelievable.

Finally I was through typing. I stepped to the door and spoke to the sergeant. "Will you call Dr. Wilson?" I said.

Dr. Wilson came straight across to the desk. He leaned over, glanced at the top sheet, then picked it up, eagerly reading it. Then the second sheet, the third. Ten full minutes he stood there, scanning page after page. Finally he straightened to his full height, and the nod he threw me had an edge of triumph. There was an odd smile on his face.

"You did it!" He was pleased—very pleased. "Man, you did it!"

I drew a breath of relief. "Yes, Doctor," I said. "But don't ever count on my doing it again." And I was telling him of those bad moments I had had with Charneel. There had been more than one, too, and the going had been tough at times.

"You know, Doctor, this queer ability of mine," I said, "came on me all of a sudden, and I guess it could go the same way it came."

"I wouldn't worry about that." Dr. Wilson put his hand on my shoulder, and he said a strange thing, something I could not follow at all. He said, "Captain, I guess we might just as well clear up your end of the line first."

Then he had the sergeant step across and get a large envelope out of the desk, place the pages in it and seal it. I thought I was beginning to get an idea of what the doctor had in mind when he said to the sergeant, "All right, Sergeant; that's in your possession now. Hang onto it; don't let it out of your hands one minute."

But when we finally headed back toward the hospital, we had two large envelopes instead of just the one. The second we picked up at the coroner's office. There'd been a little difficulty about that, but only momentarily. At the coroner's office, the clerk had balked at first, but Dr. Wilson made a quick phone call, and a moment later we were sitting back while a stenographer got busy making a copy of some testimony the doctor had asked for.

Back at Green Mills I began to get a measure of Dr. Wilson's true stature. Evidently he wasn't a man to do any fooling around anywhere or with anybody. I'd expected to be led right to my cell. But no; they didn't do that. They marched me through the corridor, all right, but instead of turning left, we turned right and headed straight into a large bare room.

Instantly I knew where I was. It was a dead giveaway—that long table and those few chairs. This was the hearing room. Evidently things were

going to happen, and fast. Just inside the door, standing stiffly at attention, were the two nurses who had let Dr. Wilson into my cell that morning; alongside them, the two guards who had taken the trip with us.

In a moment I could hear feet in the corridor. The door opened and a colonel stepped in. But he wasn't alone, for behind him were four other medical officers. They filed straight to the table and seated themselves.

And so, because of a doctor and a dog, I stood facing these five Army doctors, my case reopened.

The colonel said, "Let the patient be seated."

At a time like that, somehow every little detail seems to stamp itself indelibly on your mind. I just couldn't get myself away from that word, "patient." He'd said, "Let the patient be seated." That's what I was, and that's what I'd stay. I had a cornered feeling as I scanned the faces of my examiners. They were set; those doctors' minds were already made up. They'd know no man could talk to a dog, and nothing Dr. Wilson would say could possibly matter. They'd sit there; they'd listen; then send me back to my cell.

Of course, I was keyed up. And I kept wondering, *What type of questions will Dr. Wilson ask me? What type those five examiners?*

Well, they didn't ask me one. I guess it was about the strangest sanity hearing ever held in that room.

The colonel said, "We are ready to hear you, Doctor, and we will listen to you with extreme interest."

Dr. Wilson's gesture included the four other doctors as well as the colonel. "I want to thank you, Colonel Brownleigh," he said, "and the members of your staff." Then he got down to business, "Gentlemen, this man here, this patient, Captain Blanchard, is in Green Mills for one reason—because he claims he can talk to animals. There is no question that he could be suffering from a mental aberration. But this much is true, as I believe you gentlemen will agree: If Captain Blanchard can definitely be proved to have talked to an animal, and the proof is irrefutable, then indeed the captain may possess an unusual power, but its possession does not mean that he is not sane."

"Proceed," said Colonel Brownleigh. But a mask had come over his face, and his eyes were fixed on the table. His hands on the chair arms were as still as death.

Dr. Wilson had the two men nurses step forward, and then put to them a few questions about his visit in my room that morning. Quickly he established that in his conversation with me no place had been mentioned other than Coast Hospital, and certainly the names of no men.

Next he had Sergeant Cates step forward, lay his sealed envelope on

the table and tell what had taken place in the doctor's office. Cates had an excellent memory, and when he came to the one name the doctor had mentioned, he quoted Dr. Wilson almost verbatim. He said, "Dr. Wilson told the captain, 'I will now give you one key word: Habel.' "

As the sergeant was stepping back, Colonel Brownleigh put in, "Just a moment, Sergeant! In this—er—ah—conversation between the patient and the dog, did the patient bark like a dog or the dog talk like a man?"

"I don't know, sir," replied the sergeant. "Captain Blanchard had us get out of the room before he started."

"I see," said the colonel, and no one could have missed the glance he threw to the officer at his right.

Dr. Wilson's jaw squared. "Colonel Brownleigh"—and he sounded quite vigorous—"may I be permitted to call you as a witness?"

The colonel's eyebrows shot up. Somehow I got a thrill. These men might be majors and colonels and captains, but they certainly weren't going to jerk Dr. Wilson around.

"Colonel, when my friend, Senator Denning," Doctor Wilson went on, "made possible my visit to Green Mills this morning, wasn't that the first time I ever set foot in this hospital or ever saw this patient?"

"We'll assume that's true, Doctor."

"And in the ten weeks Captain Blanchard has been here, he has seen no newspapers, received no mail, talked to no visitors?"

"I think we can go along with you there, Doctor. The patient's malady is such that no disturbing influences would be permitted."

Dr. Wilson took a step closer to the table. "Eight days ago, gentlemen," he said, "young Richard Holmhurst, Junior, the son of a dear friend of mine, was shot and severely wounded by the family chauffeur. A few minutes later the man who shot him, Habel Twilling, was dead. This occurred on the Holmhurst estate in Lambert County, seventy-six miles from this hospital. Now, Colonel Brownleigh, from what you have just said, it would have been utterly impossible for Captain Blanchard to know even one detail of this. Would you agree with me, Colonel?"

"Doctor, will you please come to the point?" Colonel Brownleigh stirred impatiently in his chair. "What on earth has a shooting eighty miles from here to do with this patient's sanity?"

"Colonel Brownleigh," Dr. Wilson spoke quietly, "let me assure you, I will not present one word this afternoon which is not entirely pertinent." He held up a large envelope. "This envelope," he continued, "came from the Lambert County Courthouse—the coroner's office. It contains testimony offered by me in regard to the tragedy just mentioned. Colonel, would you read it, please?"

The doctor certainly meant for it to be read aloud. But the colonel didn't do that. Instead, he picked up the sheaf of papers, and for the next several minutes there was silence as he thumbed them through. "This testimony," he finally said, for the benefit of his colleagues, "brings out that the Habel Twilling the doctor mentioned was killed by a dog, and that there was no question whatsoever in the coroner's mind as to the identity of the dog."

"Is that all, Colonel?"

"No, Dr. Wilson, it isn't. The coroner thoroughly believed it was your dog and consistently refused to accept your story about a wild dog. For I note here"—and he referred to a particular page—"in his opening question he reminds you that fellow townsmen of yours, men who had often hunted in that area, already had testified that never once had they laid eyes on a dog running wild in those woods. Anyway, Doctor"—and the colonel smiled faintly—"even we find it hard to believe that any dog would be shot for saving his master's life."

Dr. Wilson raised his shoulders. "Write it off to politics," he said. "It's just a case of some swampland that wasn't bought for a county hospital, and this is the first chance a certain county official has had to get back at me, his first opportunity to discredit my word in the community. That, Colonel, I can take. But I can't take my dog being shot simply because I stepped on a politician's pocketbook. I will say this, though, gentlemen: if my dog, Charneel, could have had the power of speech and could have followed me on that witness stand, substantiating my testimony, there would have been no court order issued." Dr. Wilson paused and rested his hand on the hearing table. "Right here and now," he said, "my dog, my dog Charneel, through Captain Blanchard, is going to tell you what happened in those woods."

He reached out for the envelope lying on the table, opened it and fanned the sheets out, calling attention to the initials at the top of each. "In these pages——" he began.

"Dr. Wilson," Colonel Brownleigh interrupted, "is this the so-called interview the patient had with your dog?"

"It is," Dr. Wilson said crisply.

"I'm afraid, Doctor, it cannot be considered as relevant." Colonel Brownleigh was just as brusque. "No man can talk to an animal."

"But I have permission to read?"

"Will it take long?"

Dr. Wilson shook his head.

"Let's get on with it then!" And the colonel shifted his chair impatiently.

So Dr. Wilson began reading aloud what Charneel had told to me.

I couldn't keep my eyes away from the faces of those five men. My judges were sitting in different attitudes, but there was one attitude that could not be mistaken. Nothing Dr. Wilson could possibly say would make the slightest difference for me.

But the first time the doctor came across the name "Buddy," he paused. "I want you to note, gentlemen," he said, "here is a brand-new name, a name the patient had never heard before. And I will tell you that it is the nickname of R. J. Holmhurst, Junior. Captain Blanchard is describing in exact detail people and places he has never seen or visited." It had its impact.

Presently Dr. Wilson came to the tragedy itself, to the point where he and Charneel had just stepped through the gap in the low stone wall bordering the woods. He read of Charneel's warning growl, of himself picking up a club, and of their proceeding down a path in the woods. He read of the blast of the gun, and then the two of them, Dr. Wilson and Charneel, racing for the clearing.

A change was coming over Colonel Brownleigh. For while the doctor was reading, I noticed the colonel had picked up the papers lying on the table before him—the ones he'd skimmed through so casually but a few moments ago. But this wasn't casualness now; he seemed intent on them, almost as if he were comparing what was before him with what Dr. Wilson was reading aloud.

"No, Doctor, wait!" he interrupted suddenly. "Wait!" And Colonel Brownleigh asked both the sergeant and the private, my guards, to step forward. He said to the sergeant, "You were outside the door of the doctor's office, Sergeant. Did you leave that post even once?"

"No, sir."

He turned to Private Howard. "You were on the lawn, looking through those windows. Is that correct?"

"Yes, sir."

"Would you be willing to go on oath that while the patient and the dog were in that office, not once did the patient lift the telephone receiver from its cradle?"

"Yes, sir, I would."

"All right, Doctor." But now Colonel Brownleigh was sitting stiff as a ramrod in his chair. So were the other four.

And as Dr. Wilson read on, they leaned forward so as not to miss a single word. He had come to the part just where Habel had shot Buddy. He lifted his eyes from the pages. "Before continuing," he said, "perhaps, gentlemen, I better tell you a little about this man Habel. He

was an ex-convict, a man whom Judge Holmhurst had paroled in his personal custody. But that's not the point here. The crux of the matter is not what happened in the clearing where Habel forced me to leave Charneel with Buddy; the crux of the matter is what happened at the edge of the woods. For that's where Habel tried to kill me."

Doctor Wilson paused a moment to let that sink in. "And, gentlemen, he certainly would have but for the dog that sprang from the bushes. In the darkness even I myself was fooled. I thought it was Charneel. And I tried to call him off. I shouted, 'Charneel! Back! Back!' trying to get him to release his hold on Habel's throat."

That's when I forgot myself. I was upon my feet. "It was Tolei!" I broke in. "Tolei! Read it, Doctor; read it. Tolei's the one who leaped at Habel's throat, not Charneel. For you know, you yourself had put Charneel on guard back by Buddy. Tolei, Charneel's sister——"

Suddenly I stopped, aware of what I had done. I had no right to be talking out this way; none of these officers had called on me.

Colonel Brownleigh overlooked my outburst. He turned to Dr. Wilson. "Doctor, was that your first knowledge of Tolei?"

"It was."

"Let me see those pages, please."

Dr. Wilson stepped up and handed them over. Colonel Brownleigh accepted them, lifted off the last page and studied it briefly, then quietly handed it to the officer next to him. One by one, each man read it, and when the last had finished, it was passed back to the colonel.

Everything got quiet in the room.

The colonel sat thinking; finally he spoke. "Collusion?" he shook his head. "No, I'll have to rule that out. It couldn't possibly be collusion. Coincidence? No, this isn't coincidence." He sat back heavily. "Gentlemen," he said to his fellow officers, "I'd be glad to hear any comment you might care to make at this point."

The major at his right shifted his chair slightly. "Colonel, if the captain could talk to one dog, certainly he could talk to another."

"That's exactly what I was thinking." Abruptly Colonel Brownleigh stood up, strode across the room. At the door he turned. "Dr. Wilson, the hearing is not over yet."

When he came back, he had with him a Great Dane. The colonel took his place at the table again, then turned to me. "Captain, this dog was with me yesterday. Suppose you have him tell you what we were doing."

I looked at Colonel Brownleigh, at the four other officers behind that table, at the two nurses and the private and the sergeant standing by the

door, at Doctor Wilson. Every eye was upon me. I hadn't forgotten the difficulty I had had with Charneel.

"Will you grant permission, sir," I said, "for me to take your dog to the far end of the room?"

A quick nod was the colonel's reply. So we walked the length of that room, to the farthest corner. At that distance no one would overhear. It was the next best thing to our being alone, and purposely I placed the dog so that his back was to the room, and started in.

In a moment or two, Colonel Brownleigh raised his voice and called, a bit sharply, "Hadn't you better get going, Captain?"

"I have, sir," I called back. "You were not here at the hospital yesterday. You went fishing; got up before dawn." There was a stir in the room.

To the dog I said, "Where did he fish?"

The dog answered, but all I got was a word or two. The rest seemed to fade out, and suddenly I could feel a cold sweat on my forehead.

"Say that again," I said, and leaned closer.

He said it again.

"Again!"

And now I was on my knees beside him, my ear almost against his snout. Three separate times he had repeated it, and not once had I got it. I was afraid.

The dog shifted slightly. "The woman," he said, and a few words were trickling through, ". . . out on the rocks. She was a golden tan."

In my excitement I fairly shouted it out to the colonel. "The woman," I called, "came out on the rocks! She was a golden tan!"

The effect was electric. Colonel Brownleigh was up out of his chair like a flash. "That will do, Captain!" he cut in, and called his dog to him.

Officially I am still crazy, for the colonel said it would be Friday before the papers would come through. I have Dr. Wilson and Charneel to thank—and the colonel too. For it was a damn lucky break the colonel cutting in the way he did, and snapping me off with "That will do!" For had my life depended on it, I don't believe I could have understood another word from that dog; it seemed as if a curtain had suddenly been drawn between us, and he was a dog and I was just a man.

Meanwhile, I am a guest in Dr. Wilson's home. But when those papers do come through, I'm sticking that discharge into my pocket and the doctor and I are heading straight to one place—the Lambert County Courthouse. Charneel is not going to be shot.

So tonight I am not at Green Mills, and I can't sleep. I guess, now, you understand why.

Hypnotism has recently graduated from the ranks of the parapsychological, and has achieved full recognition as a demonstrable phenomenon, and an acceptable area of study in psychology proper. Still, for many people, the subject retains either the charlatan connotation or the terrifying implications of the Svengali legend.

In this story a popular English author, best known in this country for his novel, The Day of the Triffids, *combines new and old attitudes in two ways: his up-to-date Svengali is seeking knowledge, rather than power—just experimenting, you understand; and the not quite yet stodgy theme of hypnosis has been linked to the still uncharted area of telepathy.*

In one respect, Mr. Wyndham's treatment is unmixedly modern: he has no illusions whatsoever about the possible Trilby*-like behavior of the women in his story.*

Perforce to Dream *by John Wyndham*

"But, my dear Miss Kursey," said the man behind the desk, speaking with patient clarity. "It is *not* that we have changed our minds about the quality of your book. Our readers were enthusiastic. We stand by our opinion that it is a charming light romance. But you must see that we are now in an impossible position. We simply *cannot* publish two books that are almost identical—and now that we know that two exist, we can't even publish one of them. Very understandably, either you or the other author would feel like making trouble. Equally understandably, we don't want trouble of that kind."

Jane looked at him steadily, with hurt reproach. "But mine was first," she objected.

"By three days," he pointed out.

She dropped her eyes, and sat playing with the silver bracelet on her wrist. He watched her uncomfortably. He was not a man who enjoyed saying no to personable young women at any time; also, he was afraid she was going to cry.

"I'm terribly sorry," he said, earnestly.

Jane sighed. "I suppose it was just too good to be true—I might have known." She looked up. "Who wrote the other one?"

He hesitated. "I don't know that we can—"

Jane broke in: "Oh, but you must! It wouldn't be fair not to tell me. You simply must give me—us—a chance to clear this up."

His instinct was to steer safely out of the whole thing. If he had had the least doubt about her sincerity, he would have done so. As it was, his sense of justice won. She did have a right to know, and the chance to sort the whole thing out, if she could.

"Her name is Leila Mortridge," he admitted.

"That's her real name?"

"I believe so."

Jane shook her head. "I've never heard it. It's so queer. . . . Nobody can have seen my manuscript. No one knew I was writing it. I—I just can't understand it at all."

The publisher had no comment to make on that. Coincidences, he knew, do occur. It seems sometimes as though an idea were afloat in the ether, and settles in two independent minds simultaneously. But this was something beyond that. Save for the last two chapters, Miss Kursey's *Amaryllis in Arcady* had not only the same story as Miss Mortridge's *Strephon Take My Heart,* but the same settings, as well as long passages of identical and near identical conversation. There could be absolutely no question of chance about it.

Curiously, he asked, "Where did it come from? How did you get the idea of it in the first place, I mean?"

Jane saw that he was looking at her with a peculiar intensity. She looked back at him uncertainly, miserably aware of tears not far behind her eyes.

"I—I dreamed it—at least, I think I dreamed it," she told him.

She was not able to see the puzzled astonishment that came over his face, for suddenly, and to her intense exasperation, tears from a source deeper than mere disappointment about the book overwhelmed her.

He groaned inwardly, and sat regarding her with helpless embarrassment.

Out in the street again, conscious of looking far from her best although considerably recovered, Jane made her way to a café in a mood of deep self-disgust. The exhibition she had put on was the kind of thing she heartily despised: a thing, in fact, that she would have thought herself quite incapable of a year ago.

But the truth of the matter, which she scarcely admitted to herself, was that she was no longer the same person as she had been a year ago.

A careful observer would have said that her manner was a little altered, her assurance more individual, though superficially she was the same Jane Kursey doing the same job in the same way. Only she knew how much more tedious the job had gradually become.

It is galling for a young woman of literary leanings to keep on day after day, for what seems several lifetimes, writing with a kind of standardized verve and coded excitement about such subjects as diagonal tucks, slashed necklines, swing backs and double peplums. It is frustrating for her to have to season her work with the adjectives *heavenly, tiny, captivating, enchanting, divine, delicious,* marching around and around like an operatic army, when her deepest instinct is to put her soul on paper—when, in fact, something so extraordinary has happened to her that she feels her spirit should be mounting skylark-like to the empyrean; that her heart is no less tender than that of Elaine the Lovable; that, should the occasion arise, she would be found not incompetent among the hetaerae.

The publisher's letter, therefore, had, despite her attempts to retain a level sensibleness, given her a choky, heart-thumping excitement. It did more than disclose the first rungs of a new and greatly preferable career for which many of her associates also struggled: it petted and pleased her secret self. The publisher had spoken of literary merit as if drawing a line between her and those others who worked with three-quarters of their attention on the film rights.

Her novel, he told her frankly, he found charming—an idyllic romance which could not fail to delight a large number of readers. There were, perhaps, a few passages where the feeling was a little Elizabethan for these prudish times, but they could be toned down with imperceptible loss.

The only qualification of her delight was a faint suspicion of her own undeserving—but, after all, was a dream any more of a gift than a talent? It was just a matter of the way your mind worked, and if hers happened to work better when she slept than when she was awake, what of it? Nobody had ever been heard to think the worse of Coleridge for dreaming Kubla Khan rather than thinking it up. Besides, she would not be taken literally even though she admitted frankly to dreaming it. . . .

And now came this blow. Something so like her own story that the publisher would not touch either of them. She did not see how that could possibly have happened. She had not told anyone anything about it—not even that she was working on a book.

She gazed moodily into her coffee. Then, as she raised the cup, she became aware of the other person who had come to her table almost

unnoticed. The woman was looking her over with careful speculation. Jane paused with her cup a few inches from her mouth, returning the scrutiny. The woman was about her own age, quietly dressed, wearing a fur coat that was beyond Jane's means, and a becoming small fur cap on her fair hair. But for the difference in dress she was not unlike Jane herself; the same build and size, much the same coloring; hair, too, that was a similar shade, though differently worn.

Jane lowered her cup. As she put it down, she noticed a wedding ring on the other's hand.

The woman spoke first: "You are Jane Kursey," she said, in a tone that was more statement than question.

Jane had a curious sense of tenseness. "Yes," she admitted.

"My name," said the woman, "is Leila Mortridge."

"Oh," said Jane. She could not find anything to add to that at the moment.

The other woman sat and sipped her coffee, with Jane's eyes following every movement. She set her cup very precisely in the saucer, and looked up again.

"It seemed likely that they would be wanting to see you too," she said. "So I waited outside the publisher's to see." She paused. "There is something here that requires an explanation. Don't you think so?"

"Yes," Jane agreed again.

For some seconds they regarded one another levelly without speaking.

"Nobody knew I was writing it," the woman observed.

"Nobody knew *I* was writing it," said Jane.

She looked at the woman unhappily, resentfully, bitterly. Even if it had been only a dream—and it was hard to believe that it had, for she'd never heard of a dream that went on in installments night by night, so vividly that one seemed to be living two alternating lives—but even if it were, it was *her* dream, her *private* dream, save for such parts of it as she had chosen to write down—and even those parts should remain private until they were published.

"I don't see—" she began, and then broke off, feeling none too certain of herself.

The other woman's self-control was not good, either; the corners of her mouth were unsteady.

Jane said, "We can't talk in this place. My flat's quite near."

They walked the few hundred yards there, each immersed in thought. Not until they were in Jane's small sitting room did the woman speak again. When she did, she looked at Jane as though she were hating her.

"How did you find out?" she demanded.

"Find out what?" Jane countered.

"What I was writing."

Jane regarded her coldly. "Attack is sometimes the best form of defense, but not in this case. The first I knew of your existence was in the publisher's office about one hour ago. I gather that you found out about me in the same way, just a little earlier. That makes us practically even. I *know* you can't have read my manuscript. I know I've not read yours. It's a waste of time starting with accusations. What we have to find out is what has really happened. I—I—" She floundered to a stop, without any idea how she had intended to continue.

"Perhaps you have a copy of your manuscript here?" suggested Mrs. Mortridge.

Jane hesitated; then, without a word, she went to her desk, unlocked a lower drawer, and took out a pile of carbon copy. Still without speaking, she handed it over. The other took it without hesitation. She read a page, and stared at it for a little; then she turned on and started to read another page.

Jane went into her bedroom and stood there awhile, staring listlessly out of the window.

When she went back, the pile of pages was lying on the floor, and Leila was hunched forward, crying uncontrollably into a scrap of handkerchief.

Jane sat down, looking moodily at the script and the weeping girl. For the moment she was feeling cold and dead inside, as if with a numbness which would turn to pain as it passed. Her dream was being killed, and now she was terribly afraid of life without it. . . .

The dream had begun about a year ago. When and where it was placed, she neither knew nor cared to know—a never-never land, perhaps, for it seemed always to be spring or early summer there in a sweet, unwithering Arcady. She was lying on a bank where the grass grew close like green velvet. It ran down to a small stream of clear water chuckling over smooth white stones. Her bare feet were dabbling in the fresh coolness. The sunshine was warm on her bare arms. Her dress was a simple white cotton frock, patterned with small flowers and little amorets.

There were small flowers set among the grass, too: she could not name them, but she could describe them minutely. A bird no larger than a blue-tit came down close to her, and drank. It turned a sparkling eye on her, drank again, and then flew away, unafraid. A light breeze rustled the taller grasses beside her and shimmered the trees beyond. Her whole body drank in the warmth of the sunshine as though it were an elixir.

Dimly, she could remember another kind of life—a life full of work

and bustle—but it did not interest her: *it* was the dream, and this the reality. She could feel the ripples against her feet, the grass under her finger tips, the glow of the sun. She was intensely aware of the colors, the sounds, the scents in the air; aware as she had never been before, not merely of being alive, but of being part of the whole flow of life.

She had a glimpse of a figure approaching in the distance. A quickening excitement ran through every vein, and her heart sang. But she did not move. She lay with her head turned to one side on her arm. A tress of hair rested on her other cheek, heavy and soft as a silk tassel. She let her eyes close, but more than ever she was aware of the world about her.

She heard the soft approaching footsteps and felt the faint tremor of them in the ground. Something light and cool rested on her breast and the scent of flowers filled her nostrils. Still she did not move. She opened her eyes. A head with short dark curls was just above her own. Brown eyes were watching her from a suntanned face. Lips were smiling slightly. She reached up with both arms, and clasped them round his neck. . . .

That was how it had begun. The sentimental dream of a schoolgirl, but preciously sweet for all that, and with a bright might-have-been quality which dulled still further the following dull day. She could remember waking with a radiance which was gradually drained away by the dimness of ordinary things and people.

She was left, too, with a sense of loss—of having been robbed of what she should have been, and should have felt. It was as though in the dream she had been her rightful, essential self, while by day she was forced to carry out a drab mechanical part as though she were an animated clay figure—something that was not properly alive, and in a world that was not properly alive.

The following night, the dream came again. It did not repeat; it continued. She had never heard of a dream that did that, but there it was—the same countryside, the same people, the same particular person, and herself. A world in which she felt quite familiar, and with people whom she seemed always to have known.

There was a cottage which she could describe to the smallest detail, where she seemed to have spent all her life, in a village where she knew everyone. There was her work, at which her fingers flickered surely among innumerable bobbins and produced exquisite lace upon a black pillow. The neighbors she talked to, the girls she had grown up with, the young men who smiled at her, were all of them quite real. They

became even more real than the world of offices, dress shows, and editors demanding copy.

In her waking world, she came gradually to feel a drab among drabs; in her village world, she was alive, perceptive—and in love. . . .

For the first week or two, she had opened her eyes on the workaday world with painful reluctance, afraid that, should the dream slip from her, it would not return. But it was not finished. It went on, becoming all the time less elusive and more solid until, tentatively, she allowed herself the hope that it had come to stay. And as the weeks went on, the dream continued, building episode on episode, and it began curiously to illuminate her daily "real" life and pierce the dullness with unexpected glimpses. She found pleasure in noticing details which she had never observed before. Things and people changed in value and importance. She had more sense of detachment, and less of struggle. It came to her one day with a shock to find how her interests had altered and her impatiences had declined.

The dream had caused that. Now that she had begun to feel there was little likelihood of it fading away any moment, she could risk feeling happy in it—and the more tolerant of things outside it. The world looked altogether a different place when you knew that you had only to close your eyes at night to come alive as your true self in Arcady.

And, why, she wondered, could real life not be like that? Or perhaps for some people it was—sometimes, and in glimpses . . .

There had been that wonderful night when they had gone along the green path which led up the little hill to the pavilion. She had been excited, happy, a little tremulous. They had lain on cushions, looking out between the square oak pillars while the sun sank smoky red, and the thin banks of cloud lost their tinge to become dark lines across a sky that had turned almost green. All the sounds had been soft. A faint susurring of insects, the constant whisper of leaves, and, faraway, a nightingale singing . . . His muscles were firm and brave; she was soft as a sun-warmed peach. Does a rose, she wondered, feel like this when it is about to open . . . ?

And then she had rested content, looking up at the stars, listening to the nightingale still singing, and to all nature gently breathing.

In the morning, when her eyes were open to her familiar small room and her ears to the sound of traffic in the street below, she lay for a while in happy lassitude. It was then that she had decided to write the book —not, at first, for others to read, but for herself, so that she would never forget.

Unashamedly it was a sentimental book—one such as she had never

thought herself capable of writing. But she enjoyed writing it, and reliving in it. And then it had occurred to her that perhaps she was not the only person who was tired of carrying a tough, unsentimental carapace. So she produced a second version of the book, somewhat pruned—though not quite enough, apparently, for the publisher's taste—and added an ending of her own invention.

And here, now, was the inexplicable result.

The first pressure of Leila Mortridge's flood of tears had subsided. She was dabbing now, and giving little sniffs.

With the air of one accepting the necessity of somebody being practical, Jane said: "It seems to me it's quite clear that one of two things has happened: either there's some kind of telepathy between us—and I don't see that that fits very well—or we are both having the same dream."

Mrs. Mortridge sniffed again. "That's impossible," she said, decidedly.

"The whole situation's impossible," Jane told her shortly. "But it's happened—and we have to find the least impossible explanation. Anyway, is two people having the same dream so much more unlikely than anybody having a dream which goes on like a serial?"

Mrs. Mortridge dabbed, and regarded her thoughtfully. "I don't see," she said, a trifle primly, "how an unmarried girl like you could be having a dream like that at all."

Jane stared. "Come off it," she advised, briefly. "Besides . . . it seems to me every bit as unsuitable for a respectably married woman."

Mrs. Mortridge looked forlorn. "It's ruined my marriage."

Jane nodded understandingly. "I was engaged—and it wrecked that. How could one? I mean, after—" She let the sentence trail away.

"Quite," said Mrs. Mortridge.

They fell into abstract contemplation for some long moments.

Mrs. Mortridge broke the silence to say, "And now *you're* spoiling it, too."

"Spoiling your marriage?" said Jane, amazedly.

"No, spoiling the dream."

Jane said, firmly, "Now, don't let's be silly about this! We're both in the same boat. Do you think I want you muscling in on my dream?"

"*My* dream."

Jane disregarded that, and thought for a while.

"Perhaps it won't make all that difference," she suggested at last. "After all, if we were both dreaming we were her and didn't know anything about one another then, why shouldn't we go on without knowing anything about one another?"

"But we do—"

"Not when we're there. At least, I don't think we will. If that's so, it won't really matter, will it? At least, perhaps it won't . . ."

Mrs. Mortridge looked unconsoled. "It'll m-matter when I wake up and know you've b-been sharing—" she mumbled, tearfully.

"Do you think I like the idea of that any more than you do?" Jane said, coldly.

It took her a further twenty minutes to get rid of her visitor. Only then did she feel at liberty to sit down and have a good cry about it all.

The dream did not stop, as Jane had half-feared it might. Neither was it spoiled. Only for a few succeeding mornings was Jane troubled on waking by the thought that Leila Mortridge must be aware of every detail of the night's experiences—and though there should have been some compensation to be found in the fact that she was equally aware of what had happened to Leila Mortridge, it did not, for some reason, seem to work quite that way.

The experiences of the girl in the dream were in no way lessened for either of them by their knowledge of one another. They established that over the telephone the following morning, with a thankfulness which was almost amiability. With that settled, the besetting fear lost something of its edge, and antagonism began to dwindle. Indeed, so thoroughly did it decline that the end of a month saw it replaced by a certain air of sorority, expressed largely in telephone calls that were almost schoolgirlish in manner if not in content.

For after all, Jane said to herself, if a secret had to be shared, why not make the best of the sharing?

It was on an evening some three months after their first meeting that Leila Mortridge telephoned with an unusual, almost panicky note in her voice:

"My dear," she demanded, "have you seen this evening's *Gazette*?"

Jane said that she had just glanced at it.

"If you have it there, look at page four. It's in 'Theater Chat.' The thing in the second column, headed 'Dual Role'—"

Jane laid down the receiver. She found the newspaper and the paragraph:

DUAL ROLE

The production due to open shortly at the Countess Theater is described as a romantic play with music. In it, Mis Rosalie Marbank wil have the unique distinction of being both the leadng lady and the authoress. This work, which is her first venture into authorship, is, she explains, neither a musical comedy nor a miniature opera, but a play

with music that has been specially composed by Alan Cleat. It is the rustic love story of a girl lacemaker . . .

Jane read on to the end of the paragraph and sat quite still, clutching the paper. A tinny chattering from the neglected telephone recalled her. She picked it up.

"You've read it?" Leila Mortridge's voice inquired.

"Yes," said Jane, slowly. "Yes . . . I—you don't happen to know her, do you?"

"I don't remember ever hearing of her. But it looks—well, I mean, what else can it be?"

"It *must* be." Jane thought for a moment. Then: "All right. We'll find out. I'll push our critic into wangling us a couple of seats for the first night. Will you be free?"

"I'm certainly going to be."

The dream went on. That night there was some kind of fair in the village. Her little stall looked lovely. Her lace was as delicate as if large snowflake patterns had been spun from the finest spider-thread. It was true that nobody was buying, but that did not seem to matter.

When he came, he found her sitting on the ground beside the stall, telling stories to two adorable, wide-eyed children. Later on, they closed up the stall. She hung her hat over her arm by its ribbons, and they danced.

When the moon came up, they drifted away from the crowd. On a little rise they turned and looked back at the bonfire and the flares and the people still dancing—then they went away along a path through the woods, and forgot all about everything and everybody but each other.

One of the reasons why Jane was able to get her tickets with no great difficulty was the clash of the opening night of *Idyl* with that of a better publicized and more ambitious production. As a result, few of the regular first-night ornaments were to be seen, and the critics were second-flight. Nevertheless, the house was full.

She and Leila Mortridge found their seats a few minutes before the lights were lowered. The orchestra began an overture of some light, pretty music, but she could pay little attention to it for her empty, sick feeling of excitement.

She put out an unsteady hand. Leila's grasped it, and she could feel that it, too, was trembling. She found herself wishing very much that she had not come, and guessed that Leila was feeling the same. But they had had to come: it would have been still worse not to.

The orchestra weaved its way from one simple, happy tune to another,

and finished. There were five seconds of expectancy, and then the curtain rose.

A sound that was half-sigh and half-gasp rustled through the theater and shrank into a velvet silence.

A girl lay on a green bank set with starlike flowers. She wore a simple dress of white, patterned with small flowers and amorets. Her bare feet dabbled in the edge of a pool.

Somewhere in the audience a woman gave a giggling sob, and was hushed.

The girl on the bank stirred in lazy bliss. She raised her head and looked beyond the bank. She smiled, and then lowered her head, lying as if asleep, with a tress of hair across her cheek.

There was no sound from the audience. It seemed not to breathe. A clarinet in the orchestra began a plaintive little theme. Every eye in the house left the girl, and dwelt upon the other side of the stage.

A man in a green shirt and russet trousers came out of the bushes. He was carrying a bunch of flowers and treading softly.

At the sight of him a sigh, as of huge, composite relief, breathed through the house. Jane's hand relaxed its unconscious pressure upon Leila's.

He was not *the* man.

He approached the girl on the bank, bent over, looking down on her for a moment, then gently laid the flowers on her breast. He sat down beside her, leaning over on one elbow to gaze into her face. . . .

It was at that moment that something impelled Jane to take her attention from the stage. Her head turned slowly, as if at a half-heard whisper. . . . Her eyes rose.

She gasped. Her heart gave a jump that was physically painful. She clutched Leila's arm.

"Look!" she whispered. *"In that box up there!"*

There could not be a moment's doubt. She knew the face better than she knew her own: every curl of his hair, every plane of his features, every lash around the brown eyes. She knew the tender smile with which he was leaning forward to watch the stage—knew it so well that she ached. She knew—everything about him.

Then, suddenly, she was aware that the eyes of almost every woman in the audience had left the stage and were turned the same way as her own.

The hungry expressions on the rows of faces made her shiver and hold more tightly to Leila's arm.

For some minutes the man continued to watch, appearing oblivious

of anything but the lighted scene. Then something—perhaps the intense stillness of the audience—caused him to turn his head.

Before the hundreds of upturned eyes, his smile faded into concern.

Abruptly the silence was broken by hysterics, in a dozen different parts of the house at once.

He stood up uncertainly, his expression of concern becoming tinged with alarm. Then he turned toward the back of the box. What happened there was invisible from the floor, but in a moment he came into view again, backing away from the door toward the rail of the box. Beyond him the heads of several women came into sight. The look on their faces caused Jane to shudder again.

The man turned, and she could see that his expression was now definitely one of fear. He was cornered, and the women came on toward him like passionate furies.

With a merely momentary hesitation, he swung one leg over the rail of the box, and clambered outside. Quite evidently he intended to escape by climbing to the neighboring box—with a foot on one of the light brackets, he reached for its edge. Simultaneously, two of the women in the box he was leaving clutched at his other arm—and broke his hold upon the rail.

For a fearful prolonged moment he teetered there, arms waving to regain his balance. Then he fell, arching backward, and crashed headfirst into the aisle below.

Jane clutched Leila to her, and bit her lip to keep from screaming. She need not have made the effort: practically everyone else screamed.

Back in her own room, Jane sat looking at the telephone for a long time before she could bring herself to use it. At last she lifted the receiver, and got through to the office. She gave a desk number.

Then: "Oh, Don. It's about that man at the Countess Theater tonight. Do you know anything?" Her voice was a flat, dead sound.

"Sure. Just doing the obit now," Don said cheerfully. "What do you want to know?"

"Just—oh, just who he was—and things."

"Fellow called Desomond Haley. Age thirty-five. Quite a show of letters after his name, medical mostly. Practiced as a psychiatrist. Seems to have written quite a flock of things. Best known is a standard work: *Crowd Psychology and the Communication of Hysteria.* Latest listed publication is a paper which appears to be generally considered pretty high-flown bunk, called *The Inducement of Collective Hallucination.* He lived at—hello, hello? What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Jane told him, leveling her voice with an effort.

"Thought you sounded—say, you didn't know him or anything, did you?"

"No," said Jane, as steadily as she could. "No, I didn't know him."

Very precisely she returned the telephone to its rest. Very carefully she walked into the next room. Very deliberately and sadly she dropped on her bed, and let the tears flow as they would.

And who shall say how many tears flowed upon how many pillows for the dream that did not come that night nor ever again?

A favorite sport—indoors or out—among enthusiasts of imaginative literature, is the never ending debate on the precise distinction between fantasy and science fiction. To the extent that definition is possible, it seems to me to depend much more on treatment than on subject matter.

In the case of this completely charming story by an author whose talents are not ordinarily associated with the genre *at all, no previous classifications will do the job.*

The Laocoön Complex *by J. C. Furnas*

It was on January 26, 1937, that John Howard Simms first found a snake in his bath.

Half-lying, half-sitting in the tub, he was considering whether he would turn off the warm water when it reached his armpits or wait till it was up to his neck. As he balanced the exertion of lifting his feet to the faucet against his pleasure in the creeping warmth of the rising water, something wriggled beneath his right hip—wriggled convulsively and indignantly like a fish on the end of a line. Simms reared himself clear and snatched behind him. His clawing fingers closed on something tubular and vigorous; he leaped from the tub and found himself dripping and trembling and gripping a writhing green snake in his right hand. It never occurred to him to be incredulous about it. The snake was as solid and corporeal as the hand that held it.

Moving with gasping speed, he hurled the snake back into the tub and stood glaring at it, unconsciously wringing and wiping his hand. His frantic haste had spattered water over the whole room. Stunned or dead, the snake floated passively on the surface of the water. Its weary length peacefully undulated on the small waves and tidal sloshing in the tub. Simms felt no desire to probe into the matter of where it had come from. He merely stood and stared, while his trembling slowly left him; and, although he knew there was no one else in the apartment, something moved him to close the bathroom door with a bang.

Presently it became evident that the snake was still alive. Its undulations began to run counter to those of the water until it was swimming

lazily, even lifting its head an inch or so above the surface. Simms was relieved to see that it had survived rough treatment.

Yet he did want to get rid of it. He could use the fire tongs; but the snake was a good four feet long and might coil up to touch his hands; very possibly it was poisonous; and he could not endure the notion of again coming into contact with that writhing vigor. Perhaps he could wash it down the drain, as if it were so much dirt. Gingerly he opened the outlet and was relieved again when the water-level began visibly to sink.

Seemingly unconscious of any change, the snake floated serenely until its belly was aground. Then, moving its head cautiously from side to side, it crawled through the soapy scum to the outlet. Too late Simms realized that its flat head and plump middle were much too large to go through the holes in the metal cap over the drain. But the snake, investigating the situation with a grave air of businesslike concern, astounded him by sticking its head into the central hole—which was certainly much too small—and crawling deliberately through, inch by inch. When about six inches of tail was left, it seemed to encounter difficulties farther down. Having resisted an impulse to drag it out again, Simms shortly had the satisfaction of seeing the tail wriggle in triumph and disappear.

He ran to his kitchenette and boiled several panfuls of water which he poured down the drain with a vague faith in boiling water for getting rid of any sort of hostile pest from bacteria up. Then he rubbed himself down and dressed and went out for his breakfast, concerned because he was going to be half an hour late at the office.

He was not on sociable enough terms with any of his associates at the office to tell them about his strange morning. He was tempted to confide in the stenographer who took his dictation, but reflected in time that such a story going the rounds might gain him a reputation for eccentricity. The obscure pride which he sometimes felt in being the wheel horse of the correspondence department had often served him as counterweight in just this fashion. After work and his solitary dinner, however, he found himself unwilling to spend his customary quiet evening with the newspaper. Instead he went to a movie; moreover, he neglected to wash or brush his teeth before going to bed because he did not care to enter the bathroom.

But in the morning he had to shave and he told himself, while lathering his face, that it was childish—and unhygienic—to forswear bathing because of a strange accident. It was a bright morning; a streak of sunshine across the tub cheerfully illuminated the running water. No sign of a snake—nothing out of the way except a stray scrap of paper which

he carefully removed before getting in. As he lay back gratefully in the warm water, he realized that he was completely relaxed for the first time in twenty-four hours. Almost in that instant he felt the same electric wriggling under his hip.

This time he leaped from the water without investigating, scarcely frightened at all but feeling abused because he could not bathe in peace. It was outrageous that four feet of anomalous reptile should again be floating in his bath with its head daintily raised above the water. In a passion of pettish anger, he opened the drain and witnessed the same scene—the subsiding water, the snake's good-natured acceptance of the situation, and the horrid unreasonableness of its disappearing into a hole much too small for its girth.

A crafty longing for revenge came over him. With complete disregard for office hours, he filled the tub again, got in, lay back and got out in still hotter anger at the now familiar sign that the visitor had returned. He had carefully watched the outlet and was certain that it had not crawled back; yet, to all appearances, it was the same snake. He got the fire tongs and seized its head with the purpose of holding it under water until it drowned. But its convulsive thrashings under such treatment made him ill; there was unendurable terror in the drops of water which showered on his face and shoulders as he leaned over to the work. He might have persevered, however, if it had not occurred to him that perhaps snakes could not be drowned. It would be better to kill it instantaneously.

He had long owned a revolver, purchased as a spiritual precaution against robbery. As he took it from its place in the bureau drawer under his socks, he wondered if the superannuated cartridges would fire. They still looked grim and deadly; he took careful aim with the edge of the tub for rest and shot the snake's head off cleanly. The noise of the report in the narrow bathroom deafened him; yet he was even more sharply aware of the snake's convulsive thrashings.

Such a blast should have alarmed everyone in the house. But there were no poundings on the door, no footsteps on the stairs. He waited for only a few minutes before going back to the tub and observing with satisfaction that the snake, its head mangled and hanging, was floating on the water, quite dead.

His mind was made up. With the aid of the tongs, he coiled the snake neatly into a hatbox, dressed, and went out with the box under his arm. This matter was going to be looked into. Where to go and what to do puzzled him until he remembered that doctors know everything.

At the hospital they wrote a great deal of pointless information about

him on a form and let him get as far as the word "snakes" before calling two orderlies. Simms was annoyed to see that "Alcoholics" was written on the door of the office to which they took him with elaborate precautions.

The doctor, looking inquisitively at the hatbox, also let him speak a good while without interruption. When Simms reached the second appearance of the snake, however, he raised his hand.

"How many drinks do you usually have a day?" he asked, with a weary suggestion of routine in his voice.

"I don't drink at all," Simms answered shortly, outraged by this confirmation of the sign on the door.

"Now come," said the doctor, "I can't waste my time on you if you won't be frank."

"I don't just see snakes," said Simms, reflecting that, after all, the doctor was well justified in being skeptical, "I feel 'em—and kill 'em." He opened the hatbox and dumped the snake—which he still could not bear to touch—on the doctor's desk. Water and blood oozed from its mangled head on to the green blotter. The doctor started back in amazement.

"I shot that one this morning," said Simms, almost in apology.

The doctor picked up a paper cutter and stirred the body. Then, becoming bolder, he prodded it and held it up, limp and resigned, like a cat lifted by the middle.

"It's real!" he said indignantly.

"They're all real," answered Simms, going on with the story of the morning's battle. The doctor listened in reflective silence and then began to ask questions about his patient's private life: Where did he work? How long had he been there? Was he generally in good health? and so forth. Then, politely asking permission beforehand, he phoned Simms's office and checked up the story.

"This isn't my line," the doctor finally said, after pondering a long while with his fascinated eyes on the snake. "Better give the psychiatrists a chance at you, I think. Go and see—" and he named a great man. "Wait a moment!" He telephoned the head of the hospital and, having first convinced him that he had not gone mad himself, persuaded him to phone the great man and lay the case before him. Within ten minutes, Simms was assured the great man was deeply interested and would see Simms at half past ten.

There was something to being a unique case, Simms decided, on his way uptown. The Sunday sections of the newspapers, which he read religiously, had long been full of this Dr. Eisenmark, with particular

emphasis on his uncompromising feuds with brother psychiatrists. Under ordinary circumstances, Simms could have become acquainted with international celebrities only through the papers. And yet here he was on his way to a personal interview with the greatest man he would probably ever meet in his life, with an entrée assured, his passport coiled in the hatbox under his arm. He treated himself to the luxury of a cab the whole way.

Two women, plump and well dressed, got off at the same floor in the hotel and went ahead of him into Dr. Eisenmark's office. Simms marched intrepidly forward, said: "Mr. Simms—Polyphonic Hospital—half past ten." Door after door opened before him until he was in the great man's presence.

Dr. Eisenmark was ugly. His arms hung apelike from his stooped shoulders and swayed loosely as he paced the floor and inspected his subject. For a moment his gaze rested malevolently on the hatbox and Simms felt a passing pity for the dead snake. He looked square into Simms's face and Simms's cheeks and jaws were suffused with the incipient sweat of embarrassment. But when he spoke, his voice was completely reassuring, in spite of a thick German accent, all the more so because it came on the heels of so much silent intimidation.

His opening remarks were a strange combination of rudeness and brusque courtesy. He suspected Simms and his snake of being an elaborate hoax and said so. On the other hand, he pointed out, there was often much interest to be found in the psychopathic aspects of elaborate hoaxes. He regarded Simms's keeping the appointment as primary evidence of good faith and was glad to see him. And, if Mr. Simms did not mind, they would proceed at once to business. The first thing would be Mr. Simms's story, told without reservations and as directly as possible.

During his narrative, Simms astonished himself with his own pithy eloquence. He told it three times as well as he had at the hospital and ended with a touch of genuine drama, producing the incontrovertible evidence with proud and confident solicitude. There was a gleam of affection in his eye as he displayed the snake, for it was all that stood between him and being accused of bad faith or lunacy.

Dr. Eisenmark nodded an accompaniment to the story, at first perfunctory, then vigorous, and finally, with narrowed eyes and bared teeth, he began to furnish exclamation points to the narrative with hissing repetitions of *"Kolossal!"* If Simms had been an actor, he would have been tempted to take a bow.

"You will take another bath—here—now," he said. "I shall go with you and see." He flung open a door and stood aside for Simms to pass

through, observing him so narrowly all the while that Simms already felt naked. He badly needed the reassurance of seeing his faithful snake sprawled in the middle of the carpet, a pathetic thread of substance between him and the truth.

"You take your bath warm?" asked Dr. Eisenmark, turning on the faucets with his hairy hands. "Undress!" As Simms took off his coat and vest, the psychiatrist sat himself on a corner of the wash basin and lighted a cigarette. "You see," he said, "I do not promise to think you a liar if there are no snakes now; but if there should be snakes now, ach, what trouble would we save!"

"Not snakes," said Simms, "only one." His hands were trembling as he slipped his undershirt over his head, and he was shaking from head to foot as he stepped into the warm water.

"Come," said the psychiatrist, "I have seen ladies by the dozen giving birth to babies with more calm."

Simms sat shivering in the water with his hands round his knees. The psychiatrist came and peered into the tub.

"So," he said. "Where is this snake?"

"They don't come till I lie down," Simms mumbled.

"Lie down!" said the psychiatrist. Simms lay down and then leaped from the tub with a scream, almost knocking the great man down. When he recovered his composure, he was dripping in a corner and watching Dr. Eisenmark's effort to lay hands on a four-foot green snake which was lashing the surface of the water in vigorous efforts to escape.

"*Wunderschön!*" he was hissing to himself. "*Ach, mein Schatz, mein Liebling, du lebst!*"

There was a final struggle and the psychiatrist rose out of the tub, soaked to the waist, but clutching his prey in his hands. One fist held it firmly just below the head so that its fangs were useless. His exultant eye spied a wicker hamper for dirty towls; in a panic of panting triumph, he popped the snake within and secured the rattan hasp. Then he came to Simms, threw his ape's arms round him and kissed him soundly.

"I am famous now," he said brokenly, "but I shall be more famous, and you—you will be famous with me. We must talk—I must ask you crazy questions—you must tell me so many things. Come!"

"But your other patients?" Simms asked, overcome by diffidence.

"It is good for them to wait," said the psychiatrist, throwing him a towel. "It stimulates their egos. *Schnell!*"

It was late afternoon and the street lamps were lighted when Simms left Dr. Eisenmark and decided he had better walk home even though his knees were still trembling beneath him. He felt as if someone had

applied a stomach pump at the base of his brain. His taste in moving pictures and light fiction, his feelings toward his landlord and his opinions on the heavyweight situation had all passed in review. He had told of things he had not thought of for years; particularly in connection with snakes; he had remembered the most unaccountable details of past trivialities; he suspected that he had remembered a great deal which had never happened, but the psychiatrist had seemed to entertain no doubts.

"What do you think?" he had asked at the end, while Eisenmark stood in the gathering gloom, clasping and unclasping his hands.

"I think—so much," the great man said soberly, "but it is not for you to think or to know of thoughts. I must do much also. You must come back tomorrow—at two o'clock. And do not bathe. I shall bathe you here."

Safely at home, Simms phoned his office to tell them he was sick and indefinitely in a doctor's hands. It was not entirely a lie, of course; he found himself pondering with unaccustomed subtlety on the real meaning of the word "sick." If inconvenient abnormalities all came under that head, he could lay claim to being sick with a vengeance. Anyway he had every right to a bit of private illness on any pretext; what good was a record of ten years' faithful service if you couldn't lay off now and again?

He spent the evening in the public library, reading about snakes, not only anacondas and boa constrictors and cobras, for his was not a romantic curiosity, but also about garter snakes and black snakes, beneficent vermin which have been known to be companionable. From the moment he had seen the last arrival struggling in the doctor's grip, he had lost much of his loathing for the snake family. The man was so triumphant and the reptile so harassed; and the next morning, when he saw the scar left by the bullet in the bottom of the bathtub, he was a trifle ashamed of himself for having attacked his guest in such an unsportsmanlike way. After all, it might have been more his doing than the snake's that it had been there. Such, at least, was the implication of some of the psychiatrist's questions.

It is not strange, then, that he spent his morning in the snake house of the zoo. Here were many of the genera and species he had been reading about, heavily coiled in long glass cases or restlessly exercising themselves in flickering rhythms. Even so he was disappointed; these had nothing of the irreconcilable vigor of his own snakes. They were caged and did not seem to mind very much. Only one large boa, digesting evilly with unblinking eyes, obscenely conscious of the lump back of his

head which represented a rabbit swallowed whole, appealed to Simms's new sensibility. He felt sure that this fifteen feet of gorged malevolence could be irritable and thrash around in his cage.

At two o'clock Dr. Eisenmark welcomed Simms with a jubilant warmth which made him stare. He also felt inclined to stare at the doctor's companion, a sharp faced man who was introduced as Dr. Harvey, curator of reptiles in the very zoo which Simms had been visiting. Scalpels and forceps were spread over the desk.

"You see," said Dr. Eisenmark, "I have been forced to seek consultation. I know nothing of snakes. But my good friend here who has spent the morning with me, he knows them like his ten fingers. We have been violent with our friend of yesterday—" and he produced a huge cork board on which, pegged down, flayed, and opened up like a half-made necktie, Simms beheld the snake which had been confined in the hamper. Simms felt ill; only yesterday it had been uncompromisingly alive.

"I do not think my friend will regret the hours he has spent with me," the psychiatrist went on. "It has been interesting, *ach,* so interesting. Even to me who knows nothing of snakes. But you must tell him—I do not know the language."

The curator of reptiles spoke at some length while Simms stared at the dissected wreck on the board. This snake, it appeared, belonged to no known species or variety. But that was its mildest eccentricity. Its anatomical features were scientifically fantastic: "Its fangs," said the curator, "are built like dog teeth and its scales attached like fish scales. Then I dissected—and I found, Mr. Simms, that beyond a rudimentary alimentary canal and a vaguely differentiated brain and spinal cord, it has no internal organs at all. No subsidiary nerves—no reproductive system—no muscles—how it managed to move and live I could not imagine, and yet Eisenmark told me it was uncommonly vigorous." There was a melancholy fear in his eyes as he gazed at the dissected specimen. "I don't like it—I don't like it at all," he said, and reached for his hat.

Dr. Eisenmark laughed.

"He does not understand!" he told Simms. "He does not understand any better than you did, even less if possible!" He turned on the curator ferociously. "Do you not see? It is just the kind of snake a man who knew nothing about snakes would imagine."

"Don't go over that again," said the curator, "I want to forget about it," and he left without another word, forestalling thanks by his haste, the picture of a man bewildered beyond endurance.

When the door banged, the psychiatrist burst into roars of laughter.

"The real man of science!" he said, "shut up in his own specialty and

afraid to look out of it. He knows the little snakes, but you must not tell him there is a whole world outside!" Then he reverted to the suppressed excitement of the preceding evening. *"Ach!"* he went on, "do you know what we have found? I suspect—I guess—and the stupid expert tells me I am right. There—" he indicated the cork board and its horrid display—"there is the death of the old science! Not for nothing have I kept my mind open. Einstein! A trifler with paper and pencil! Newton! Mendel! Darwin! All fools running in a circle: We break through—we—"

"I don't understand anything," said Simms drearily. "What have you proved?"

The psychiatrist panted in disgust and shook a hairy finger in his face.

"We prove," he said, "that you—you, an insignificant young man—" Simms winced—"can think matter into existence. And that is not all—that you can organize it into moving, living flesh, that you can make life. *Himmel,* do not stare at me so! Here is the flesh you have made—it was alive—do I not know?"

"But I didn't want to make snakes," said Simms, "I had nothing to do with it. They just came."

"My friend," said the psychiatrist, "if you do not stop being foolish, I shall send you to my colleagues who will try to tell you that your snakes are libidinous symbols and insult your grandmother. They will call your trouble the Laocoön complex and ask you questions for three years until you become self-conscious about the way you get your hair cut. Why do I take time to tell you what you mean to the world? You did not think snakes as you think eggs for breakfast—but yesterday I see you are a man who cannot fall in love, who does his work like a blind horse in a mine, who is alive only because he cannot help breathing—who likes warm water because it is flexible and alive as he is not. *Ach,* I tell you it was fear and horror you wanted—fear and horror that was alive, more alive than the cinema and little books about murder. And you tell me you did not make these snakes when you have made them without knowing it because it is fear and horror you need! *Dummkopf!"*

As he looked at Simms's pale face, a glint of humor crept into his voice: "But I shall take care of you," he went on, obviously striving to collect himself. "You come to me not like a guinea pig for experiment but as a patient to be cured. You will make me a snake in the presence of eminent witnesses and then I shall cure you. Then, if you are wise, you will go murder a nice girl and run away and enlist in the Frenchman Foreign Legion and try to live a little."

Simms gaped at him and hung his head.

"So," said the psychiatrist, in a kindlier voice, "I am not polite. But it is my business to speak strongly. You will come back tomorrow and we will talk about the witnesses and the demonstration."

Incapable of saying a word, Simms gulped and went out. Out of his new scientific significance he had got nothing but an uncomfortably bloated feeling. Now that he was out of Dr. Eisenmark's hearing, he repeated to himself again and again that he had not wanted snakes, they just came; and, nuisance that they had been, it was all nothing compared to the scale of the troubles they had brought upon him. He shrank pitifully from the prospect of taking such a momentous bath in the presence of bearded, pretentious witnesses. He should have said nothing to anyone and disposed of his snakes unaided, or even let them stay. It might have been hasty to decide that they were hostile; it seemed inconceivable that they should be, now that he had seen yesterday's specimen in such pathetic dishabille.

When he got home, he went straight to the bathroom and stared at the scar in the bottom of the bathtub. He recalled the agonized care with which he had aimed the revolver and the cataclysmic reverberations of the explosion when he fired. Trying to kill the snake would be the last thing he would consider doing in his new frame of mind. Perhaps it was because the psychiatrist had put the notion in his head, but there was now something attractive and satisfying about that convulsive wriggling which made every fiber tingle throughout the brute's whole length. With as casual an air as he could manage, he turned on the hot water and began to undress.

The bath was quite cold when the cleaning woman found him on the bathroom floor the next morning. He had got as far as the medicine cabinet before he lost consciousness, and a tiny bottle of a popular disinfectant proved that he had not lost his man-in-the-street faith in first aid. The curator had been right; the fangs of Simms's snakes were poisonous.

The green snake which the woman found in the tub was still swimming gallantly with its head raised above the water. Its remarkable powers of endurance can be attributed only to the fact that Simms had inclined to believe that snakes could not be drowned.

In little more than a year's time since the appearance of their much admired "What Thin Partitions" the team of Clifton and Apostolides has become firmly established among the top ranks of idea innovators in science fiction—or psience *fiction, rather, since much of their work has been in this area.*

Apostolides is "something classified in engineering at an aircraft plant." Clifton, a former personnel director and industrial engineer, began his career of introducing startling new concepts more than thirty years ago: "Qualified for a country teacher's job in Arkansas when I was thirteen," he writes. "Investigation into subversive teacher activities is not *something new. I lost my job for insisting that the world was round."*

A new novel, They'd Rather Be Right, *carrying on the life history of "Crazy Joey," is currently appearing serially in* Astounding Science Fiction.

Crazy Joey *by Mark Clifton and Alex Apostolides*

Joey pulled the covers up over his head, trying to shut out the whispers which filled the room. But even with the pillow over his head, their shrill buzz entered up through the roof of his mouth, tasting acrid and bitter, spinning around in his brain. Fingers in his ears simply made the words emerge from a sensation of cutting little lights into words.

"It worries me, Madge, more and more, the way that boy carries on. I was hoping he'd outgrow it, but he don't."

His father's voice was deep and petulant, sounding from the pillow on his side of the bed there in the other room. "Hanging back, all the time. Not playing with the other kids, staying out of school, claiming the teachers don't like him. It ain't natural, Madge. I don't like it."

"Now you're working yourself up again, Bob." His mother's patient voice from her side of the bed cut across the deeper tones. "What good is it going to do you?"

"Did some good when I thrashed him." His father spoke sharply, and a little louder. Joey could hear the buzz of the voice itself coming through the walls. "Stopped him talking about whispers. I tell you I ain't gonna have a kid of mine acting crazy. I passed a bunch of the little brats on the

way home tonight. 'There goes Crazy Joey's father,' I heard one of them say. I won't stand for it. Either Joey learns to stand up and be a real boy, or—"

"Or what, Bob?" His mother's voice had both defiance and fear in it.

"Or . . . oh, I don't know what—" His father's voice trailed off in disgust. "Let's go to sleep, Madge. I'm tired."

Joey felt his mother's lift of hope. Perhaps she could keep awake a little longer, waiting for his deep breathing to assure her he was asleep, so she could move from her extreme edge of the bed and be more comfortable—without touching him.

The deep, rasping sensation of his father's weary hopelessness; desire, but not for her. Drab and uninteresting. He was still young enough, still a man; tied down tight to this drab.

The lighter, more delicate thought of his mother. She was still young enough, still hungered for romance. The vision of a green slope of hill, starred with white daisies, the wind blowing through her flowing hair, a young man striding on firm brown legs up the hill toward her, his sloping shoulders swinging with his stride. Tied to this coarse hulk beside her, instead.

The heavier rasp of thought demanded attention. Those girls flouncing down the hallway of the school; looking out of the corners of their eyes at the boys; conscious only of the returning speculative stares; unconscious of the old janitor who was carrying baskets of wastepaper down the hall behind them.

Joey buried his head deeper into the bed beneath his pillow. The visions were worse than the whispers. He did not fully understand them, but was overwhelmed by them, by a deep sense of shame that he had participated in them.

He tried to will his mind to leave the visions, and there leaped, with startling clarity, the vision of his father holding him down on the bed, a terrible rage in his face, shouting at him.

"How come you know how I looked at those two girls in the hall at school? You spying little sneak!" The blows. The horror. The utter confusion.

And the imaginings were worse than the visions. So clear, so intricately clear, they became memories. Memories as sharp and clear as any other reality. Eight-year-old Joey could not yet know the reasoned verbalization: an imaginary experience can have as profound an effect upon personality development as a real one. He knew only that it was so.

But he must never tell about this beating, must never tell anyone. Others wouldn't have any such memory and they would say he was crazy.

He must store it away, with all the other things he had stored away. It was hard to keep remembering which were the ones others could remember, and which were his alone. Each was as real as the other, and that was the only distinction.

Sometimes he forgot, and talked about the wrong things. Then they called him a little liar. To keep away from that he always had to go into their minds first, and that was sometimes a terrible and frightening thing; their memories were not the same as his, and often hard to recognize.

Then it was morning. The whispers were all about him again. In half-awake reverie, he shuddered over the imagined beating he had received. He twisted and turned under the covers, trying to escape the also twisting threads of thought between his father and mother in the kitchen. The threads became ropes; gray-green and alive; affection turned resentment coiling and threatening; held back from striking only by hopelessness. He stared into the gray morning light seeping in around the shade at his window. He tried to trace the designs on the wallpaper, but they, too, became twisting worms of despair. And transferred again into the memory of the beating. Involuntarily, a sob escaped his throat, aloud.

"Madge!" This was no whisper, but his father shouting at his mother. "That kid is in there sniveling again. I'll give him something to bawl about." The sudden terrible rage was a dead black smothering blanket.

"Bob!" The sharp fear in his mother's voice stopped the tread of feet across the kitchen floor, changing the rage back to hopelessness.

He felt his father go away from his door, back to his place at the table. He felt the sudden surge of resolution in his father.

"Madge, I'm going to talk to Dr. Ames this morning. He gets in early. He's the head of the psychology department. I'm going to talk to him about Joey."

Joey could feel the shame of his father at such a revelation. The shame of saying, "Dr. Ames, do you think my son is crazy?"

"What good will that do?" His mother's voice was resentful, fearful; afraid of what the doctor might say.

"I'll tell him all about Joey. He gives loony tests, and I'm going to find out about—"

"Bob! Saying such a thing about your own son. It's—it's sinful!" His mother's voice was high, and her chair creaked as she started to move from her side of the table.

"Take it easy, Madge," his father warned her. "I'm not saying he's crazy, mind you. I just want to get to the bottom of it. I want to know. I want a normal boy." Then, desperately: "Madge, I just want a boy!" The frustration, the disappointment welled over Joey as if it were his own.

"I'll talk to the doctor," his father was continuing, reasoning with her. "I'll try to get him to see Joey. I'm janitor of his building, and he shouldn't charge me anything. Maybe he'll see you and Joey this afternoon. I'll call you on the phone if he will. You be ready to take Joey up there if I should call." The voice was stern, unbending.

"Yes, Bob." His mother recognized the inflexibility of the decision.

"Where's my lunch pail, then?" his father asked. "I'll get to work early, so I can have a talk with Dr. Ames before class time."

"On the sink, Bob. Where it always is," his mother answered patiently.

The sudden rage again. Always is. Always is. That's the trouble, Madge. Everything always is. Just like yesterday, and the day before. That's why it's all so hopeless. But the bitterness switched suddenly to pity.

"Don't worry so, Madge." There was a tone of near affection in his father's voice. Belated consideration. Joey felt his father move around the table, pat his mother awkwardly on the shoulder. But still the little yellow petals of affection were torn and consumed by the gray-green worms of resentment.

"Bob—" His mother spoke to the closing door. The footsteps, heavy, went on down the back steps of their house, each a soundless impact upon Joey's chest.

Joey felt his mother start toward his room. Hastily he took the pillow from over his head, pulled the blanket up under his chin, dropped his chin and jaw, let his mouth open in the relaxation of deep sleep, and breathed slowly. He hoped he could will away the welts of the belt blows before she would see them. With all his might he willed the welts away, and the angry blue bruises of his imagination. All the signs of the terrible consequences of what might have been.

He felt her warm tenderness as she opened his door. Now the lights were warm and shining, clear and beautiful, unmuddied by any resentments. He felt the tenderness flow outward from her, and wrapped it around him to clear away the bruises. He willed back the tears of relief, and lay in apparent deep sleep. He felt her kneel down by his bed, and heard the whispers in her mind.

"My poor little different boy. You're all I've got. I don't care what they say, Joey. I don't care what they say." Joey felt the throb of grief arise in her throat, choked back, the tremendous effort to smile at him, to make her voice light and carefree.

"Wake up, Joey," she called, and shook his shoulder lightly. "It's morn-

ing, darling." There was bright play in her voice, the gladness of morning itself. "Time all little fellows were up and doing."

He opened his eyes, and her face was sweet and tender. No one but a Joey could have read the apprehension and dread which lay behind it.

"I sure slept sound," he said boisterously. "I didn't even dream."

"Then you weren't crying a while ago?" she asked in hesitant puzzlement.

"Me, Mom? Me?" he shouted indignantly. "What could there be to cry about?"

The campus of Steiffel University was familiar to Joey from the outside. He knew the winding paths, the stretches of lawn, the green trees, the white benches nestled in shaded nooks. The other kids loved to hide in the bushes at night and listen to the young men and women talking. They snickered about it on the school playground all the time. Joey had tried it once, but had refused to go back again. These were thoughts he did not want to see—tender, urgent thoughts so precious that they belonged to no one else except the people feeling them.

But now walking up the path, leading to the psychology building with his mother, he could feel only her stream of thought.

"Oh I pray, dear God, I pray that the doctor won't find anything wrong with Joey. Dear God . . . dear God . . . don't let them find anything wrong with Joey. They might want to take him away, shut him up somewhere. I couldn't bear it. I couldn't live. Dear God . . . oh dear God—"

Joey's thought darted down another bypath of what might be, opened by his mother's prayer. He willed away the constriction in his throat.

"This is interesting, Mom," he exclaimed happily. "Pop is always talking about it. But I've never been inside the building of a college before. Have you?"

"No, son," she said absently. Thank heaven he doesn't know. "Joey—" she said suddenly, and faltered.

He could read the thought in her mind. Don't let them find anything wrong with you. Try not to talk about whispers, or imagination, or—

"What, Mom?" It was urgent to get her away from her fear again.

"Joey . . . er . . . are you afraid?"

"No, Mom," he answered scornfully. "Course not. It's just another school, that's all. A school for big kids."

He could feel his father watching them through a basement window, waiting for them to start up the steps of the building. Waiting to meet them in the front hall, to take them up to Dr. Ames's study. He could feel the efforts his father was making to be casual and normal about it all; Bob Carter, perhaps only a janitor, but a solid citizen, independently

proud. Didn't everyone call him "Mr. Carter?" Recognize his dignity?

Joey's father, with his dignity upon him, met them at the doorway of the building; looked furtively and quickly at the rusty black clothing of his wife, inadvertently comparing the textiles of her old suit to the rich materials the coeds wore with such careless style.

"You look right nice, Madge," he said heavily, to reassure her, and took her arm gallantly. When they had reached the second floor, up the broad stairs, he turned to Joey.

"I've been telling the professors how bright you are, Joey. They want to talk to you." He chuckled agreeably.

Pop, don't laugh like that. I know you're ashamed. But don't lie to me, Pop. I know.

"Just answer all their questions, Joey," his father was saying. "Be truthful." He emphasized the word again, "Truthful, I said."

"Sure, Pop," Joey answered dutifully; knowing his father hoped he wouldn't be truthful—and that his mother might die if he were. He wondered if he might hear the whisperings from the professors' minds. What if he couldn't hear! How would he know how to answer them, if he couldn't hear the whispers! Maybe he couldn't hear, wouldn't know how to answer, and then his mother would die!

His face turned pale, and he felt as if he were numb; in a dull dead trance as they walked down the hall and into a study off one of the big classrooms.

"This here is my wife and my son, Dr. Martin," his father was saying. Then to Joey's mother: "Dr. Martin is Dr. Ames's assistant."

The boy is very frightened. The thought came clearly and distinctly to Joey from the doctor's mind.

"Not any more," Joey said, and didn't realize until it was done that he had exclaimed it aloud in his relief. He could hear!

"I beg your pardon, Joey?" Dr. Martin turned from greeting his mother and looked with quick penetration into Joey's eyes. His own sharp blue eyes had exclamation points in them, accented by his raised blond brows in a round face.

"But of course he is Dr. Ames's assistant," his father corrected him heartily, with an edge behind the words. You little fool, you're starting in to demonstrate already.

That isn't what the boy meant. Dr. Martin was racing the thought through his mind. I had the thought that the boy was frightened, and he immediately said he wasn't. All the pathological symptoms of fright disappeared instantly, too. Yes. Put into the matrix of the telepath, all the

things Carter told us this morning about him would fit. I hadn't considered that. And I know that old fool Ames would never consider it.

If there ever was a closed mind against ESP, he's got it. Orthodox psychology!

"We will teach nothing here but orthodox psychology, Dr. Martin," Ames had said. "It is the duty of some of us to insist a theory be proved through time and tradition. We will not rush down every side path, accepting theories as unsubstantial as the tobacco smoke which subsidizes them."

So much for ESP. Well, even Rhine says that the vast body of psychology, in spite of all the evidence, still will not accept the fact of ESP.

But if this kid were a telepath—a true telepath. If by any chance he were . . . If his remark and the disappearance of the fear symptoms were not just coincidence!

But another Ames's admonition dampened his elation. "Our founder, Jacob Steiffel, was a wise man. He believed in progress, Martin, as do I. But progress through conservative proof. Let others play the fool, our job is to preserve the bastions of scientific solidity!"

"Dr. Ames has not arrived yet," he said suddenly to Joey's parents. "He's been called to the office of the university president. But, in the meantime, leave the boy with me. There's preliminary work to do, and I'm competent to do that." He realized the implications of bitterness in his remark, and reassured himself that these people were not so subtle as to catch it.

"I got work to do anyhow," Joey's father said. His relief was apparent, that he would not be required to stand by, and he was using it to play the part of the ever faithful servant.

"Here's a room where you may wait, Mrs. Carter," Dr. Martin said to Joey's mother. He opened a door and showed her in to a small waiting room. "There are magazines. Make yourself quite comfortable. This may take an hour or so."

"Thank you, Doctor." It was the first time she had spoken, and her voice contained the awe and respect she felt. A thread of resentment, too. It wasn't fair; some had so many advantages to get educated. Others— But the resentment was drowned out in the awe and respect. These were not just ordinary doctors. They *taught* doctors!

She sat tentatively on the edge of a wooden chair, the hardest one in the room. The worn red feather in her hat drooped, but her back remained straight.

Joey felt the doctor thinking, "Relax, woman! We're not going to skin him alive!" But he merely closed the door. Joey could still see her sitting

there, through the closed door; not relaxing, not reaching for a magazine. Her lips were pulled tight against her teeth to keep her prayer from showing. "Dear God, oh, dear God—"

Dr. Martin came back over from closing the door, and led Joey to a chair near the bookcase.

"Now you just sit down there and relax, Joey. We're not going to hurt you. We're just going to visit a little, and ask you some questions." But his mind was darting in and out around his desires. I'd better start in on routine IQ tests, leave the Rorschach for Ames. Now that it's standard, he'll use it. Leave word association for him, too. That's his speed. Maybe I should give the multiphasic; no, better leave that for Ames. He'll discredit it, but it'll make him feel very modern and up-to-date to use it. I mustn't forget I'm just the errand boy around here. I wish I could run the Rhine ESP deck on the boy, but if Ames came in and caught me at it—"

The office phone rang, and Martin picked it up hurriedly. It was the president's office calling.

"Dr. Ames asked me to tell you he will be tied up for almost an hour," the operator said disinterestedly. "The patient will just have to wait."

"Thank you," Martin said slowly. Joey felt his lift of spirit. I can run a few samples of the Rhine cards. I just have to know. I wish I could get away from this place, into a school where there's some latitude for research. I wish Marion weren't so tied down here with her family and that little social group she lords it over. "My husband is assistant to the dean of psychology!" That's much more important to her than any feeling I've got of frustration. If I quit here, and got into a place where I could work, really work, it would mean leaving this town. Marion wouldn't go. She's a big frog in a little puddle here. And still tied to her parents—and I'm tied to Marion. If anybody needs psych help, I do. I wish I had the courage—

Joey, as frequently with adults, could not comprehend all the words and sentences, but the somatic indecision and despair washed over him, making him gasp for breath.

Martin went over to a desk, with sudden resolution, and from far back in a drawer he pulled out a thin deck of cards.

"We're going to play a little game first, Joey," he said heartily, as he sat down at his desk and pulled a sheet of paper toward him. "There are twenty-five cards here. Five of them have a circle, five a star, a wavy line, a cross, a rectangle. Do you know what a rectangle is, Joey?"

Joey didn't, but the vision of a square leaped into his mind.

"Yes, sir," Joey said. "It's a sort of square."

"That's right," Martin said approvingly, making a mental note that the

boy shouldn't have known the word, and did. "Now I'm going to look at a card, one at a time, and then you guess what kind of an image there is on it. I'll write down what the card really shows, and what you say it is, and then we'll see how many you get right."

Too short a time! Too short a time! But maybe long enough to be significant. If I should just get a trace. All right, suppose you do? The question was ironic in his mind. He picked up the first card and looked at it, holding it carefully so that Joey would have no chance to see the face of it.

A circle leaped with startling clarity into Joey's mind. And the circle contained the image of Joey's mother, sitting on the edge of her chair in the other room, praying over and over, "Don't let them find anything wrong with him. Don't let them find—"

"Square," Joey said promptly. He felt the tinge of disappointment in Martin's mind as he recorded the true and the false. Not a perfect telepath, anyway.

"All right, Joey," Martin responded verbally. "Next card."

"Did I get that one right?" Joey asked brightly.

"I'm not supposed to tell you," Martin answered. "Not until the end of the game." Well, the boy showed normal curiosity. Didn't seem to show too much anxiety, which sometimes damped down the ESP factor. He picked up the next card. Joey saw it contained a cross.

"Star," he said positively.

"Next card," Martin said.

It was in the nineteenth card that Joey sensed a new thought in Martin's mind. There was a rising excitement. Not one of them had been correct. Rhine says a negative result can be as revealing as a positive one. He should get every fifth card correctly. Five out of the twenty-five, to hit the law of averages. Martin picked up the twentieth card and looked at it. It was a wavy line.

"Wavy line," Joey answered. He felt the disappointment again in Martin's mind, this time because he had broken the long run of incorrectness.

The twenty-first card was a star.

"Star," Joey said.

And the next three were equally correct. Joey had called five out of the twenty-five correctly, as the law of averages required. The pattern was a bit strange. What would the laws of chance say to a pattern such as this? Try it again.

"Let's try it again," he suggested.

"You were supposed to tell me how I did at the end of the game," Joey prompted.

"You were correct on five of them, Joey," Martin said, noncommittally.

"Is that pretty good?" Joey asked anxiously.

"Average," Martin said, and threw him a quick look. Wasn't that eagerness to please just a bit overdone? "Just average. Let's try it again."

This time Joey did not make the mistake of waiting until the end of the deck before he called correct cards. The doctor had said every fifth card should be called correctly. Joey did not understand statistical language. Dutifully, he called every fifth card correctly. Four wrong, one right. And again, the rising excitement near the twentieth card. Again, what are the laws of chance that the boy would call four wrong, one right, again and again, in perfect order?

Joey promptly called two of them right together. And felt Martin's disappointment. The pattern had been broken again. And then a rise of excitement, carefully suppressed.

"Let's run them again," Martin said. And he whispered strongly to himself. "This time he must call every other one of them right, in order to pass as just an average boy."

Joey was bewildered. There seemed to be a double thought in Martin's mind, a tenseness he could not understand. He wavered, and then doubtfully, doubting he was doing the right thing, he began to call every other card correctly.

Halfway through the deck Martin laid the cards down. Joey caught the flash of undisguised elation in his mind, and sank back into his own chair in despair. He had done it wrong.

"O.K., Joey," Martin said quietly. There was a smile of tender bitterness around his lips. "I don't know what the idea is. You've got your reasons, and they must be pretty terrible ones. Do you think you could talk to me? Tell me about it?"

"I don't know what you mean, Dr. Martin," Joey lied. Perhaps if he didn't admit anything—

"In trying to avoid a pattern, Joey, you made one. Just as soon as I realized you were setting up an unusual pattern, you immediately changed it. Every time. But that, too, is a pattern." And then he asked, quite dryly, "Or am I talking over your head?"

"Yes, sir," Joey said. "I guess you are." But he had learned. The whole concept of patterned response as against random response leaped from Martin's mind into his. "Maybe if I tried it again?" he asked hopefully. At all costs he must get the idea out of Martin's mind that there was anything exceptional about him. This time, and forever afterwards, he knew he could avoid any kind of a pattern. Just one more chance.

"I don't blame you, Joey," Martin answered sadly. "If you've looked into my mind, well, I don't blame you. Here we are. You're a telepath and afraid to reveal it. I'm a psychologist, supposed to be, and I'm afraid to investigate it. A couple of fellows who caught the tiger by the tail, aren't we, Joey? Looks as if we'd better kind of protect one another, doesn't it?"

"Yes, sir," Joey answered and tried to hold back the tears of relief. "You won't even tell my mother? What about my father?" He already knew that Martin didn't dare tell Ames.

"I won't tell anybody, Joey," Martin answered sadly. "I've got to hang onto my job. And in this wise and mighty institution we believe only in orthodox psychology. What you have, Joey, simply doesn't exist. Dr. Ames says so, and Dr. Ames is always right. No, Joey," he sighed, "I'm not likely to tell anybody."

"Maybe he'll trick me like you did," Joey said doubtfully, but without resentment. "Maybe with that ink-blot thing, or that 'yes' and 'no' pile of little cards."

Martin glanced at him quickly.

"You're quite perfect at it, aren't you?" He framed it a question and made it a statement. "You go beyond the words to the actual thought image itself. No, Joey, in that case I don't think he will. I think you can keep ahead of him."

"I don't know," Joey said doubtfully. "It's all so new. So many new things to think about all at once."

"I'll try to be in the room with you and him," Martin promised. "I'll think of the normal answer each time. He won't look very deep. He never does. He already knows all the answers."

"Thank you, sir." Joey said, and then, "I won't tell on you, either."

"O.K., Joey. We'd better be finishing the IQ test when he comes in. He's about due now. I suppose you'd better grade around a hundred. And you'd better miss random questions, so as not to show any definite pattern, for him to grab onto. All right, here goes. Tell me what is wrong with this statement—"

The tests were over. Joey sat quietly in his chair, watching Dr. Martin grade papers at his desk, watching him trying not to think about Joey. He watched his mother in the waiting room, still sitting on the edge of her chair, where she had been for the last two hours, without moving, her eyes closed, her lips still drawn tight. He watched Dr. Ames, sitting in his own office, absently shuffling papers around, comparing the values of the notes he had taken on Joey's reaction.

But the nearer turmoil in Dr. Martin's mind all but drowned out the fear of his mother, the growing disgust of Dr. Ames.

"It's a choice between Joey and holding my job. No matter how secretly I worked, Ames would find out. Once you're fired from a school, it's almost impossible to get a comparable job. All this subversive business, this fear of investigating anything outside the physical sciences that isn't strictly orthodox. No matter what explanation was given out, they'd suspect me of subversion. Oh Marion, Marion! Why can't I count on you to stand beside me? Or am I just using you as an excuse? Would I have the courage even if there were no Marion?"

He rubbed his hand across his eyes, as if to shut out the vision of a world where there was no Marion. He replaced it with a world where constant fear of becoming grist for some politician's publicity ground all research to a halt. He had quite forgotten that Joey was sitting across the room, and could follow at least the somatics of his thought.

Consciously he shoved the problem into the background, and made himself concentrate on the words of the student's paper before him. The words leaped into startling clarity, for they were a reflection of his own train of thought.

". . . *it becomes apparent then that just as physical science varies its techniques from one material to the next to gain maximum result, psychology must obtain an equal willingness to become flexible. I suggest that objective physical science methodology will never permit us to* know *a man; that such methodology limits us merely to knowing* about *a man. I suggest that an entirely new science, perhaps through somatics and methodology derived therefrom, must be our approach.*"

Dr. Martin shoved the paper away from him. Must warn that student. His entire train of thought was a violation of orthodox psychology. Ames would crucify the boy if he ever saw this paper. Did he dare warn the boy? Students show so little caution or ethics. He could hear him now down at the milkshake hangout.

"Martin told me to soft-pedal my thinking if I wanted to get a grade."

And the answering chorus from all around the room, the Tannenbaum chant:

"Oh, Steiffel U will stifle you,
We all must think as granddads do!"

Best just to give the student a failing grade on the paper, and let him draw his own conclusion. Got to be orthodox.

With his thumb and fingers he pulled the flesh of his forehead into a

heavy crease, grinding it between his fingers, taking pleasure that the pain of the flesh lessened the pain of his spirit. If only the kid had never shown up here!

His thought stream was interrupted in Joey's mind by the scene now taking place in the waiting room. Dr. Ames had taken a chair beside Joey's mother.

"Oh no, no, no, no, Mrs. Carter," he was saying consolingly. "Don't be so frightened. There's absolutely nothing wrong with your boy. Nothing at all—yet. I've never tested a more average boy."

Characteristically, he had overlooked the most vital point, a point also forgotten by Martin when he was thinking of the proper answers for Joey to give—that no boy can possibly be as average as Joey had graded. It never occurred to him that mean average is a statistical concept in psychology, never to be found in one individual.

"Notice I said 'yet,' Mrs. Carter," Ames said heavily. "He's an only child, isn't he?"

"Yes," Joey's mother barely breathed the word. Her fear had not abated. She knew that doctors sometimes did not tell all the truth. In the soap operas they always started out comfortingly, and only gradually let you know the terrible truth.

"I thought so," Ames said with finality. "And as with many one-child families, you've spoiled him. Spoiled him so dreadfully that now you must take stern measures."

"He's all I've got, Doctor," she said hesitantly.

"All the more reason why you want him to grow up into a strong, solid man. A man such as your husband, for example. A child is a peculiar little entity, Mrs. Carter. The more attention you give him, the more he wants."

He continued the development of his theme inexorably.

"Their bodies can be little, but their egos can be enormous. They learn little tricks for getting attention. And then they add to these with others. They're insatiable little monsters. They never get enough. Once they get you under their thumb, they'll ride you to death. They'll try anything, anything at all to get special attention, constant attention. That's what has happened to your Joey."

"I'm not sure I understand, Doctor."

"Well, Mrs. Carter, to put it bluntly, Joey has been pretending, telling lies, deliberately keeping you worried and fearful so that you will give him more attention. He hasn't been able to fool his father so well, so in line with Oedipus Complex, he set about to win you away from his father, to come between you. Your husband is a fine man, a good worker;

but your son wants to make you turn against your husband so he will get all of your attention."

He was enjoying the development of his logic, sparing no impact upon her.

"And it could be bad for the boy. Too much attention is like too much candy. It makes them sick." He pulled an ancient trick upon her, deliberately confusing her to impress her with the gravity, and his knowledge. "If this continues, the boy could easily become a catatonic schizophrenic!"

Joey's mother shrank back, her eyes opening wide. The horror of the unknown was worse than the reality might be.

"What is that, Doctor?"

The doctor, gratified by her reaction, pulled another ancient one.

"Well . . . er . . . without the proper background . . . er . . . well, in layman's language, Mrs Carter, we might roughly define it as an incurable form of insanity."

"Oh no, no! Not my Joey!"

The doctor leaned back in his chair. In this changing world of thought anarchy, it was good to see there were some who still retained the proper respect, placed the proper value upon the words of a man of science. These flip kids he got in his classes these days; this younger generation! Without respect, that flip kid he'd had to get expelled.

"Just give us the facts, Doctor, and let us draw our own conclusions. Yours haven't worked so well."

Yes, it was gratifying to see there were still some who recognized a man of position.

"But you can prevent it, Mrs. Carter." He leaned forward again. "Joey is eight, now. No longer a baby. It is time he began to be a little man. He plays hooky from school, says the teachers don't like him. Why, Mrs. Carter, when I was eight, I got up before daylight, did my farm chores without complaint, and walked two miles through the snow for the wonderful privilege of going to school!

"Now here is what you must do. You must regard this just as you would a medical prescription; with full knowledge of the penalty if you do not use the prescription: You must stop mothering him. Stop catering to him. Pay no attention to his tricks. Let his father take over, Mrs. Carter. The boy needs a strong man's hand.

"He must be forced to play with the other boys. A black eye never hurt a boy, now and then, a real boy. Your boy must get in there and scrap it

out with the rest of them, gain his place among them, just as he will have to scrap later to gain his place in society."

A sigh, almost a sob, escaped her. A doctor knows. And this doctor *teaches* doctors. Relief from tension, fear of the terrible words the doctor had said; and then a growing anger, anger at herself, anger at Joey. He had tricked her. Her son had lied to her, betrayed her love, pretended all sorts of terrible things just to worry her. She stood up suddenly, her face white with grief-rage.

"Thank you, Doctor. Thank you so much. I'm sorry we took up your time." Her humiliation was complete.

"No thanks needed, Mrs. Carter. Glad to help. We've caught it in time. If it had been allowed to go on a little longer—"

He left the phrase hanging in the air, ominously. He patted her arm in a fatherly fashion, and turned absently away, dismissing her.

Joey saw her open the door into the room where he was sitting.

"Come, Joey," she said firmly.

Dr. Martin did not look up from the papers he was now grading with furious speed, furious intensity, slashing angrily with his blue pencil at any thought variant from the orthodox. But even while he checked, circled, questioned, the thought crept into his mind.

"I could write an anonymous letter to Dr. Billings of—yes, that's the thing to do. It's out of my hands then. If Billings chooses to ignore the follow-up, that's his business."

Joey followed his mother out of the room and down the hall. She walked ahead of him, rapidly, her eyes blazing with anger and humiliation, not caring whether he followed her or not.

In one corner of the schoolyard, the boys were playing ball. Joey knew they saw him coming down the sidewalk, alone, but they pointedly paid no attention to him.

He did not try to join them. Even though they were not looking at him, he could hear the hated refrain singing through their minds.

Crazy Joe
Such a schmo!
Hope he falls
And breaks his toe!

It was simply their resentment because he was different. Their unconscious wish that he stumble and fall now and then, as they did. He realized that he must learn to do this. Then he shrugged. No, if he carried out his plan, it wouldn't matter.

He walked on down past the fence of the play yard. The boys were concentrating on their ball game.

Without a warning a warmth suffused him, singing sympathy, hope, joy. He stopped, looked about him, and saw no one. Yet the somatic feeling had been near—so very near.

Then he saw it. A dirty, lop-eared dog looking at him quizzically from under a shrub near the playground gate. He thought at the dog, and saw its head come up. They stood and looked at one another, each letting the warmth, the tenderness, affection wash over them. So lonely. Each of them had been so lonely.

Joey knelt down and began to whisper.

"My mother is mad at me right now. So I can't take you home."

The dog cocked his head to one side and looked at him.

"But I'll get food for you," Joey promised. "You can sleep under our back steps and nobody will know if you just keep out of sight."

The dog licked a pink tongue at his face. Joey nuzzled his face in the dirty hair of the dog's neck.

"I was going to die," he whispered. "I was going to die just as soon as my mother got over being mad at me. I was going to wait until then, because I didn't want her to blame herself later. I can do it, you know. I can stop my blood from moving, or my heart from beating; there's a hundred ways. But maybe I won't need to do it now. I won't need to die until you do. And that will be a long time; a long, long time. You see, if I can stop your heart from beating, I can keep it beating, too."

The dog wagged his stumpy tail; and then stiffened in Joey's arms.

"Yes," Joey thought quickly at the dog. "Yes, I know the kids are watching us now. Pretend like—" the thought hurt him, but he said it anyway. "Pretend you don't like me, that you hate me."

Slowly the dog backed away from Joey.

"Here, doggy, doggy!" Joey called.

The dog gave a wavering wag of his stump tail.

"No, no!" Joey thought desperately. "No, don't let them know. They'll want to hurt you if they find out. They're— People are like that."

The dog backed away another step and lifted his lip in a snarl.

"Yah! Yah! Yah!" the kids called out. "Joey can't even make friends with a dog!"

They were standing in a semicircle about him now. Joey stood up and faced them then for a moment. There was no anger or resentment in his face. There never would be now. One just shouldn't get angry at blind and helpless things.

Without a word he started walking down the street, away from them. The dog crouched far back in the corner under the shrub.

"Yah! Yah! Crazy Joey!" the kids called out again.

Joey did not look back. They couldn't see. They couldn't hear. They couldn't know. He felt a rush of pity.

The kids went back to their play, arguing loudly about who was at bat.

The dog waited until their attention was fully on the game again. Then he crept out from under the bush, and started ambling aimlessly down the street in the direction Joey had gone, trotting awkwardly on the bias as some dogs do.

He did not need to sniff for tracks. He knew.

Among the several remarkable faculties that come under the general heading of ESP, I find that the idea of telepathy appeals strongly to me, but its persistent companion, precognition, is a much less welcome thought.

Perhaps, to some, the ability to look into the future may seem attractive. To me, the implications are too disturbing; I prefer to believe that I have some degree of personal control over my own future actions.

This problem of predestination vs. *free will has of course long been a subject of philosophical and theological debate. Recently—ever since the concept of time as a possible fourth dimension began to be bandied about—the mathematicians have gotten into the act, and have come up with some reassuring hypotheses derived from what is known as "probability mathematics."*

The theme is handled here, with unusual dramatic impact, by a young West Coast writer of exceptional promise.

The Golden Man *by Phillip K. Dick*

"Is it always hot like this?" the salesman demanded. He addressed everybody at the lunch counter and in the shabby booths against the wall. A middle-aged fat man with a good-natured smile, rumpled gray suit, sweat-stained white shirt, a drooping bow tie, and a panama hat.

"Only in the summer," the waitress answered.

None of the others stirred. The teen-age boy and girl in one of the booths, eyes fixed intently on each other. Two workmen, sleeves rolled up, arms dark and hairy, eating bean soup and rolls. A lean, weathered farmer. An elderly businessman in a blue-serge suit, vest and pocket watch. A dark rat-faced cab driver drinking coffee. A tired woman who had come in to get off her feet and put down her bundles.

The salesman got out a package of cigarettes. He glanced curiously around the dingy café, lit up, leaned his arms on the counter, and said to the man next to him, "What's the name of this town?"

The man grunted. "Walnut Creek."

The salesman sipped at his Coke for a while, his cigarette held loosely between his plump white fingers. Presently he reached in his coat and

brought out a leather wallet. For a long time he leafed thoughtfully through cards and papers, bits of notes, ticket stubs, endless odds and ends, soiled fragments—and finally a photograph.

He grinned at the photograph, and then began to chuckle, a low moist rasp. "Look at this," he said to the man beside him.

The man went on reading his newspaper.

"Hey, look at this." The salesman nudged him with his elbow and pushed the photograph at him. "How's that strike you?"

Annoyed, the man glanced briefly at the photograph. It showed a nude woman, from the waist up. Perhaps thirty-five years old. Face turned away. Body white and flabby. With eight breasts.

"Ever seen anything like that?" the salesman chuckled, his little red eyes dancing. His face broke into lewd smiles and again he nudged the man.

"I've seen that before." Disgusted, the man resumed reading his newspaper.

The salesman noticed the lean old farmer was looking at the picture. He passed it genially over to him. "How's that strike you, Pop? Pretty good stuff, eh?"

The farmer examined the picture solemnly. He turned it over, studied the creased back, took a second look at the front, then tossed it to the salesman. It slid from the counter, turned over a couple of times, and fell to the floor face up.

The salesman picked it up and brushed it off. Carefully, almost tenderly, he restored it to his wallet. The waitress' eyes flickered as she caught a glimpse of it.

"Damn nice," the salesman observed, with a wink. "Wouldn't you say so?"

The waitress shrugged indifferently. "I don't know. I saw a lot of them around Denver. A whole colony."

"That's where this was taken. Denver DCA Camp."

"Any still alive?" the farmer asked.

The salesman laughed harshly. "You kidding?" He made a short, sharp swipe with his hand. "Not any more."

They were all listening. Even the high-school kids in the booth had stopped holding hands and were sitting up straight, eyes wide with fascination.

"Saw a funny kind down near San Diego," the farmer said. "Last year, some time. Had wings like a bat. Skin, not feathers. Skin and bone wings."

The rat-eyed taxi driver chimed in. "That's nothing. There was a two-headed one in Detroit. I saw it on exhibit."

"Was it alive?" the waitress asked.

"No. They'd already euthed it."

"In sociology," the high-school boy spoke up, "we saw tapes of a whole lot of them. The winged kind from down south, the big-headed one they found in Germany, an awful-looking one with sort of cones, like an insect. And—"

"The worst of all," the elderly businessman stated, "are those English ones. That hid out in the coal mines. The ones they didn't find until last year." He shook his head. "Forty years, down there in the mines, breeding and developing. Almost a hundred of them. Survivors from a group that went underground during the war."

"They just found a new kind in Sweden," the waitress said. "I was reading about it. Controls minds at a distance, they said. Only a couple of them. The DCA got there plenty fast."

"That's a variation of the New Zealand type," one of the workmen said. "It reads minds."

"Reading and controlling are two different things," the businessman said. "When I hear something like that I'm plenty glad there's the DCA."

"There was a type they found right after the war," the farmer said. "In Siberia. Had the ability to control objects. Psychokinetic ability. The Soviet DCA got it right away. Nobody remembers that any more."

"I remember that," the businessman said. "I was just a kid, then. I remember because that was the first deeve I ever heard of. My father called me into the living room and told me and my brothers and sisters. We were still rebuilding the house. That was in the days when the DCA inspected everyone and stamped their arms." He held up his thin, gnarled wrist. "I was stamped there, sixty years ago."

"Now they just have the birth inspection," the waitress said. She shivered. "There was one in San Francisco this month. First in over a year. They thought it was over, around here."

"It's been dwindling," the taxi driver said. "Frisco wasn't too bad hit. Not like some. Not like Detroit."

"They still get ten or fifteen a year in Detroit," the high-school boy said. "All around there. Lots of pools still left. People go into them, in spite of the robot signs."

"What kind was this one?" the salesman asked. "The one they found in San Francisco."

The waitress gestured. "Common type. The kind with no toes. Bent over. Big eyes."

"The nocturnal type," the salesman said.

"The mother had hid it. They say it was three years old. She got the doctor to forge the DCA chit. Old friend of the family."

The salesman had finished his Coke. He sat playing idly with his cigarette, listening to the hum of talk he had set into motion. The high-school boy was leaning excitedly toward the girl across from him, impressing her with his fund of knowledge. The lean farmer and the businessman were huddled together, remembering the old days, the last years of the war, before the first Ten-Year Reconstruction Plan. The taxi driver and the two workmen were swapping yarns about their own experiences.

The salesman caught the waitress' attention. "I guess," he said thoughtfully, "that one in Frisco caused quite a stir. Something like that happening so close."

"Yeah," the waitress murmured.

"This side of the bay wasn't really hit," the salesman continued. "You never get any of them over here."

"No." The waitress moved abruptly. "None in this area. Ever." She scooped up dirty dishes from the counter and headed toward the back.

"Never?" the salesman asked, surprised. "You've never had any deeves on this side of the bay?"

"No. None." She disappeared into the back, where the fry cook stood by his burners, white apron and tattooed wrists. Her voice was a little too loud, a little too harsh and strained. It made the farmer pause suddenly and glance up.

Silence dropped like a curtain. All sound cut off instantly. They were all gazing down at their food, suddenly tense and ominous.

"None around here," the taxi driver said, loudly and clearly, to no one in particular. "None ever."

"Sure," the salesman agreed genially. "I was only—"

"Make sure you get that straight," one of the workmen said.

The salesman blinked. "Sure, buddy. Sure." He fumbled nervously in his pocket. A quarter and a dime jangled to the floor and he hurriedly scooped them up. "No offense."

For a moment there was silence. Then the high-school boy spoke up, aware for the first time that nobody was saying anything. "I heard something," he began eagerly, voice full of importance. "Somebody said they saw something up by the Johnson farm that looked like it was one of those—"

"*Shut up,*" the businessman said, without turning his head.

Scarlet-faced, the boy sagged in his seat. His voice wavered and broke off. He peered hastily down at his hands and swallowed unhappily.

The salesman paid the waitress for his Coke. "What's the quickest road to Frisco?" he began. But the waitress had already turned her back.

The people at the counter were immersed in their food. None of them looked up. They ate in frozen silence. Hostile, unfriendly faces, intent on their food.

The salesman picked up his bulging brief case, pushed open the screen door, and stepped out into the blazing sunlight. He moved toward his battered 1978 Buick, parked a few meters up. A blue-shirted traffic cop was standing in the shade of an awning, talking languidly to a young woman in a yellow silk dress that clung moistly to her slim body.

The salesman paused a moment before he got into his car. He waved his hand and hailed the policeman. "Say, you know this town pretty good?"

The policeman eyed the salesman's rumpled gray suit, bow tie, his sweat-stained shirt. The out-of-state license. "What do you want?"

"I'm looking for the Johnson farm," the salesman said. "Here to see him about some litigation." He moved toward the policeman, a small white card between his fingers. "I'm his attorney—from the New York Guild. Can you tell me how to get out there? I haven't been through here in a couple of years."

Nat Johnson gazed up at the noonday sun and saw that it was good. He sat sprawled out on the bottom step of the porch, a pipe between his yellowed teeth, a lithe, wiry man in red-checkered shirt and canvas jeans, powerful hands, iron-gray hair that was still thick despite sixty-five years of active life.

He was watching the children play. Jean rushed laughing in front of him, bosom heaving under her sweat shirt, black hair streaming behind her. She was sixteen, bright-eyed, legs strong and straight, slim young body bent slightly forward with the weight of the two horseshoes. After her scampered Dave, fourteen, white teeth and black hair, a handsome boy, a son to be proud of. Dave caught up with his sister, passed her, and reached the far peg. He stood waiting, legs apart, hands on his hips, his two horseshoes gripped easily. Gasping, Jean hurried toward him.

"Go ahead!" Dave shouted. "You shoot first. I'm waiting for you."

"So you can knock them away?"

"So I can knock them closer."

Jean tossed down one horseshoe and gripped the other with both

hands, eyes on the distant peg. Her lithe body bent, one leg slid back, her spine arched. She took careful aim, closed one eye, and then expertly tossed the shoe. With a clang the shoe struck the distant peg, circled briefly around it, then bounced off again and rolled to one side. A cloud of dust rolled up.

"Not bad," Nat Johnson admitted, from his step. "Too hard, though. Take it easy." His chest swelled with pride as the girl's glistening, healthy body took aim and again threw. Two powerful, handsome children, almost ripe, on the verge of adulthood. Playing together in the hot sun.

And there was Cris.

Cris stood by the porch, arms folded. He wasn't playing. He was watching. He had stood there since Dave and Jean had begun playing, the same half-intent, half-remote expression on his finely cut face. As if he were seeing past them, beyond the two of them. Beyond the field, the barn, the creek bed, the rows of cedars.

"Come on, Cris!" Jean called, as she and Dave moved across the field to collect their horseshoes. "Don't you want to play?"

No, Cris didn't want to play. He never played. He was off in a world of his own, a world into which none of them could come. He never joined in anything, games or chores or family activities. He was by himself always. Remote, detached, aloof. Seeing past everyone and everything—that is, until all at once something clicked and he momentarily rephased, re-entered their world briefly.

Nat Johnson reached out and knocked his pipe against the step. He refilled it from his leather tobacco pouch, his eyes on his eldest son. Cris was now moving into life. Heading out onto the field. He walked slowly, arms folded calmly, as if he had for the moment descended from his own world into theirs. Jean didn't see him; she had turned her back and was getting ready to pitch.

"Hey," Dave said, startled. "Here's Cris."

Cris reached his sister, stopped, and held out his hand. A great dignified figure, calm and impassive. Uncertainly, Jean gave him one of the horseshoes. "You want this? You want to play?"

Cris said nothing. He bent slightly, a supple arc of his incredibly graceful body, then moved his arm in a blur of speed. The shoe sailed, struck the far peg, and dizzily spun around it. Ringer.

The corners of Dave's mouth turned down. "What a lousy darn thing."

"Cris," Jean reproved, "you don't play fair."

No, Cris didn't play fair. He had watched half an hour—then come out and thrown once. One perfect toss, one dead ringer.

"He never makes a mistake," Dave complained.

Cris stood, face blank. A golden statue in the midday sun. Golden hair, skin, a light down of gold fuzz on his bare arms and legs—

Abruptly he stiffened. Nat sat up, startled. "What is it?" he barked.

Cris turned in a quick circle, magnificent body alert. "Cris!" Jean demanded. "What—"

Cris shot forward. Like a released energy beam he bounded across the field, over the fence, into the barn and out the other side. His flying figure seemed to skim over the dry grass as he descended into the barren creek bed, between the cedars. A momentary flash of gold—and he was gone. Vanished. There was no sound. No motion. He had utterly melted into the scenery.

"What was it this time?" Jean asked wearily. She came over to her father and threw herself down in the shade. Sweat glowed on her smooth neck and upper lip; her sweat shirt was streaked and damp. "What did he see?"

"He was after something," Dave stated, coming up.

Nat grunted. "Maybe. There's no telling."

"I guess I better tell Mom not to set a place for him," Jean said. "He probably won't be back."

Anger and futility descended over Nat Johnson. No, he wouldn't be back. Not for dinner and probably not the next day—or the one after that. He'd be gone God only knew how long. Or where. Or why. Off by himself, alone some place. "If I thought there was any use," Nat began, "I'd send you two after him. But there's no—"

He broke off. A car was coming up the dirt road toward the farmhouse. A dusty, battered old Buick. Behind the wheel sat a plump red-faced man in a gray suit, who waved cheerfully at them as the car sputtered to a stop and the motor died into silence.

"Afternoon," the man nodded, as he climbed out of the car. He tipped his hat pleasantly. He was middle-aged, genial-looking, perspiring freely as he crossed the dry ground toward the porch. "Maybe you folks can help me."

"What do you want?" Nat Johnson demanded hoarsely. He was frightened. He watched the creek bed out of the corner of his eye, praying silently. God, if only he *stayed* away. Jean was breathing quickly, sharp little gasps. She was terrified. Dave's face was expressionless, but all color had drained from it. "Who are you?" Nat demanded.

"Name's Baines. George Baines." The man held out his hand but Johnson ignored it. "Maybe you've heard of me. I own the Pacifica Development Corporation. We built all those little bomb-proof houses just

outside town. Those little round ones you see as you come up the main highway from Lafayette."

"What do you want?" Johnson held his hands steady with an effort. He'd never heard of the man, although he'd noticed the housing tract. It couldn't be missed—a great ant heap of ugly pillboxes straddling the highway. Baines looked like the kind of man who'd own them. But what did he want here?

"I've bought some land up this way," Baines was explaining. He rattled a sheaf of crisp papers. "This is the deed, but I'll be damned if I can find it." He grinned good-naturedly. "I know it's around this way, some place, this side of the state road. According to the clerk at the County Recorder's Office, a mile or so this side of that hill over there. But I'm no damn good at reading maps."

"It isn't around here," Dave broke in. "There's only farms around here. Nothing for sale."

"This is a farm, son," Baines said genially. "I bought it for myself and my missus. So we could settle down." He wrinkled his pug nose. "Don't get the wrong idea—I'm not putting up any tracts around here. This is strictly for myself. An old farmhouse, twenty acres, a pump and a few oak trees—"

"Let me see the deed." Johnson grabbed the sheaf of papers, and while Baines blinked in astonishment, he leafed rapidly through them. His face hardened and he handed them back. "What are you up to? This deed is for a parcel fifty miles from here."

"Fifty miles!" Baines was dumfounded. "No kidding? But the clerk told me—"

Johnson was on his feet. He towered over the fat man. He was in top-notch physical shape—and he was plenty damn suspicious. "Clerk, hell. You get back into your car and drive out of here. I don't know what you're after, or what you're here for, but I want you off my land."

In Johnson's massive fist something sparkled. A metal tube that gleamed ominously in the midday sunlight. Baines saw it—and gulped. "No offense, mister." He backed nervously away. "You folks sure are touchy. Take it easy, will you?"

Johnson said nothing. He gripped the lash-tube tighter and waited for the fat man to leave.

But Baines lingered. "Look, buddy. I've been driving around this furnace five hours, looking for my damn place. Any objection to my using your—facilities?"

Johnson eyed him with suspicion. Gradually the suspicion turned to disgust. He shrugged. "Dave, show him where the bathroom is."

"Thanks." Baines grinned thankfully. "And if it wouldn't be too much trouble, maybe a glass of water. I'd be glad to pay you for it." He chuckled knowingly. "Never let the city people get away with anything, eh?"

"Christ." Johnson turned away in revulsion as the fat man lumbered after his son, into the house.

"Dad," Jean whispered. As soon as Baines was inside she hurried up onto the porch, eyes wide with fear. "Dad, do you think he—"

Johnson put his arm around her. "Just hold on tight. He'll be gone, soon."

The girl's dark eyes flashed with mute terror. "Every time the man from the water company, or the tax collector, some tramp, children, *anybody* come around, I get a terrible stab of pain—here." She clutched at her heart, hand against her breasts. "It's been that way eighteen years. How much longer can we keep it going? *How long?*"

The man named Baines emerged gratefully from the bathroom. Dave Johnson stood silently by the door, body rigid, youthful face stony.

"Thanks, son," Baines sighed. "Now where can I get a glass of cold water?" He smacked his thick lips in anticipation. "After you've been driving around the sticks looking for a dump some red-hot real-estate agent stuck you with—"

Dave headed into the kitchen. "Mom, this man wants a drink of water. Dad said he could have it."

Dave had turned his back. Baines caught a brief glimpse of the mother, gray-haired, small, moving toward the sink with a glass, face withered and drawn, without expression.

Then Baines hurried from the room, down a hall. He passed through a bedroom, pulled a door open, found himself facing a closet. He turned and raced back, through the living room, into a dining room, then another bedroom. In a brief instant he had gone through the whole house.

He peered out a window. The back yard. Remains of a rusting truck. Entrance of an underground bomb shelter. Tin cans. Chickens scratching around. A dog, asleep under a shed. A couple of old auto tires.

He found a door leading out. Soundlessly, he tore the door open and stepped outside. No one was in sight. There was a barn, a leaning, ancient wood structure. Cedar trees beyond, a creek of some kind. What had once been an outhouse.

Baines moved cautiously around the side of the house. He had perhaps thirty seconds. He had left the door of the bathroom closed; the boy would think he had gone back in there. Baines looked into the house through a window. A large closet, filled with old clothing, boxes and bundles of magazines.

He turned and started back. He reached the corner of the house and started around it.

Nat Johnson's gaunt shape loomed up and blocked his way. "All right, Baines. You asked for it."

A pink flash blossomed. It shut out the sunlight in a single blinding burst. Baines leaped back and clawed at his coat pocket. The edge of the flash caught him and he half-fell, stunned by the force. His suit-shield sucked in the energy and discharged it, but the power rattled his teeth and for a moment he jerked like a puppet on a string. Darkness ebbed around him. He could feel the mesh of the shield glow white, as it absorbed the energy and fought to control it.

His own tube came out—and Johnson had no shield. "You're under arrest," Baines muttered grimly. "Put down your tube and your hands up. And call your family." He made a motion with the tube. "Come on, Johnson. Make it snappy."

The lash-tube wavered and then slipped from Johnson's fingers. "You're still alive." Dawning horror crept across his face. "Then you must be—"

Dave and Jean appeared. *"Dad!"*

"Come over here," Baines ordered. "Where's your mother?"

Dave jerked his head numbly. "Inside."

"Get her and bring her here."

"You're DCA," Nat Johnson whispered.

Baines didn't answer. He was doing something with his neck, pulling at the flabby flesh. The wiring of a contact mike glittered as he slipped it from a fold between two chins and into his pocket. From the dirt road came the sound of motors, sleek purrs that rapidly grew louder. Two teardrops of black metal came gliding up and parked beside the house. Men swarmed out, in the dark gray-green of the Government Civil Police. In the sky swarms of black dots were descending, clouds of ugly flies that darkened the sun as they spilled out men and equipment. The men drifted slowly down.

"He's not here," Baines said, as the first man reached him. "He got away. Inform Wisdom back at the lab."

"We've got this section blocked off."

Baines turned to Nat Johnson, who stood in dazed silence, uncomprehending, his son and daughter beside him. "How did he know we were coming?" Baines demanded.

"I don't know," Johnson muttered. "He just—knew."

"A telepath?"

"I don't know."

Baines shrugged. "We'll know, soon. A clamp is out, all around here. He can't get past, no matter what the hell he can do. Unless he can dematerialize himself."

"What'll you do with him when you—if you catch him?" Jean asked huskily.

"Study him."

"And then kill him?"

"That depends on the lab evaluation. If you could give me more to work on, I could predict better."

"We can't tell you anything. We don't know anything more." The girl's voice rose with desperation. "He doesn't talk."

Baines jumped. *"What?"*

"He doesn't talk. He never talked to us. Ever."

"How old is he?"

"Eighteen."

"No communication." Baines was sweating. "In eighteen years there hasn't been any semantic bridge between you? Does he have *any* contact? Signs? Codes?"

"He—ignores us. He eats here, stays with us. Sometimes he plays when we play. Or sits with us. He's gone days on end. We've never been able to find out what he's doing—or where. He sleeps in the barn—by himself."

"Is he really gold-colored?"

"Yes."

"Skin, as well as hair?"

"Skin, eyes, hair, nails. Everything."

"And he's large? Well-formed?"

It was a moment before the girl answered. A strange emotion stirred her drawn features, a momentary glow. "He's incredibly beautiful. A god. A god come down to earth." Her lips twisted. "You won't find him. He can do things. Things you have no comprehension of. Powers so far beyond your limited—"

"You don't think we'll get him?" Baines frowned. "More teams are landing all the time. You've never seen an Agency clamp in operation. We've had sixty years to work out all the bugs. If he gets away it'll be the first time—"

Baines broke off abruptly. Three men were quickly approaching the porch. Two green-clad Civil Police. And a third man between them. A man who moved silently, lithely, a faintly luminous shape that towered above them.

"Cris!" Jean screamed.

"We got him," one of the police said.

Baines fingered his lash-tube uneasily. "Where? How?"

"He gave himself up," the policeman answered, voice full of awe. "He came to us voluntarily. Look at him. He's like a metal statue. Like some sort of—god."

The golden figure halted for a moment beside Jean. Then it turned slowly, calmly, to face Baines.

"Cris!" Jean shrieked. *"Why did you come back?"*

The same thought was eating at Baines, too. He shoved it aside—for the time being. "Is the jet out front?" he demanded quickly.

"Ready to go," one of the CP answered.

"Fine." Baines strode past them, down the steps and onto the dirt field. "Let's go. I want him taken directly to the lab." For a moment he studied the massive figure who stood calmly between the two Civil Policemen. Beside him, they seemed to have shrunk, become ungainly and repellent. Like dwarfs . . . What had Jean said? *A god come to earth.* Baines broke angrily away. "Come on," he muttered brusquely. "This one may be tough; we've never run up against one like it before. We don't know what the hell it can do."

The chamber was empty, except for the seated figure. Four bare walls, floor and ceiling. A steady glare of white light relentlessly etched every corner of the chamber. Near the top of the far wall ran a narrow slot, the view windows through which the interior of the chamber was scanned.

The seated figure was quiet. He hadn't moved since the chamber locks had slid into place, since the heavy bolts had fallen from outside and the rows of bright-faced technicians had taken their places at the view windows. He gazed down at the floor, bent forward, hands clasped together, face calm, almost expressionless. In four hours he hadn't moved a muscle.

"Well?" Baines said. "What have you learned?"

Wisdom grunted sourly. "Not much. If we don't have him doped out in forty-eight hours we'll go ahead with the euth. We can't take any chances."

"You're thinking about the Tunis type," Baines said. He was, too. They had found ten of them, living in the ruins of the abandoned North African town. Their survival method was simple. They killed and absorbed other life forms, then imitated them and took their places. Chameleons, they were called. It had cost sixty lives before the last one was destroyed. Sixty top-level experts, highly trained DCA men.

"Any clues?" Baines asked.

"He's different as hell. This is going to be tough." Wisdom thumbed a pile of tape-spools. "This is the complete report, all the material we got

from Johnson and his family. We pumped them with the psych-wash, then let them go home. Eighteen years—and no semantic bridge. Yet, he looks fully developed. Mature at thirteen—a shorter, faster life cycle than ours. But why the mane? All the gold fuzz? Like a Roman monument that's been gilded."

"Has the report come in from the analysis room? You had a wave-shot taken, of course."

"His brain pattern has been fully scanned. But it takes time for them to plot it out. We're all running around like lunatics while he just sits there!" Wisdom poked a stubby finger at the window. "We caught him easily enough. He can't have *much,* can he? But I'd like to know what it is. Before we euth him."

"Maybe we should keep him alive until we know."

"Euth in forty-eight hours," Wisdom repeated stubbornly. "Whether we know or not. I don't like him. He gives me the creeps."

Wisdom stood chewing nervously on his cigar, a red-haired, beefy-faced man, thick and heavy-set, with a barrel chest and cold, shrewd eyes deep-set in his hard face. Ed Wisdom was Director of DCA's North American Branch. But right now he was worried. His tiny eyes darted back and forth, alarmed flickers of gray in his brutal, massive face.

"You think," Baines said slowly, "this is *it?*"

"I always think so," Wisdom snapped. "I have to think so."

"I mean—"

"I know what you mean." Wisdom paced back and forth, among the study tables, technicians at their benches, equipment and humming computers. Buzzing tape slots and research hookups. "This thing lived eighteen years with his family and *they* don't understand it. *They* don't know what it has. They know what it does, but not how."

"What does it do?"

"It knows things."

"What kind of things?"

Wisdom grabbed his lash-tube from his belt and tossed it on a table. "Here."

"What?"

"Here." Wisdom signaled, and a view window was slid back an inch. "Shoot him."

Baines blinked. "You said forty-eight hours."

With a curse, Wisdom snatched up the tube, aimed it through the window directly at the seated figure's back, and squeezed the trigger.

A blinding flash of pink. A cloud of energy blossomed in the center of the chamber. It sparkled, then died into dark ash.

"Good God!" Baines gasped. "You—"

He broke off. The figure was no longer sitting. As Wisdom fired, it had moved in a blur of speed, away from the blast, to the corner of the chamber. Now it was slowly coming back, face blank, still absorbed in thought.

"Fifth time," Wisdom said, as he put his tube away. "Last time Jamison and I fired together. Missed. He knew exactly when the bolts would hit. And where."

Baines and Wisdom looked at each other. Both of them were thinking the same thing. "But even reading minds wouldn't tell him where they were going to hit," Baines said. "When, maybe. But not where. Could you have called your own shots?"

"Not mine," Wisdom answered flatly. "I fired fast, damn near at random." He frowned. "*Random.* We'll have to make a test of this." He waved a group of technicians over. "Get a construction team up here. On the double." He grabbed paper and pen and began sketching.

While construction was going on, Baines met his fiancée in the lobby outside the lab, the great central lounge of the DCA Building.

"How's it coming?" she asked. Anita Ferris was tall and blonde, with blue eyes and a mature, carefully cultivated figure. An attractive, competent-looking woman in her late twenties. She wore a metal-foil dress and cape—with a red and black stripe on the sleeve, the emblem of the A-Class. Anita was Director of the Semantics Agency, a top-level government co-ordinator. "Anything of interest, this time?"

"Plenty." Baines guided her from the lobby into the dim recess of the bar. Music played softly in the background, a shifting variety of patterns formed mathematically. Dim shapes moved expertly through the gloom, from table to table. Silent, efficient robot waiters.

As Anita sipped her Tom Collins, Baines outlined what they had found.

"What are the chances," Anita asked slowly, "that he's built up some kind of deflection cone? There was one kind that warped their environment by direct mental effort. No tools. Direct mind to matter."

"Psychokinetics?" Baines drummed restlessly on the table top. "I doubt it. The thing has ability to predict, not to control. He can't stop the beams, but he can sure as hell get out of the way."

"Does he jump between the molecules?"

Baines wasn't amused. "This is serious. We've handled these things sixty years—longer than you and I have been around added together. Eighty-seven types of deviants have shown up, real mutants that could

reproduce themselves, not mere freaks. This is the eighty-eighth. We've been able to handle each of them in turn. But this—"

"Why are you so worried about this one?"

"First, it's eighteen years old. That in itself is incredible. Its family managed to hide it that long."

"Those women around Denver were older than that. Those ones with—"

"They were in a government camp. Somebody high up was toying with the idea of allowing them to breed. Some sort of industrial use. We withheld euth for years. But Cris Johnson stayed alive *outside our control.* Those things at Denver were under constant scrutiny."

"Maybe he's harmless. You always assume a deeve is a menace. He might even be beneficial. Somebody thought those women might work in. Maybe this thing has something that would advance the race."

"*Which* race? Not the human race. It's the old 'the operation was a success but the patient died' routine. If we introduce a mutant to keep us going it'll be mutants, not us, who'll inherit the earth. It'll be mutants surviving for their own sake. Don't think for a moment we can put padlocks on them and expect them to serve us. If they're really superior to Homo sapiens, they'll win out in even competition. To survive, we've got to cold-deck them right from the start."

"In other words, we'll know Homo superior when he comes—by definition. He'll be the one we won't be able to euth."

"That's about it," Baines answered. "Assuming there *is* a Homo superior. Maybe there's just Homo peculiar. Homo with an improved line."

"The Neanderthal probably thought the Cro-Magnon man had merely an improved line. A little more advanced ability to conjure up symbols and shape flint. From your description, this thing is more radical than a mere improvement."

"This thing," Baines said slowly, "has an ability to predict. So far, it's been able to stay alive. It's been able to cope with situations better than you or I could. How long do you think we'd stay alive in that chamber, with energy beams blazing down at us? In a sense it's got the ultimate survival ability. If it can always be accurate—"

A wall-speaker sounded. "Baines, you're wanted in the lab. Get the hell out of the bar and upramp."

Baines pushed back his chair and got to his feet. "Come along. You may be interested in seeing what Wisdom has got dreamed up."

A tight group of top-level DCA officials stood around in a circle, middle-aged, gray-haired, listening to a skinny youth in a white shirt and

rolled-up sleeves explaining an elaborate cube of metal and plastic that filled the center of the view platform. From it jutted an ugly array of tube snouts, gleaming muzzles that disappeared into an intricate maze of wiring.

"This," the youth was saying briskly, "is the first real test. It fires at random—as nearly random as we can make it, at least. Weighted balls are thrown up in an air stream, then dropped free to fall back and cut relays. They can fall in almost any pattern. The thing fires according to their pattern. Each drop produces a new configuration of timing and position. Ten tubes, in all. Each will be in constant motion."

"And *nobody* knows how they'll fire?" Anita asked.

"Nobody." Wisdom rubbed his thick hands together. "Mind-reading won't help him, not with this thing."

Anita moved over to the view windows, as the cube was rolled into place. She gasped. "Is that him?"

"What's wrong?" Baines asked.

Anita's cheeks were flushed. "Why, I expected a—a *thing*. My God, he's beautiful! Like a golden statue. Like a deity!"

Baines laughed. "He's eighteen years old, Anita. Too young for you."

The woman was still peering through the view window. "Look at him. Eighteen? I don't believe it."

Cris Johnson sat in the center of the chamber, on the floor. A posture of contemplation, head bowed, arms folded, legs tucked under him. In the stark glare of the overhead lights his powerful body glowed and rippled, a shimmering figure of downy gold.

"Pretty, isn't he?" Wisdom muttered. "All right. Start it going."

"You're going to *kill* him?" Anita demanded.

"We're going to try."

"But he's—" She broke off uncertainly. "He's not a monster. He's not like those others, those hideous things with two heads, or those insects. Or those awful things from Tunis."

"What is he, then?" Baines asked.

"I don't know. But you can't just *kill* him. It's terrible!"

The cube clicked into life. The muzzles jerked, silently altered position. Three retracted, disappeared into the body of the cube. Others came out. Quickly, efficiently, they moved into position—and abruptly, without warning, opened fire.

A staggering burst of energy fanned out, a complex pattern that altered each moment, different angles, different velocities, a bewildering blur that cracked from the windows down into the chamber.

The golden figure moved. He dodged back and forth, expertly avoid-

ing the bursts of energy that seared around him on all sides. Rolling clouds of ash obscured him; he was lost in a mist of crackling fire and ash.

"Stop it!" Anita shouted. "For God's sake, you'll destroy him!"

The chamber was an inferno of energy. The figure had completely disappeared. Wisdom waited a moment, then nodded to the technicians operating the cube. They touched guide buttons and the muzzles slowed and died. Some sank back into the cube. All became silent. The works of the cube ceased humming.

Cris Johnson was still alive. He emerged from the settling clouds of ash, blackened and singed. But unhurt. He had avoided each beam. He had weaved between them and among them as they came, a dancer leaping over glittering sword-points of pink fire. He had survived.

"No," Wisdom murmured, shaken and grim. "Not a telepath. Those were at random. No prearranged pattern."

The three of them looked at each other, dazed and frightened. Anita was trembling. Her face was pale and her blue eyes were wide. "What, then?" She whispered, "What is it? What does he have?"

"He's a good guesser," Wisdom suggested.

"He's not guessing," Baines answered. "Don't kid yourself. That's the whole point."

"No, he's not guessing." Wisdom nodded slowly. "He *knew*. He predicted each strike. I wonder . . . *Can* he err? *Can* he make a mistake?"

"We caught him," Baines pointed out.

"You said he came back voluntarily." There was a strange look on Wisdom's face. "Did he come back *after* the clamp was up?"

Baines jumped. "Yes, after."

"He couldn't have got through the clamp. So he came back." Wisdom grinned wryly. "The clamp must actually have been perfect. It was supposed to be."

"If there had been a single hole," Baines murmured, "he would have known it—gone through."

Wisdom ordered a group of armed guards over. "Get him out of there. To the euth stage."

Anita shrieked. "Wisdom, you can't—"

"He's too far ahead of us. We can't compete with him." Wisdom's eyes were bleak. "We can only guess what's going to happen. He *knows*. For him, it's a sure thing. I don't think it'll help him at euth, though. The whole stage is flooded simultaneously. Instantaneous gas, released throughout." He signaled impatiently to the guards. "Get going. Take him down right away. Don't waste any time."

"Can we?" Baines murmured thoughtfully.

The guards took up positions by one of the chamber locks. Cautiously, the tower control slid the lock back. The first two guards stepped cautiously in, lash-tubes ready.

Cris stood in the center of the chamber. His back was to them as they crept toward him. For a moment he was silent, utterly unmoving. The guards fanned out, as more of them entered the chamber. Then—

Anita screamed. Wisdom cursed. The golden figure spun and leaped forward, in a flashing blur of speed. Past the triple line of guards, through the lock and into the corridor.

"Get him!" Baines shouted.

Guards milled everywhere. Flashes of energy lit up the corridor, as the figure raced among them, up the ramp.

"No use," Wisdom said calmly. "We can't hit him." He touched a button, then another. "But maybe this will help."

"What—" Baines began. But the leaping figure shot abruptly at him, straight at him, and he dropped to one side. The figure flashed past. It ran effortlessly, face without expression, dodging and jumping as the energy beams seared around it.

For an instant the golden face loomed up before Baines. It passed and disappeared down a side corridor. Guards rushed after it, kneeling and firing, shouting orders excitedly. In the bowels of the building, heavy guns were rumbling up. Locks slid into place as escape corridors were systematically sealed off.

"Good God," Baines gasped, as he got to his feet. "Can't he do anything but run?"

"I gave orders," Wisdom said, "to have the building isolated. There's no way out. Nobody comes and nobody goes. He's loose here in the building—but he won't get out."

"If there's one exit overlooked, he'll know it," Anita pointed out shakily.

"We won't overlook any exit. We got him once; we'll get him again."

A messenger robot had come in. Now it presented its message respectfully to Wisdom. "From analysis, sir."

Wisdom tore the tape open. "Now we'll know how it thinks." His hands were shaking. "Maybe we can figure out its blind spot. It may be able to out-think us, but that doesn't mean it's invulnerable. It only predicts the future—it can't change it. If there's only death ahead, its ability won't. . ."

Wisdom's voice faded into silence. After a moment he passed the tape to Baines.

"I'll be down in the bar," Wisdom said. "Getting a good stiff drink." His face had turned lead-gray. "All I can say is *I hope to hell this isn't the race to come.*"

"What's the analysis?" Anita demanded impatiently, peering over Baines's shoulder. "How does it think?"

"It doesn't," Baines said, as he handed the tape back to his boss. "It doesn't think at all. Virtually no frontal lobe. It's not a human being—it doesn't use symbols. It's nothing but an animal."

"An animal," Wisdom said. "With a single highly developed faculty. Not a superior man. Not a man at all."

Up and down the corridors of the DCA Building, guards and equipment clanged. Loads of Civil Police were pouring into the building and taking up positions beside the guards. One by one, the corridors and rooms were being inspected and sealed off. Sooner or later the golden figure of Cris Johnson would be located and cornered.

"We were always afraid a mutant with superior intellectual powers would come along," Baines said reflectively. "A deeve who would be to us what we are to the great apes. Something with a bulging cranium, telepathic ability, a perfect semantic system, ultimate powers of symbolization and calculation. A development along our own path. A better human being."

"He acts by reflex," Anita said wonderingly. She had the analysis and was sitting at one of the desks studying it intently. "Reflex—like a lion. A golden lion." She pushed the tape aside, a strange expression on her face. "The lion god."

"Beast," Wisdom corrected tartly. "Blond beast, you mean."

"He runs fast," Baines said, "and that's all. No tools. He doesn't build anything or utilize anything outside himself. He just stands and waits for the right opportunity and then he runs like hell."

"This is worse than anything we've anticipated," Wisdom said. His beefy face was lead-gray. He sagged like an old man, his blunt hands trembling and uncertain. "To be replaced by an animal! Something that runs and hides. Something without a language!" He spat savagely. "That's why they weren't able to communicate with it. We wondered what kind of semantic system it had. It hasn't got any! No more ability to talk and think than a—dog."

"That means intelligence has failed," Baines went on huskily. "We're the last of our line—like the dinosaur. We've carried intelligence as far as it'll go. Too far, maybe. We've already got to the point where we know so much—think so much—we can't act."

"Men of thought," Anita said. "Not men of action. It's begun to have a paralyzing effect. But this thing—"

"This thing's faculty works better than ours ever did. We can recall past experiences, keep them in mind, learn from them. At best, we can make shrewd guesses about the future, from our memory of what's happened in the past. But we can't be certain. We have to speak of probabilities. Grays. Not blacks and whites. We're only guessing."

"Cris Johnson isn't guessing," Anita added.

"He can look ahead. See what's coming. He can—prethink. Let's call it that. He can see into the future. Probably he doesn't perceive it as the future."

"No," Anita said thoughtfully. "It would seem like the present. He has a broader present. But his present lies ahead, not back. Our present is related to the past. Only the past is certain, to us. To him, the future is certain. And he probably doesn't remember the past, any more than any animal remembers what's happened."

"As he develops," Baines said, "as his race evolves, it'll probably expand its ability to prethink. Instead of ten minutes, thirty minutes. Then an hour. A day. A year. Eventually they'll be able to keep ahead a whole lifetime. Each one of them will live in a solid, unchanging world. There'll be no variables, no uncertainty. No motion! They won't have anything to fear. Their world will be perfectly static, a solid block of matter."

"And when death comes," Anita said, "they'll accept it. There won't be any struggle; to them, it'll already have happened."

"*Already have happened,*" Baines repeated. "To Cris, our shots had already been fired." He laughed harshly. "Superior survival doesn't mean superior man. If there were another world-wide flood, only fish would survive. If there were another ice age, maybe nothing but polar bears would be left. When we opened the lock, he had already seen the men, seen exactly where they were standing and what they'd do. A neat faculty—but not a development of mind. A pure physical *sense.*"

"But if every exit is covered," Wisdom repeated, "he'll see he can't get out. He gave himself up before—he'll give himself up again." He shook his head. "An animal. Without language. Without tools."

"With his new sense," Baines said, "he doesn't need anything else." He examined his watch. "It's after two. Is the building completely sealed off?"

"You can't leave," Wisdom stated. "You'll have to stay here all night —or until we catch the bastard."

"I meant her." Baines indicated Anita. "She's supposed to be back at Semantics by seven in the morning."

Wisdom shrugged. "I have no control over her. If she wants, she can check out."

"I'll stay," Anita decided. "I want to be here when he—when he's destroyed. I'll sleep here." She hesitated. "Wisdom, isn't there some other way? If he's just an animal couldn't we—"

"A zoo?" Wisdom's voice rose in a frenzy of hysteria. "Keep it penned up in the zoo? Christ no! It's got to be killed!"

For a long time the great gleaming shape crouched in the darkness. He was in a store room. Boxes and cartons stretched out on all sides, heaped up in orderly rows, all neatly counted and marked. Silent and deserted.

But in a few moments people burst in and search the room. He could see this. He saw them in all parts of the room, clear and distinct, men with lash-tubes, grim-faced, stalking with murder in their eyes.

The sight was one of many. One of a multitude of clearly etched scenes lying tangent to his own. And to each was attached a further multitude of interlocking scenes, that finally grew hazier and dwindled away. A progressive vagueness, each syndrome less distinct.

But the immediate one, the scene that lay closest to him, was clearly visible. He could easily make out the sight of the armed men. Therefore it was necessary to be out of the room before they appeared.

The golden figure got calmly to its feet and moved to the door. The corridor was empty; he could see himself already outside, in the vacant, drumming hall of metal and recessed lights. He pushed the door boldly open and stepped out.

A lift blinked across the hall. He walked to the lift and entered it. In five minutes a group of guards would come running along and leap into the lift. By that time he would have left it and sent it back down. Now he pressed a button and rose to the next floor.

He stepped out into a deserted passage. No one was in sight. That didn't surprise him. He couldn't be surprised. The element didn't exist for him. The positions of things, the space relationships of all matter in the immediate future, were as certain for him as his own body. The only thing that was unknown was that which had already passed out of being. In a vague, dim fashion, he had occasionally wondered where things went after he had passed them.

He came to a small supply closet. It had just been searched. It would be half an hour before anyone opened it again. He had that long; he could see that far ahead. And then—

And then he would be able to see another area, a region farther be-

yond. He was always moving, advancing into new regions he had never seen before. A constantly unfolding panorama of sights and scenes, frozen landscapes spread out ahead. All objects were fixed. Pieces on a vast chessboard through which he moved, arms folded, face calm. A detached observer who saw objects that lay ahead of him as clearly as those under foot.

Right now, as he crouched in the small supply closet, he saw an unusually varied multitude of scenes for the next half hour. Much lay ahead. The half-hour was divided into an incredibly complex pattern of separate configurations. He had reached a critical region; he was about to move through worlds of intricate complexity.

He concentrated on a scene ten minutes away. It showed, like a three-dimensional still, a heavy gun at the end of the corridor, trained all the way to the far end. Men moved cautiously from door to door, checking each room again, as they had done repeatedly. At the end of the half-hour they had reached the supply closet. A scene showed them looking inside. By that time he was gone, of course. He wasn't in that scene. He had passed on to another.

The next scene showed an exit. Guards stood in a solid line. No way out. He was in that scene. Off to one side, in a niche just inside the door. The street outside was visible, stars, lights, outlines of passing cars and people.

In the next tableau he had gone back, away from the exit. There was no way out. In another tableau he saw himself at other exits, a legion of golden figures, duplicated again and again, as he explored regions ahead, one after another. But each exit was covered.

In one dim scene he saw himself lying charred and dead; he had tried to run through the line, out the exit.

But that scene was vague. One wavering, indistinct still out of many. The inflexible path along which he moved would not deviate in that direction. It would not turn him that way. The golden figure in that scene, the miniature doll in that room, was only distantly related to him. It was himself, but a faraway self. A self he would never meet. He forgot it and went on to examine the other tableau.

The myriad of tableaux that surrounded him were an elaborate maze, a web which he now considered bit by bit. He was looking down into a doll's house of infinite rooms, rooms without number, each with its furniture, its dolls, all rigid and unmoving. The same dolls and furniture were repeated in many. He, himself, appeared often. The two men on the platform. The woman. Again and again the same combinations turned

up; the play was redone frequently, the same actors and props moved around in all possible ways.

Before it was time to leave the supply closet, Cris Johnson had examined each of the rooms tangent to the one he now occupied. He had consulted each, considered its contents thoroughly.

He pushed the door open and stepped calmly out into the hall. He knew exactly where he was going. And what he had to do. Crouched in the stuffy closet, he had quietly and expertly examined each miniature of himself, observed which clearly etched configuration lay along his inflexible path, the one room of the doll house, the one set out of legions, toward which he was moving.

Anita slipped out of her metal-foil dress, hung it over a hanger, then unfastened her shoes and kicked them under the bed. She was just starting to unclip her bra when the door opened.

She gasped. Soundlessly, calmly, the great golden shape closed the door and bolted it after him.

Anita snatched up her lash-tube from the dressing table. Her hand shook; her whole body was trembling. "What do you want?" she demanded. Her fingers tightened convulsively around the tube. "I'll kill you."

The figure regarded her silently, arms folded. It was the first time she had seen Cris Johnson closely. The great dignified face, handsome and impassive. Broad shoulders. The golden mane of hair, golden skin, pelt of radiant fuzz—

"Why?" she demanded breathlessly. Her heart was pounding wildly. "What do you want?"

She could kill him easily. But the lash-tube wavered. Cris Johnson stood without fear; he wasn't at all afraid. Why not? Didn't he understand what it was? What the small metal tube could do to him?

"Of course," she said suddenly, in a choked whisper. "You can see ahead. You know I'm not going to kill you. Or you wouldn't have come here."

She flushed, terrified—and embarrassed. He knew exactly what she was going to do; he could see it as easily as she saw the walls of the room, the wall-bed with its covers folded neatly back, her clothes hanging in the closet, her purse and small things on the dressing table.

"All right." Anita backed away, then abruptly put the tube down on the dressing table. "I won't kill you. Why should I?" She fumbled in her purse and got out her cigarettes. Shakily, she lit up, her pulse racing. She was scared. And strangely fascinated. "Do you expect to stay here? It

won't do any good. They've come through the dorm twice, already. They'll be back."

Could he understand her? She saw nothing on his face, only blank dignity. God, he was huge! It wasn't possible he was only eighteen, a boy, a child. He looked more like some great golden god, come down to earth.

She shook the thought off savagely. He wasn't a god. He was a beast. *The blond beast,* come to take the place of man. To drive man from the earth.

Anita snatched up the lash-tube. "Get out of here! You're an animal! A big stupid animal! You can't even understand what I'm saying—you don't even have a language. You're not human."

Cris Johnson remained silent. As if he were waiting. Waiting for what? He showed no sign of fear or impatience, even though the corridor outside rang with the sound of men searching, metal against metal, guns and energy tubes being dragged around, shouts and dim rumbles as section after section of the building was searched and sealed off.

"They'll get you," Anita said. "You'll be trapped here. They'll be searching this wing any moment." She savagely stubbed out her cigarette. "For God's sake, what do you expect *me* to do?"

Cris moved toward her. Anita shrank back. His powerful hands caught hold of her and she gasped in sudden terror. For a moment she struggled blindly, desperately.

"Let go!" She broke away and leaped back from him. His face was expressionless. Calmly, he came toward her, an impassive god advancing to take her. "Get away!" She groped for the lash-tube, trying to get it up. But the tube slipped from her fingers and rolled onto the floor.

Cris bent down and picked it up. He held it out to her, in the open palm of his hand.

"Good God," Anita whispered. Shakily, she accepted the tube, gripped it hesitantly, then put it down again on the dressing table.

In the half-light of the room, the great golden figure seemed to glow and shimmer, outlined against the darkness. A god—no, not a god. An animal. A great golden beast, without a soul. She was confused. Which was he—or was he both? She shook her head, bewildered. It was late, almost four. She was exhausted and confused.

Cris took her in his arms. Gently, kindly, he lifted her face and kissed her. His powerful hands held her tight. She couldn't breathe. Darkness, mixed with the shimmering golden haze, swept around her. Around and around it spiraled, carrying her senses away. She sank down into it gratefully. The darkness covered her and dissolved her in a swelling torrent

of sheer force that mounted in intensity each moment, until the roar of it beat against her and at last blotted out everything.

Anita blinked. She sat up and automatically pushed her hair into place. Cris was standing before the closet. He was reaching up, getting something down.

He turned toward her and tossed something on the bed. Her heavy metal-foil traveling cape.

Anita gazed down at the cape without comprehension. "What do you want?"

Cris stood by the bed, waiting.

She picked up the cape uncertainly. Cold creepers of fear plucked at her. "You want me to get you out of here," she said softly. "Past the guards and the CP."

Cris said nothing.

"They'll kill you instantly." She got unsteadily to her feet. "You can't run past them. Good God, don't you do anything but run? There must be a better way. Maybe I can appeal to Wisdom. I'm Class A—Director Class. I can go directly to the Full Directorate. I ought to be able to hold them off, keep back the euth indefinitely. The odds are a billion to one against us if we try to break past—"

She broke off.

"But you don't gamble," she continued slowly. "You don't go by odds. You *know* what's coming. You've seen the cards already." She studied his face intently. "No, you can't be cold-decked. It wouldn't be possible."

For a moment she stood deep in thought. Then with a quick, decisive motion, she snatched up the cloak and slipped it around her bare shoulders. She fastened the heavy belt, bent down and got her shoes from under the bed, snatched up her purse, and hurried to the door.

"Come on," she said. She was breathing quickly, cheeks flushed. "Let's go. While there are still a number of exits to choose from. My car is parked outside, in the lot at the side of the building. We can get to my place in an hour. I have a winter home in Argentina. If worst comes to worst we can fly there. It's in the back country, away from the cities. Jungle and swamps. Cut off from almost everything." Eagerly, she started to open the door.

Cris reached out and stopped her. Gently, patiently, he moved in front of her.

He waited a long time, body rigid. Then he turned the knob and stepped boldly out into the corridor.

The corridor was empty. No one was in sight. Anita caught a faint

glimpse, the back of a guard hurrying off. If they had come out a second earlier—

Cris started down the corridor. She ran after him. He moved rapidly, effortlessly. The girl had trouble keeping up with him. He seemed to know exactly where to go. Off to the right, down a side hall, a supply passage. Onto an ascent freight-lift. They rose, then abruptly halted.

Cris waited again. Presently he slid the door back and moved out of the lift. Anita followed nervously. She could hear sounds: guns and men, very close.

They were near an exit. A double line of guards stood directly ahead. Twenty men, a solid wall—and a massive heavy-duty robot gun in the center. The men were alert, faces strained and tense. Watching wide-eyed, guns gripped tight. A Civil Police officer was in charge.

"We'll never get past," Anita gasped. "We wouldn't get ten feet." She pulled back. "They'll—"

Cris took her by the arm and continued calmly forward. Blind terror leaped inside her. She fought wildly to get away, but his fingers were like steel. She couldn't pry them loose. Quietly, irresistibly, the great golden creature drew her along beside him, toward the double line of guards.

"There he is!" Guns went up. Men leaped into action. The barrel of the robot cannon swung around. *"Get him!"*

Anita was paralyzed. She sagged against the powerful body beside her, tugged along helplessly by his inflexible grasp. The lines of guards came nearer, a sheer wall of guns. Anita fought to control her terror. She stumbled, half-fell. Cris supported her effortlessly. She scratched, fought at him, struggled to get loose—

"Don't shoot!" she screamed.

Guns wavered uncertainly. "Who is she?" The guards were moving around, trying to get a sight on Cris without including her. "Who's he got there?"

One of them saw the stripe on her sleeve. Red and black. Director Class. Top-level.

"She's Class A." Shocked, the guards retreated. "Miss, get out of the way!"

Anita found her voice. "Don't shoot. He's—in my custody. You understand? I'm taking him out."

The wall of guards moved back nervously. "No one's supposed to pass. Director Wisdom gave orders—"

"I'm not subject to Wisdom's authority." She managed to edge her voice

with a harsh crispness. "Get out of the way. I'm taking him to the Semantics Agency."

For a moment nothing happened. There was no reaction. Then slowly, uncertainly, one guard stepped aside.

Cris moved. A blur of speed, away from Anita, past the confused guards, through the breach in the line, out the exit, and onto the street. Bursts of energy flashed wildly after him. Shouting guards milled out. Anita was left behind, forgotten. The guards, the heavy-duty gun, were pouring out into the early morning darkness. Sirens wailed. Patrol cars roared into life.

Anita stood dazed, confused, leaning against the wall, trying to get her breath.

He was gone. He had left her. Good God—what had she done? She shook her head, bewildered, her face buried in her hands. She had been hypnotized. She had lost her will, her common sense. Her reason! The animal, the great golden beast, had tricked her. Taken advantage of her. And now he was gone, escaped into the night.

Miserable, agonized tears trickled through her clenched fingers. She rubbed at them futilely; but they kept on coming.

"He's gone," Baines said. "We'll never get him, now. He's probably a million miles from here."

Anita sat huddled in the corner, her face to the wall. A little bent heap, broken and wretched.

Wisdom paced back and forth. "But where can he go? Where can he hide? Nobody'll hide him! Everybody knows the law about deeves!"

"He's lived out in the woods most of his life. He'll hunt—that's what he's always done. They wondered what he was up to, off by himself. He was catching game and sleeping under trees." Baines laughed harshly. "And the first woman he meets will be glad to hide him—as *she* was." He indicated Anita with a jerk of his thumb.

"So all that gold, that mane, that godlike stance, was *for* something. Not just ornament." Wisdom's thick lips twisted. "He doesn't have just one faculty—he has two. One is new, the newest thing in survival methods. The other is as old as life." He stopped pacing to glare at the huddled shape in the corner. "Plumage. Bright feathers, combs for the roosters, swans, birds, bright scales for the fish. Gleaming pelts and manes for the animals. An animal isn't necessarily *bestial*. Lions aren't bestial. Or tigers. Or any of the big cats. They're anything but bestial."

"He'll never have to worry," Baines said. "He'll get by—as long as human women exist to take care of him. And since he can see ahead, into the future, he already knows he's sexually irresistible to human females."

"We'll get him," Wisdom muttered. "I've had the government declare an emergency. Military and Civil Police will be looking for him. Armies of men—a whole planet of experts, the most advanced machines and equipment. We'll flush him, sooner or later."

"By that time it won't make any difference," Baines said. He put his hand on Anita's shoulder and patted her ironically. "You'll have company, sweetheart. You won't be the only one. You're just the first of a long procession."

"Thanks, "Anita grated.

"The oldest survival method and the newest. Combined to form one perfectly adapted animal. How the hell are we going to stop him? We can put *you* through a sterilization tank—but we can't pick them all up, all the women he meets along the way. And if we miss one we're finished."

"We'll have to keep trying," Wisdom said. "Round up as many as we can. Before they can spawn." Faint hope glinted in his tired, sagging face. "Maybe his characteristics are recessive. Maybe ours will cancel his out."

"I wouldn't lay any money on that," Baines said. "I think I know already which of the two strains is going to turn up dominant." He grinned wryly. "I mean, I'm making a good *guess*. It won't be us."

The two previous selections here that dealt with pure telepathy were concerned with the relations and interactions between the gifted individual and the society around him. The hero of "No One Believed Me" was faced with a desperate necessity to make others believe; "Crazy Joey" had an equally urgent motivation to discourage belief.

Mr. Grinnell's hero, in this new twist on the Morley Roberts classic, "The Anticipator," is not at all interested in whether anyone will believe it, but is exclusively and determinedly preoccupied with how to dispose *of it. . . .*

Malice Aforethought *by David Grinnell*

It was bad enough that people always mistook Allen San Sebastian for the writer, Marvin Dane. It was worse how the society of the literary world kept shoving the two together until, having met at so many parties and people's homes, they were regarded by the outside world as being friends.

Actually neither liked the other very much—that is always the curse of similarity in competitors. They would have avoided each other if they could, but they couldn't, not without snubbing too many valuable intermediaries. Both wrote stories for the same magazine, both did their best to toady up to the impossible boor who was its editor.

LeClair B. Smith, who was owner and editor of *Grimoire: The Magazine of Spectral Fiction*, was a sharp-dealing, coarse-tongued, self-educated businessman who knew nothing about literature, had a Sunday-supplement taste in art, but knew just about everything when it came to squeezing the pennies from the newsdealers and the trusting public. That *Grimoire* was such a success was due to that grim jest of fate that made Smith capable of enjoying a good horror tale when he read one. Possibly it was a subconscious reflection of the sadism that makes so many successful men scornful of the feelings of others. Certainly his handling of his authors instilled horror in those who had perforce to deal with him.

For it was good business to stay in his favor, as San Sebastian well

knew, and when you had to depend on Smith's checks for your living, it became a matter of life and death.

San Sebastian had left his parental farm, somewhere in the Middle West, after selling several stories, and had made himself live in the intellectual slums of the big city. It was good business; besides, he could concentrate better where there were no infernal roosters to rouse him from bed at half-past four, and he could stay up as late as he pleased with decent conversations and a half-gallon of thick sweet muscatel to sip from. The fly in his ointment was Marvin Dane.

They looked alike, both tall, gaunt, dark-haired. Both had a tendency to squint, both had the same dry sense of humor. But there, insisted San Sebastian, the resemblance ended. He could write and Dane couldn't. Smith, their god and judge, didn't share San Sebastian's opinion. He thought they could both write—and also happened to think that San Sebastian was slipping and Dane coming up.

San Sebastian had begun to realize the horrible truth himself when three stories in a row were rejected as being too similar to material bought just previously. He didn't know what this material was until two months later when he saw a story of Dane's in the latest *Grimoire* that shook him to the core. It was quite identical, plot, writing and all, to one of his stories.

Dane a plagiarist? Hard to see how. San Sebastian, after overcoming his first fit of fury and black anger, found himself lost in a reflex of puzzlement. Nobody, but nobody, saw San Sebastian's stories until he'd written them out, rewritten them, pecked out a copy painfully on his typewriter and then, after waiting a week or so to reread again, made his further corrections.

Dane couldn't possibly have seen the stories before; he couldn't possibly have sneaked into San Sebastian's rooms to copy his tales; and besides San Sebastian never discussed plots with any of his friends. Yet there it was.

By the time the third similar story of Dane's had appeared in print and two other tales of San Sebastian's had been rejected by Smith with the cutting insinuation that San Sebastian must have peeked at Dane's red-hot typewriter, Allen San Sebastian was in a state bordering on madness. He could, of course, try to sell his rejected tales to a competitor magazine. But besides the fact that he didn't go over as well with the other editors, they might holler bloody murder when Dane's duplicates hit the stands first.

San Sebastian finally took a friend into his confidence. A rather older man, Carlton Vanney was more steady in his ways, with a bent for the

psychological and the occult. He discussed the matter, showed this friend Dane's published stories and his own originals. It was, he insisted, not possible for either writer to have seen the other's work in production.

Vanney, a man of considerable experience, after giving the matter much thought, pointed out that the coincidence of ideas was not precisely new in history. It happened before, it happened often in fact with creative minds that two persons would think of the same thing at the same time. It seems, Vanney said, that the universe moved at a certain pace, and then when conditions were ready for certain ideas, they developed spontaneously to the first minds that bothered to look for them.

For instance when the science of mathematics had reached an impasse in the old arithmetics, Newton and Leibnitz, separated in two different nations, without knowledge of each other, individually invented and worked out the system of calculus. Again the planet Neptune had been seen by two different astronomers almost simultaneously. Again and again, inventions were duplicated, sometimes at half a world's distance, by minds of similar caliber.

It was as if there were an invisible telegraphic network linking all the minds of the world. So that when a Frenchman named Ader made a wild short flight in a crazy apparatus of canvas and propellers in 1898, two young mechanics in Ohio could conceive a mad inspiration for a miracle that would mature at Kitty Hawk a few years later.

Now, reasoned Carlton Vanney, was it not logical that when two minds as similar as Dane's and San Sebastian's were living within a few blocks of each other, were simultaneously trying to determine the demands of the same mind, LeClair B. Smith's, in the same specialized style of writing, *Grimoire's,* that one should telegraph his ideas to the other, just as a powerful sending station transmits instantly to the receivers of a waiting set? Who is to say which of the two originated the ideas of these stories? It may be San Sebastian glimpsing them from Dane's mind, or vice versa. No personal guilt could be placed.

The reason, the only reason, why Dane was winning was that he was the faster writer. Dane wrote by typewriter the first time and never rewrote. Once he tore his first draft from the keys of his machine, it went within hours to Smith's desk. And it would be two weeks before San Sebastian's tortoise-paced prose would reach that same destination.

Marvin Dane was clever enough, beyond doubt. He had often irked San Sebastian by his boasting that he never cluttered up his imagination with the stories of others. He never read other writers' efforts and he never relied on the classics and anthologies for inspiration. His mind was very probably wide open for stray plots coming over the telepathic ether.

This answer satisfied San Sebastian's curiosity, but left him in an even grimmer plight than before. Was he doomed always to lose out in this ghastly race? Did this spell his end as a writer?

For several days Allen San Sebastian wandered the streets of the big city lost in wonder and despair. There must be an answer, but what, but how? This was to be a struggle to the death—for it was clear that the only obvious course that would clear his future would be Dane's incapacitation.

He could, for instance, break into Dane's apartment and smash his typewriter with an axe. By the time Dane could borrow or buy another machine, San Sebastian would have at least one new story on Smith's desk first. But this was obviously an impractical solution. He could pay someone to beat up Dane and put him in a hospital. This too did not exactly appeal to him. Besides, it invited a host of trouble; whom would he get to do it and how could he keep himself from being blackmailed thereafter? As for murder, the idea didn't appeal to him at all.

Then, one afternoon, the idea came to him. Almost in a fever flush, San Sebastian made his way home, closed and locked the door behind him and dashed to his bookcase. Pulling out a volume therein, he seated himself at his desk, took pen in hand and began transcribing the pages of the book that he had opened. Carefully he bent himself to his task.

In two hours he had completed the first writing. Setting the manuscript aside, he waited. Next day he again repeated the process, laboriously copying out the printed pages for a second time. Yet a third day he worked on it, then set up his typewriter and began typing out the pages slowly in his usual painstaking manner. He drew out the work as long as possible.

On the fourth day, upon typing finis to the last page, he clipped all the completed pages together, read through them very carefully once more, and then, taking the various manuscripts into his little kitchenette, burned them each and every one over a jet of his gas stove.

Then he took a rest from literary work for two months.

Now LeClair B. Smith was, as has been said, pretty much of a nonliterary businessman, self-educated and self-opinionated. He knew a good horror story when he saw one; and when Marvin Dane submitted a humdinger to him, he bought it on that same day and fitted it into his magazine's schedule. Dane, as has also been said, had the not unadmirable quality of keeping his mind clear of other horror writers' works.

It was very embarrassing when a host of discerning readers and fans flooded the magazine with angry letters for publishing H. P. Lovecraft's *The Rats in the Walls* under the title of *The Mumbling Vermin of*

Oxham Priory by Marvin Dane—"A gripping tale of ancestral doom, written especially for *Grimoire* by a modern de Maupassant." It was disastrous for Marvin Dane when Smith not only threw him out of the office but sued him for the return of his money and damages.

And it didn't do Allen San Sebastian any harm when Dane's new stories were constantly returned to him by the office boy unopened, as per editorial orders. You could be sure to find San Sebastian's name in any table of contents in any new issue of *Grimoire*. As for Dane, after that ruinous climax to his literary career, for which he was quite unable to blame anyone but himself and his sizzling typewriter, he became a moderate sort of success as the clerk in a small but select bookstore catering to obscurantist prosody.

How open-minded can you get?

I am perfectly ready to entertain speculation about the reality of telepathy; I am reluctantly willing to consider the philosophic implications of precognition; I am even prepared to let my prejudice against table-rappings and stone-throwings be swayed by the scientific-sounding word, "psychokinesis." But though you lead me to the séance room, you will never get me to accept spiritualism and "materializations" as subject matter capable of treatment by "science-fictional rationale." . . .

At least, that was *true until I read Miss Christie's story about a "trance medium," which she has managed to imbue with the same mounting suspense and the same quietly inevitable logic to be found in her best detective stories.*

The Last Séance *by Agatha Christie*

Raoul Daubreuil crossed the Seine humming a little tune to himself. He was a good-looking young Frenchman of about thirty-two, with a fresh-colored face and a little black mustache. By profession he was an engineer. In due course he reached the Cardonet and turned in at the door of No. 17. The concierge looked out from her lair and gave him a grudging "Good morning," to which he replied cheerfully. Then he mounted the stairs to the apartment on the third floor. As he stood there waiting for his ring at the bell to be answered he hummed once more his little tune. Raoul Daubreuil was feeling particularly cheerful this morning. The door was opened by an elderly Frenchwoman, whose wrinkled face broke into smiles when she saw who the visitor was.

"Good morning, Monsieur."

"Good morning, Elise," said Raoul.

He passed into the vestibule, pulling off his gloves as he did so.

"Madame expects me, does she not?" he asked over his shoulder.

"Ah, yes, indeed, Monsieur."

Elise shut the front door and turned towards him.

"If Monsieur will pass into the little *salon,* Madame will be with him in a few minutes. At the moment she reposes herself."

Raoul looked up sharply.

"Is she not well?"

"Well!"

Elise gave a snort. She passed in front of Raoul and opened the door of the little *salon* for him. He went in and she followed him.

"Well!" she continued. "How should she be well, poor lamb? Séances, séances, and always séances. It is not right—not natural, not what the good God intended for us. For me, I say straight out, it is trafficking with the devil."

Raoul patted her on the shoulder reassuringly.

"There, there, Elise," he said soothingly, "do not excite yourself, and do not be too ready to see the devil in everything you do not understand."

Elise shook her head doubtingly.

"Ah, well," she grumbled under her breath. "Monsieur may say what he pleases, I don't like it. Look at Madame, every day she gets whiter and thinner, and the headaches!"

She held up her hands.

"Ah, no, it is not good, all this spirit business. Spirits indeed! All the good spirits are in Paradise, and the others are in Purgatory or . . ."

"Your view of the life after death is refreshingly simple, Elise," said Raoul as he dropped into a chair.

The old woman drew herself up.

"I am a good Catholic, Monsieur."

She crossed herself, went towards the door, then paused, her hand on the handle.

"Afterwards when you are married, Monsieur," she said pleadingly, "it will not continue—all this?"

Raoul smiled at her affectionately.

"You are a good faithful creature, Elise," he said, "and devoted to your mistress. Have no fear, once she is my wife, all this 'spirit business,' as you call it, will cease. For Madame Daubreuil there will be no more séances."

Elise's face broke into smiles.

"Is it true what you say?" she asked eagerly.

The other nodded gravely.

"Yes," he said, speaking almost more to himself than to her. "Yes, all this must end. Simone has a wonderful gift and she has used it freely, but now she has done her part. As you have justly observed, Elise, day by day she gets whiter and thinner. The life of a medium is a particularly trying and arduous one, involving a terrible nervous strain. All the same, Elise, your mistress is the most wonderful medium in Paris—more, in

France. People from all over the world come to her because they know that with her there is no trickery, no deceit."

Elise gave a snort of contempt.

"Deceit! Madame could not deceive a newborn babe if she tried."

"She is an angel," said the young Frenchman with fervor. "And I—I shall do everything a man can to make her happy. You believe that?"

Elise drew herself up, and spoke with a certain simple dignity.

"I have served Madame for many years, Monsieur. With all respect I may say that I love her. If I did not believe that you adored her as she deserves to be adored—*eh bien,* Monsieur! I should be willing to tear you limb from limb."

Raoul laughed.

"Bravo, Elise! You are a faithful friend, and you must approve of me now that I have told you Madame is going to give up the spirits."

He expected the old woman to receive this pleasantry with a laugh, but somewhat to his surprise she remained grave.

"Supposing, Monsieur," she said hesitatingly, "the spirits will not give *her* up?"

Raoul stared at her.

"Eh! What do you mean?"

"I said," repeated Elise, "supposing the spirits will not give *her* up?"

"I thought you didn't believe in the spirits, Elise?"

"No more I do," said Elise stubbornly. "It is foolish to believe in them. All the same——"

"Well?"

"It is difficult for me to explain, Monsieur. You see, me, I always thought that these mediums, as they call themselves, were just clever cheats who imposed on the poor souls who had lost their dear ones. But Madame is not like that. Madame is good. Madame is honest, and——"

She lowered her voice and spoke in a tone of awe.

"*Things happen.* It is not trickery, things happen, and that is why I am afraid. For I am sure of this, Monsieur, it is not right. It is against nature and *le bon Dieu,* and *somebody will have to pay.*"

Raoul got up from his chair and came and patted her on the shoulder.

"Calm yourself, my good Elise," he said, smiling. "See, I will give you some good news. Today is the last of these séances; after today there will be no more."

"There *is* one today then?" asked the old woman suspiciously.

"The last, Elise, the last."

Elise shook her head disconsolately.

"Madame is not fit——" she began.

But her words were interrupted, the door opened and a tall, fair woman came in. She was slender and graceful, with the face of a Botticelli Madonna. Raoul's face lighted up, and Elise withdrew quickly and discreetly.

"Simone!"

He took both her long, white hands in his and kissed each in turn. She murmured his name very softly.

"Raoul, my dear one."

Again he kissed her hands and then looked intently into her face.

"Simone, how pale you are! Elise told me you were resting; you are not ill, my well-beloved?"

"No, not ill——" she hesitated.

He led her over to the sofa and sat down on it beside her.

"But tell me then."

The medium smiled faintly.

"You will think me foolish," she murmured.

"I? Think you foolish? Never."

Simone withdrew her hand from his grasp. She sat perfectly still for a moment or two gazing down at the carpet. Then she spoke in a low, hurried voice.

"I am afraid, Raoul."

He waited for a minute or two expecting her to go on, but as she did not he said encouragingly:

"Yes, afraid of what?"

"Just afraid—that is all."

"But——"

He looked at her in perplexity, and she answered the look quickly.

"Yes, it is absurd, isn't it, and yet I feel just that. Afraid, nothing more. I don't know what of, or why, but all the time I am possessed with the idea that something terrible—terrible—is going to happen to me. . . ."

She stared out in front of her. Raoul put an arm gently round her.

"My dearest," he said, "come, you must not give way. I know what it is, the strain, Simone, the strain of a medium's life. All you need is rest—rest and quiet."

She looked at him gratefully.

"Yes, Raoul, you are right. That is what I need, rest and quiet."

She closed her eyes and leant back a little against his arm.

"And happiness," murmured Raoul in her ear.

His arm drew her closer. Simone, her eyes still closed, drew a deep breath.

"Yes," she murmured, "yes. When your arms are round me I feel safe.

I forget my life—the terrible life—of a medium. You know much, Raoul, but even you do not know all it means."

He felt her body grow rigid in his embrace. Her eyes opened again, staring in front of her.

"One sits in the cabinet in the darkness, waiting, and the darkness is terrible, Raoul, for it is the darkness of emptiness, of nothingness. Deliberately one gives oneself up to be lost in it. After that one knows nothing, one feels nothing, but at last there comes the slow, painful return, the awakening out of sleep, but so tired—so terribly tired."

"I know," murmured Raoul, "I know."

"So tired," murmured Simone again.

Her whole body seemed to droop as she repeated the words.

"But you are wonderful, Simone."

He took her hands in his, trying to rouse her to share his enthusiasm.

"You are unique—the greatest medium the world has ever known."

She shook her head, smiling a little at that.

"Yes, yes," Raoul insisted.

He drew two letters from his pocket.

"See here, from Professor Roche of the Salpêtrière, and this one from Dr. Genir at Nancy, both imploring that you will continue to sit for them occasionally."

"Ah, no!"

Simone sprang suddenly to her feet.

"I will not, I will not. It is to be all finished—all done with. You promised me, Raoul."

Raoul stared at her in astonishment as she stood wavering, facing him almost like a creature at bay. He got up and took her hand.

"Yes, yes," he said. "Certainly it is finished, that is understood. But I am so proud of you, Simone, that is why I mentioned those letters."

She threw him a swift sideways glance of suspicion.

"It is not that you will ever want me to sit again?"

"No, no," said Raoul, "unless perhaps you yourself would care to, just occasionally for these old friends—"

But she interrupted him, speaking excitedly.

"No, no, never again. There is danger, I tell you. I can feel it, great danger."

She clasped her hands on her forehead a minute, then walked across to the window.

"Promise me never again," she said in a quieter voice over her shoulder.

Raoul followed her and put his arms round her shoulders.

"My dear one," he said tenderly, "I promise you after today you shall never sit again."

He felt the sudden start she gave.

"Today," she murmured. "Ah, yes—I had forgotten Madame Exe."

Raoul looked at his watch.

"She is due any minute now; but perhaps, if you do not feel well——"

Simone hardly seemed to be listening to him; she was following out her own train of thought.

"She is—a strange woman, Raoul, a very strange woman. Do you know I—I have almost a horror of her."

"Simone!"

There was reproach in his voice, and she was quick to feel it.

"Yes, yes, I know, you are like all Frenchmen, Raoul. To you a mother is sacred and it is unkind of me to feel like that about her when she grieves so for her lost child. But—I cannot explain it, she is so big and black, and her hands—have you ever noticed her hands, Raoul? Great big strong hands, as strong as a man's. Ah!"

She gave a little shiver and closed her eyes. Raoul withdrew his arm and spoke almost coldly.

"I really cannot understand you, Simone. Surely you, a woman, should have nothing but sympathy for a mother bereft of her only child."

Simone made a gesture of impatience.

"Ah, it is you who do not understand, my friend! One cannot help these things. The first moment I saw her I felt——"

She flung her hands out.

"*Fear*. You remember, it was a long time before I would consent to sit for her? I felt sure in some way she would bring me misfortune."

Raoul shrugged his shoulders.

"Whereas, in actual fact, she brought you the exact opposite," he said drily. "All the sittings have been attended with marked success. The spirit of the little Amélie was able to control you at once, and the materializations have really been striking. Professor Roche ought really to have been present at the last one."

"Materializations," said Simone in a low voice. "Tell me, Raoul (you know that I know nothing of what takes place while I am in the trance), are the materializations really so wonderful?"

He nodded enthusiastically.

"At the first few sittings the figure of the child was visible in a kind of nebulous haze," he explained, "but at the last séance——"

"Yes?"

He spoke very softly.

"Simone, the child that stood there was an actual living child of flesh and blood. I even touched her—but seeing that the touch was acutely painful to you, I would not permit Madame Exe to do the same. I was afraid that her self-control might break down, and that some harm to you might result."

Simone turned away again towards the window.

"I was terribly exhausted when I woke," she murmured. "Raoul, are you sure—are you really sure that all this is *right*? You know what dear old Elise thinks, that I am trafficking with the devil?"

She laughed rather uncertainly.

"You know what I believe," said Raoul gravely. "In the handling of the unknown there must always be danger, but the cause is a noble one, for it is the cause of science. All over the world there have been martyrs of science, pioneers who have paid the price so that others may follow safely in their footsteps. For ten years now you have worked for science at the cost of a terrific nervous strain. Now your part is done, from today onward you are free to be happy."

She smiled at him affectionately, her calm restored. Then she glanced quickly up at the clock.

"Madame Exe is late," she murmured. "She may not come."

"I think she will," said Raoul. "Your clock is a little fast, Simone."

Simone moved about the room, rearranging an ornament here and there.

"I wonder who she is, this Madame Exe?" she observed. "Where she comes from, who her people are? It is strange that we know nothing about her."

Raoul shrugged his shoulders.

"Most people remain incognito if possible when they come to a medium," he observed. "It is an elementary precaution."

"I suppose so," agreed Simone listlessly.

A little china vase she was holding slipped from her fingers and broke to pieces on the tiles of the fireplace. She turned sharply on Raoul.

"You see," she murmured, "I am not myself. Raoul, would you think me very—very cowardly if I told Madame Exe I could not sit today?"

His look of pained astonishment made her redden.

"You promised, Simone——" he began gently.

She backed against the wall.

"I won't do it, Raoul. I won't do it."

And again that glance of his, tenderly reproachful, made her wince.

"It is not of the money I am thinking, Simone, though you must

realize that the money this woman has offered you for a last sitting is enormous—simply enormous."

She interrupted him defiantly.

"There are things that matter more than money."

"Certainly there are," he agreed warmly. "That is just what I am saying. Consider—this woman is a mother, a mother who has lost her only child. If you are not really ill, if it is only a whim on your part—you can deny a rich woman a caprice, can you deny a mother one last sight of her child?"

The medium flung her hands out despairingly in front of her.

"Oh, you torture me," she murmured. "All the same you are right. I will do as you wish, but I know now what I am afraid of—it is the word 'mother.' "

"Simone!"

"There are certain primitive elementary forces, Raoul. Most of them have been destroyed by civilization, but motherhood stands where it stood at the beginning. Animals—human beings, they are all the same. A mother's love for her child is like nothing else in the world. It knows no law, no pity, it dares all things and crushes down remorselessly all that stands in its path."

She stopped, panting a little, then turned to him with a quick, disarming smile.

"I am foolish today, Raoul. I know it."

"Lie down for a minute or two," he urged. "Rest till she comes."

"Very well." She smiled at him and left the room.

Raoul remained for a minute or two lost in thought, then he strode to the door, opened it, and crossed the little hall. He went into a room the other side of it, a sitting room very much like the one he had left, but at one end was an alcove with a big armchair set in it. Heavy black velvet curtains were arranged so as to pull across the alcove. Elise was busy arranging the room. Close to the alcove she had set two chairs and a small round table. On the table was a tambourine, a horn and some paper and pencils.

"The last time," murmured Elise with grim satisfaction. "Ah, Monsieur, I wish it were over and done with."

The sharp ting of an electric bell sounded.

"There she is, that great gendarme of a woman," continued the old servant. "Why can't she go and pray decently for her little one's soul in a church, and burn a candle to Our Blessed Lady? Does not the good God know what is best for us?"

"Answer the bell, Elise," said Raoul peremptorily.

She threw him a look, but obeyed. In a minute or two she returned ushering in the visitor.

"I will tell my mistress you are here, Madame."

Raoul came forward to shake hands with Madame Exe. Simone's words floated back to his memory.

"So big and so black."

She *was* a big woman, and the heavy black of French mourning seemed almost exaggerated in her case. Her voice when she spoke was very deep.

"I fear I am a little late, Monsieur."

"A few minutes only," said Raoul, smiling. "Madame Simone is lying down. I am sorry to say she is far from well, very nervous and overwrought."

Her hand, which she was just withdrawing, closed on his suddenly like a vice.

"But she will sit?" she demanded sharply.

"Oh, yes, Madame."

Madame Exe gave a sigh of relief, and sank into a chair, loosening one of the heavy black veils that floated round her.

"Ah, Monsieur!" she murmured, "you cannot imagine, you cannot conceive the wonder and the joy of these séances to me! My little one! My Amélie! To see her, to hear her, even—perhaps—yes, perhaps to be even able to—stretch out my hand and touch her."

Raoul spoke quickly and peremptorily.

"Madame Exe—how can I explain?—on no account must you do anything except under my express directions. Otherwise there is the gravest danger."

"Danger to me?"

"No, Madame," said Raoul, "to the medium. You must understand that the phenomena that occur are explained by science in a certain way. I will put the matter very simply, using no technical terms. A spirit, to manifest itself, has to use the actual physical substance of the medium. You have seen the vapor of fluid issuing from the lips of the medium. This finally condenses and is built up into the physical semblance of the spirit's dead body. But this ectoplasm we believe to be the actual substance of the medium. We hope to prove this some day by careful weighing and testing—but the great difficulty is the danger and pain which attends the medium on any handling of the phenomena."

Madame Exe had listened to him with close attention.

"That is very interesting, Monsieur. Tell me, shall not a time come when the materialization shall advance so far that it shall be capable of detachment from its parent, the medium?"

"That is a fantastic speculation, Madame."

She persisted.

"But, on the facts, not impossible?"

"Quite impossible today."

"But perhaps in the future?"

He was saved from answering, for at that moment Simone entered. She looked languid and pale, but had evidently regained entire control of herself. She came forward and shook hands with Madame Exe, though Raoul noticed the faint shiver that passed through her as she did so.

"I regret, Madame, to hear that you are indisposed," said Madame Exe.

"It is nothing," said Simone rather brusquely. "Shall we begin?"

She went to the alcove and sat down in the armchair. Suddenly Raoul in his turn felt a wave of fear pass over him.

"You are not strong enough," he exclaimed. "We had better cancel the séance. Madame Exe will understand."

"Monsieur!"

Madame Exe rose indignantly.

"Yes, yes, it is better not, I am sure of it."

"Madame Simone promised me one last sitting."

"That is so," agreed Simone quietly, "and I am prepared to carry out my promise."

"I hold you to it, Madame," said the other woman.

"I do not break my word," said Simone coldly. "Do not fear, Raoul," she added gently, "after all, it is for the last time—the last time, thank God."

At a sign from her Raoul drew the heavy black curtains across the alcove. He also pulled the curtains of the windows so that the room was in semi-obscurity. He indicated one of the chairs to Madame Exe and prepared himself to take the other. Madame Exe, however, hesitated.

"You will pardon me, Monsieur, but—you understand I believe absolutely in your integrity and in that of Madame Simone. All the same, so that my testimony may be the more valuable, I took the liberty of bringing this with me."

From her handbag she drew a length of fine cord.

"Madame!" cried Raoul. "This is an insult!"

"A precaution."

"I repeat it is an insult."

"I don't understand your objection, Monsieur," said Madame Exe coldly. "If there is no trickery you have nothing to fear."

Raoul laughed scornfully.

"I can assure you that I have nothing to fear, Madame. Bind me hand and foot if you will."

His speech did not produce the effect he hoped, for Madame Exe merely murmured unemotionally, "Thank you, Monsieur," and advanced upon him with her roll of cord.

Suddenly Simone from behind the curtain gave a cry.

"No, no, Raoul, don't let her do it."

Madame Exe laughed derisively.

"Madame is afraid," she observed sarcastically.

"Yes, I am afraid."

"Remember what you are saying, Simone," cried Raoul. "Madame Exe is apparently under the impression that we are charlatans."

"I must make sure," said Madame Exe grimly.

She went methodically about her task, binding Raoul securely to his chair.

"I must congratulate you on your knots, Madame," he observed ironically when she had finished. "Are you satisfied now?"

Madame Exe did not reply. She walked around the room examining the panelling of the walls closely. Then she locked the door leading into the hall, and, removing the key, returned to her chair.

"Now," she said in an indescribable voice, "I am ready."

The minutes passed. From behind the curtain the sound of Simone's breathing became heavier and more stertorous. Then it died away altogether, to be succeeded by a series of moans. Then again there was silence for a little while, broken by the sudden clattering of the tambourine. The horn was caught up from the table and dashed to the ground. Ironic laughter was heard. The curtains of the alcove seemed to have been pulled back a little, the medium's figure was just visible through the opening, her head fallen forward on her breast. Suddenly Madame Exe drew in her breath sharply. A ribbonlike stream of mist was issuing from the medium's mouth. It condensed and began gradually to assume a shape, the shape of a little child.

"Amélie! My little Amélie!"

The hoarse whisper came from Madame Exe. The hazy figure condensed still further. Raoul stared almost incredulously. Never had there been a more successful materialization. Now, surely it was a real child, a real flesh and blood child standing there.

"*Maman!*"

The soft childish voice spoke.

"My child!" cried Madame Exe. "My child!"

She half-rose from her seat.

"Be careful, Madame," cried Raoul warningly.

The materialization came hesitatingly through the curtains. It was a child. She stood there, her arms held out.

"*Maman!*"

"Ah!" cried Madame Exe.

Again she half-rose from her seat.

"Madame," cried Raoul, alarmed, "the medium——"

"I must touch her," cried Madame Exe hoarsely.

She moved a step forward.

"For God's sake, Madame, control yourself," cried Raoul.

He was really alarmed now.

"Sit down at once."

"My little one, I must touch her."

"Madame, I command you, sit down!"

He was writhing desperately with his bonds, but Madame Exe had done her work well; he was helpless. A terrible sense of impending disaster swept over him.

"In the name of God, Madame, sit down!" he shouted. "Remember the medium."

Madame Exe paid no attention to him. She was like a woman transformed. Ecstasy and delight showed plainly in her face. Her outstretched hand touched the little figure that stood in the opening of the curtains. A terrible moan came from the medium.

"My God!" cried Raoul. "My God! This is terrible. The medium——"

Madame Exe turned on him with a harsh laugh.

"What do I care for your medium?" she cried. "I want my child."

"You are mad!"

"My child, I tell you. Mine! My own! My own flesh and blood! My little one come back to me from the dead, alive and breathing."

Raoul opened his lips, but no words would come. She was terrible, this woman! Remorseless, savage, absorbed by her own passion. The baby lips parted, and for the third time the same word echoed: "*Maman!*"

"Come then, my little one," cried Madame Exe.

With a sharp gesture she caught up the child in her arms. From behind the curtains came a long-drawn scream of utter anguish.

"Simone!" cried Raoul. "Simone!"

He was aware vaguely of Madame Exe rushing past him, of the unlocking of the door, of retreating footsteps down the stairs.

From behind the curtains there still sounded the terrible high long-drawn scream—such a scream as Raoul had never heard. It died away in a horrible kind of gurgle. Then there came the thud of a body falling. . . .

Raoul was working like a maniac to free himself from his bonds. In his frenzy he accomplished the impossible, snapping the rope by sheer strength. As he struggled to his feet, Elise rushed in, crying, "Madame!"

"Simone!" cried Raoul.

Together they rushed forward and pulled the curtain.

Raoul staggered back.

"My God!" he murmured. "Red—all red. . . ."

Elise's voice came beside him, harsh and shaking.

"So Madame is dead. It is ended. But tell me, Monsieur, what has happened. *Why is Madame all shrunken away—why is she half her usual size? What has been happening here?*"

"I do not know," said Raoul.

His voice rose to a scream.

"I do not know. I do not know. But I think—I am going mad. . . . Simone! Simone!"

The twin phrases, "water witch" and "rain magic," have enchanted me ever since, at the age of ten, I first found them on the "Myths and Legends" shelf at the Public Library.

Years later, I heard with amusement the stories of anthropologists who learned to take their raincoats along when they went out to study the primitive Indian rain-dance superstitions. Later still, in a dry summer in New York, I discovered that modern science had taken the magic entirely out of rainmaking. Then Kenneth Roberts published his startling report on Henry Gross and His Dowsing Rod, *in which he spoke irritably indeed of the "unfortunate modern American habit of referring to a water dowser as a water witch."*

When the day comes that every home is equipped with a household manual of weather control, and the use of the divining rod is taught in high-school science labs, I shall still reserve my right to think of these things as rain magic and water witching, and shall continue to enjoy the Indian legends on which Mr. Brown's story is based.

Medicine Dancer *by Bill Brown*

The red convertible raced around the shoulder of Big Dog Mesa in a loose and frantic sort of driving. It sucked dust up from the gravel patches in the macadam, laying these floating clouds in the hot air as smoke signals had once hung over the mesa.

If the girl was frantic, it showed only in her driving. Her black hair was smoothed tight across her scalp and bound around her head with two braids as slick as blacksnakes. The ends of the braids hung down in two short tails to give the suggestion of Indian she wanted.

Taka jerked the car around a chuck hole and glanced off into the valley to the right, thankful for the dryness and barrenness. It had been weeks since she had seen anything but rain, torrents of rain and wet, slippery streets. At every town where she'd danced on the big medicine drums, it had rained.

The best primitive dancer in America, they said. She'd read it in the columns and heard it on the air. Sensational! Savage! But they didn't know it was the medicine drums with the corn and the lightning sym-

bols that made her dance that way. And no one knew yet that she brought the rain.

The white people weren't evil like Old Pete, her father, had said. No, they called her the Thunder Bird and they gave her a thousand dollars a week. And sometimes they let her sit at their tables in the night clubs and they bought her champagne even when it was against the law in some states to buy a drink for an Indian. And they groomed her and polished her and made her a calendar cover Indian girl in a pure white-feathered head dress. And they all got drenched to see her because they would come in light clothes when the weather report said fair weather and she would dance on the drums and it would rain in the night even while she was dancing.

The town of Big Dog suddenly came into view. It was only a service station and post office and store all in one building and two frame houses from which the paint had blown off with the sand storms. Behind a little hill to the right of the town, kept neatly out of sight as junk yards are hidden behind high board fences, were the wickiups of the Indians who herded sheep around Big Dog.

With the town in sight, the girl drove faster until the two big medicine drums in the back seat rumbled with the vibration. And she didn't decrease her speed until she had to brake hard to bring the convertible into the service station, scattering the gravel with her tires.

A man in blue denims and a red shirt, his black hair in a queue down his back, was mounting a tire on a rim. He was pressed against the wall of the station, trying to work in the narrow shade.

"Uncle Charlie!" Taka called. "Where's Pete?"

Charlie looked up from his work and squinted until he made out who the girl was. He waved a tire tool in the direction of the Indian village. "Home," he grunted. Taka drove around the service station, down the path toward the village.

Old Pete's wickiup was the same as it always had been—built of pieces of corrugated tin and old boards and canvas; and Old Pete was sitting on an ancient car seat by the door whittling on a gun stock.

He looked up at the red convertible and at the finely molded, sophisticated girl who stepped out. Taka ran to her father and hugged him around the neck and kissed him.

"Father," she said, half-crying, "didn't you get my telegram?"

Old Pete grunted and scratched himself under his blue shirt. He drew a yellow envelope out of his shirt pocket. He looked at it curiously and handed it to his daughter.

"Papa," she said. "You didn't even open it!" Old Pete stared at his

daughter as though he were unaware of her brilliant red dress the color of the convertible, and the emerald on her finger and the big gold earrings.

"You read," he said.

It had been two years since Taka had seen her father, but she knew this would be her greeting. That was Old Pete's way. Taka laughed and tore open the envelope.

I'm coming home, Papa. I need you. A thousand kisses. Taka.

Old Pete grunted and took the telegram from Taka and looked at it and folded it back into his pocket. He walked over to the convertible and ran his hand over the flank of the car and patted it as though he were testing pony flesh. He grunted without pleasure.

Taka noticed the old man still held himself straight when he walked, as a chief should, and she noticed he still wore his two braids with red ribbon on them. She had a silly feeling that he wore them to spite the smelly black asphalt highway that had come through the Indian country. Something for the tourists to stare at and photograph.

The old man came back to Taka. "Why you come home?" he asked in his pigeon English that was his affectation.

Taka began to cry. "Terrible things happen, Papa, when I dance on the drums!"

Old Pete stared down at his daughter, stern lines cut into the stone of his face. "White men do this to you?"

"Oh, no, Papa. The white people have all been good to me." And she told him how the good people had come out in their fragile clothes and how, every time after she danced, they stood helpless under dripping awnings waiting for taxis. And she put her hands over her eyes and cried.

"It's those horrid paintings on the drums, Papa—but without the medicine drums I can't dance at all. My feet are like rock!"

"Does anyone else know, Taka, that it rains when you dance?"

Taka shook her head. "Not yet. But they'll find out. And then I can't dance any more. Oh, please teach me a new dance, Papa! Please!"

Taka went to a hotel twenty miles away, leaving the problem up to her father. Old Pete picked up his shotgun that leaned in a corner of the hut and he waded through the thorny brush and up the hill behind the village where rattlesnakes lay coiled on the rocks and stunted cactus tried to grow. At the top of the hill, Old Pete sat down on a rock and sat still for an hour with the shotgun across his knees, staring down into the valley below the mesa.

It was true, without a doubt, that Taka was the medicine dancer. When was the last real medicine dancer? That was Old Pete's grandfather. And before him? Old Pete couldn't remember. But then the white men came and told the Indians dancing for rain was superstition. They still had rain dances, but it didn't rain any more. And now here comes Taka, a true medicine dancer after three generations.

Old Pete stared down into the valley, trying to think what it was like before the white men came—when his grandfather and all the medicine dancers before him kept the valley green with rain and the corn was thick and the valley was full of buffalo and any time you could see dust on the mesa from antelope herds. But now there was only dry waste and the sticky black highway and the dingy town. No good to make rain here now because the white cattlemen owned the valley. It could never be the Indian's again . . . never. . . .

Old Pete sat for another hour thinking his Indian thoughts and feeling his bitterness for the white men rise up. What kind of chief would he be today if the great tribe were still here? If he had a hundred bucks in war paint and a hundred thundering ponies and a war bonnet of eagle feathers? . . . The fat cattle to be slaughtered on the ranches. . . . If it weren't for the highway. He remembered the last pony, the buckskin —how he found him bloated and fly-blown beside the highway where a car had hit him. . . .

Yes, Old Pete could teach Taka another dance—one that wouldn't bring rain. Yes. . . .

Suddenly he rose and walked over the hill and killed a turkey buzzard while it was gorging on a dead coyote. He found a rusty tomato can in a heap of dumped garbage and he drained the turkey buzzard's blood into it. He went to the base of a butte where the red face-clay used to come from and he found the old pits around a dead spring. He stared awhile at the old Indian symbols painted on the rock and then he went back to the hut with the red clay and the buzzard's blood.

Old Pete stretched new buckskin over the drums and he painted it with the old symbols he saw on the rocks—zigzag lines with a jiggle on the end that some ancient ancestor thought of as a rattlesnake. And he painted the red fire spirit that was half a mountain and half a man with a big black mouth.

When Taka came in her red convertible the next morning, the old man drew two circles the size of the drums on the ground and he taught her the new dance—the slow-moving, stiff-legged dance with the short steps, and then the fast leap from one circle to the next; and Taka's bare feet pounded on the ground like buffalo hooves.

"But I'm clumsy," Taka complained.
"On the drums your feet will have wings," Old Pete said.
"Let me try it on the drums now."
Old Pete shook his head. "Paint not dry," he said.
Taka pouted. "But Papa, I have to dance tomorrow in Los Angeles!"
"Paint dry tomorrow," the old man said.

Taka was back in Los Angeles before dark the next day but it had taken fast driving to get there. Her first show went on at seven and when Taka made the drums rumble with her feet, the diners paused and some stood up, leaving their drinks and their steaks on the tables. And some of the diners stayed in the club until the last show, which was at midnight when Taka came out with her drums again.

Taka danced on the drums, stiff-legged and jerky, her feet pounding like buffalo hooves. She knew she had never danced like this before. The drums rumbling like ponies on the warpath, like war thunder over Big Dog Mesa. It was as though she couldn't stop dancing; her feet drew magic from the medicine drums and she danced sometimes half-crouched and sometimes bent over backward, all in the old, forgotten rhythms. She didn't stop, even when the people in the night club, dressed in their evening clothes and silks, overturned the tables and the men fought one another with chairs and bottles and the thin women in their doll dresses screamed when their clothes were torn.

Taka kept on dancing, stiff-legged and jerky like a machine. Buffalo hooves . . . ponies on the warpath . . . thunder over the mesa.

And because of the thunder of the drums, people fighting in the night club couldn't hear the sirens all over the city—sirens that had been tuned to scream when war missiles were launched from across the sea.

The work of Sheridan Le Fanu is well known to fantasy readers; that of his niece, Rhoda Broughton, is almost entirely unknown. This story was first published in England in 1873, and was reprinted there, as recently as 1947 in Twilight Stories. *To the best of my knowledge, it has never appeared in this country.*

Of the several stories in this collection dealing with precognition, this one is, surprisingly, the most realistic and rationalistic in treatment. The idea that the voicing of a prophecy may set in motion a chain of events that will work toward its fulfillment has been much exploited in the years since this was written—but seldom with so little elaborate contrivance, or so natural a flow of events, as here.

Behold It Was a Dream *by Rhoda Broughton*

Yesterday morning I received the following letter:

Weston House, Caulfield, ——shire.

My dear Dinah, You must *come: I scorn all your excuses, and see through their flimsiness. I have no doubt that you are much better amused in Dublin, frolicking round ballrooms with a succession of horse-soldiers, and watching her Majesty's household troops play polo in the Phoenix Park, but no matter—you* must *come. We have no particular inducements to hold out. We lead an exclusively bucolic, cow-milking, pig-fattening, roast-mutton-eating, and to-bed-at-ten-o'clock-going life; but no matter—you* must *come. I want you to see how happy two dull elderly people may be, with no special brightness in their lot to make them so. My old man—he is surprisingly ugly at the first glance, but grows upon one afterwards—sends you his respects, and bids me say that he will meet you at* any *station on* any *day at* any *hour of the day or night. If you succeed in evading our persistence this time, you will be a cleverer woman than I take you for.*

Ever yours affectionately,
Jane Watson

August 15th.

P.S.—We will invite our little scarlet-headed curate to dinner to meet you, so as to soften your fall from the society of the Plungers.

This is my answer:

My dear Jane, Kill the fat calf in all haste, and put the bake meats into the oven, for I will come. Do not, however, imagine that I am moved thereunto by the prospect of the bright-headed curate. Believe me, my dear, I am as yet at a distance of ten long good years from an addiction to the minor clergy. If I survive the crossing of that seething, heaving, tumbling abomination, St. George's Channel, you may expect me on Tuesday next. I have been groping for hours in Bradshaw's darkness that may be felt, and I have arrived at length at this twilight result, that I may arrive at your station at 6.55 P.M. *But the ways of Bradshaw are not our ways, and I* may *either rush violently past or never attain it. If I do, and if, on my arrival, I see some rustic vehicle, guided by a startlingly ugly gentleman, awaiting me, I shall know, from your wifely description, that it is your "old man." Till Tuesday, then,*

Affectionately yours,
Dinah Bellairs

August 17th

I am as good as my word; on Tuesday I set off. For four mortal hours and a half I am disastrously, hideously, diabolically sick. For four hours and a half I curse the day on which I was born, the day on which Jane Watson was born, the day on which her old man was born, and lastly—but oh! not, *not* leastly—the day and the dock on which and in which the *Leinster's* plunging, curtsying, throbbing body was born. On arriving at Holyhead, feeling convinced from my sensations that, as the French say, I touch my last hour, I indistinctly request to be allowed to stay on board and *die,* then and there; but as the stewardess and my maid take a different view of my situation, and insist upon forcing my cloak and bonnet on my dying body and limp head, I at length succeed in staggering on deck and off the accursed boat. I am then well shaken up for two or three hours in the Irish mail, and, after crawling along a slow byeline for two or three hours more, am at length, at 6.55, landed, battered, tired, dust-blacked, and qualmish, at the little roadside station of Caulfield. My maid and I are the only passengers who descend. The train snorts its slow way onwards, and I am left gazing at the calm, crimson death of the August sun, and smelling the sweet peas in the station-master's garden border. I look round in search of Jane's promised tax-cart, and steel my nerves for the contemplation of her old man's unlovely features. But the only

vehicle which I see is a tiny two-wheeled pony carriage, drawn by a small and tub-shaped bay pony, and driven by a lady in a hat, whose face is turned expectantly towards me. I go up and recognize my friend, whom I have not seen for two years—not since before she fell in with her old man and espoused him.

"I thought it safest, after all, to come myself," she says, with a bright laugh. "My old man looked so handsome this morning that I thought you would never recognize him from my description. Get in, dear, and let us trot home as quickly as we can."

I comply, and for the next half-hour sit (while the cool evening wind is blowing the dust off my hot and jaded face) stealing amazed glances at my companion's cheery features. *Cheery!* That is the very last word that, excepting in an ironical sense, anyone would have applied to my friend Jane two years ago. Two years ago Jane was thirty-five, the elderly eldest daughter of a large family, hustled into obscurity, justled, shelved, by half-a-dozen younger, fresher sisters; an elderly girl, addicted to lachrymose verse about the gone, and the dead, and the forever lost. Apparently the gone has come back, the dead resuscitated, the forever lost been found again. The peaky, sour virgin is transformed into a gracious matron, with a kindly, comely face, pleasure making and pleasure feeling. Oh, happiness! what powder or paste, or milk of roses, can make old cheeks young again in the cunning way that you do? If you would but bide steadily with us, we might live forever, always young and always handsome.

My musings on Jane's metamorphosis, combined with a tired headache, make me somewhat silent, and indeed there is mostly a slackness of conversation between the two dearest allies on first meeting after absence—a sort of hesitating shiver before plunging into the sea of talk that both know lies in readiness for them.

"Have you got your harvest in yet?" I ask, more for the sake of not utterly holding my tongue than from any profound interest in the subject, as we jog briskly along between the yellow corn fields, where the dry bound sheaves are standing in golden rows in the red sunset light.

"Not yet," answers Jane; "we have only just begun to cut some of it. However, thank God, the weather looks as settled as possible; there is not a streak of watery lilac in the west."

My headache is almost gone, and I am beginning to think kindly of dinner—a subject from which all day until now my mind has hastily turned with a sensation of hideous inward revolt—by the time that the fat pony pulls up before the old-world dark porch of a modest little house, which has bashfully hidden its original face under a veil of crowded

clematis flowers and stalwart ivy. Set as in a picture frame by the large drooped ivy leaves, I see a tall and moderately hard-featured gentleman of middle age, perhaps, of the two, rather inclining towards elderly, smiling at us a little shyly.

"This is my old man," cries Jane, stepping gaily out, and giving him a friendly introductory pat on the shoulder. "Old man, this is Dinah."

Having thus been made known to each other we shake hands, but neither of us can arrive at anything pretty to say. Then I follow Jane into her little house, the little house for which she has so happily exchanged her tenth part of the large and noisy paternal mansion. It is an old house, and everything about it has the moderate shabbiness of old age and long and careful wear. Little thick-walled rooms, dark and cool, with flowers and flower scents lying in wait for you everywhere—a silent, fragrant, childless house. To me, who have had oily locomotives snorting and racing through my head all day, its dumb sweetness seems like heaven.

"And now that we have secured you, we do not mean to let you go in a hurry," says Jane hospitably that night at bedtime, lighting the candles on my dressing table.

"You are determined to make my mouth water, I see," say I, interrupting a yawn to laugh. "Lone lorn me, who have neither old man nor dear little house, nor any prospect of ultimately attaining either."

"But if you honestly are not bored you will stay with us a good bit?" she says, laying her hand with kind entreaty on my sleeve. "St. George's Channel is not lightly to be faced again."

"Perhaps I shall stay until you are obliged to go away yourselves to get rid of me," return I, smiling. "Such things have happened. Yes, without joking, I will say a month. Then, by the end of a month, if you have not found me out thoroughly, I think I may pass among men for a more amiable woman than I have ever yet had the reputation of."

A quarter of an hour later I am laying down my head among soft and snow-white pillows, and saying to myself that this delicious sensation of utter drowsy repose, of soft darkness and odorous quiet, is cheaply purchased, even by the ridiculous anguish which my own sufferings, and—hardly less than my own sufferings—the demoniac sights and sounds afforded by my fellow passengers, caused me on board the accursed *Leinster*—

'Built in the eclipse, and rigged with curses dark.'

II

"Well, I cannot say that you look much rested," says Jane, next morn-

ing, coming in to greet me, smiling and fresh—(yes, skeptic of eighteen, even a woman of thirty-seven may look fresh in a print gown on an August morning, when she has a well of lasting quiet happiness inside her)—coming in with a bunch of creamy *gloire de Dijons* in her hand for the breakfast table. "You look infinitely more fagged than you did when I left you last night!"

"Do I?" say I, rather faintly.

"I am afraid you did not sleep much?" suggests Jane, a little crestfallen at the insult to her feather beds implied by my wakefulness. "Some people never can sleep the first night in a strange bed, and I stupidly forgot to ask you whether you liked the feather bed or mattress at the top."

"Yes, I did sleep," I answer gloomily. "I wish to heaven I had not!"

"Wish—to—heaven—you—had—not?" repeats Jane slowly, with a slight astonished pause between each word. "My dear child, for what other purpose did you go to bed?"

"I—I—had bad dreams," say I, shuddering a little; and then, taking her hand, roses and all, in mine: "Dear Jane, do not think me quite run mad, but—but—have you got a Bradshaw in the house?"

"A Bradshaw? What on earth do you want with Bradshaw?" says my hostess, her face lengthening considerably, and a slight tincture of natural coldness coming into her tone.

"I know it seems rude—insultingly rude," say I, still holding her hand and speaking almost lachrymosely, "but do you know, my dear, I really am afraid that—that—I shall have to leave you—today?"

"To leave us?" repeats she, withdrawing her hand and growing angrily red. "What! When not twenty-four hours ago you settled to stay a *month* with us? What have we done between then and now to disgust you with us?"

"Nothing—nothing," cry I eagerly; "how can you suggest such a thing? I never had a kinder welcome or ever saw a place that charmed me more; but—but——"

"But what?" asks Jane, her color subsiding and looking a little mollified.

"It is best to tell the truth, I suppose," say I, sighing, "even though I know that you will laugh at me—will call me vaporish—sottishly superstitious; but I had an awful and hideous dream last night."

"Is that all?" she says, looking relieved, and beginning to arrange her roses in an old china bowl. "And do you think that all dreams are confined to this house? I never heard before of their affecting any one special place more than another. Perhaps no sooner are you back in Dublin, in

your own room and your own bed, than you will have a still worse and uglier one."

I shake my head. "But it was about this house—about *you*."

"About you and your husband," I answer earnestly. "Shall I tell it you? Whether you say 'Yes' or 'No' I must. Perhaps it came as a warning; such things have happened. Yes; say what you will, I cannot believe that any vision so consistent—so tangibly real and utterly free from the jumbled incongruities and unlikenesses of ordinary dreams—could have meant nothing. Shall I begin?"

"By all means," answers Mrs. Watson, sitting down in an armchair and smiling easily. "I am quite prepared to listen—and *dis*believe."

"You know," say I, narratively, coming and standing close before her, "how utterly tired out I was when you left me last night. I could hardly answer your questions for yawning. I do not think that I was ten minutes in getting into bed, and it seemed like heaven when I laid my head down on the pillow. I felt as if I should sleep till the Day of Judgment. Well, you know, when one is asleep one has, of course, no measure of time, and I have no idea what hour it was *really*; but at some time, in the blackest and darkest of the night, I seemed to wake. It appeared as if a noise had woke me—a noise which at first neither frightened nor surprised me in the least, but which seemed quite natural, and which I accounted for in the muddled drowsy way in which one does account for things when half-asleep. But as I gradually grew to fuller consciousness I found out, with a cold shudder, that the noise I heard was not one that belonged to the night; nothing that one could lay on wind in the chimney, or mice behind the wainscot, or ill-fitting boards. It was a sound of muffled struggling, and once I heard a sort of choked, strangled cry. I sat up in bed, perfectly numbed with fright, and for a moment could hear nothing for the singing of the blood in my head, and the loud battering of my heart against my side. Then I thought that if it were anything bad —if I were going to be murdered—I had at least rather be in the light than the dark, and see in what sort of shape my fate was coming, so I slid out of bed and threw my dressing gown over my shoulders. I had stupidly forgotten, in my weariness, overnight, to put the matches by the bedside, and could not for the life of me recollect where they were. Also, my knowledge of the geography of the room was so small, that in the utter blackness, without even the palest, grayest ray from the window to help me, I was by no means sure in which direction the door lay. I can feel *now* the pain of the blow I gave this right side against the sharp corner of the table in passing; I was quite surprised this morning not to find the mark of a bruise there. At last, in my groping, I came upon the handle and turned

the key in the lock. It gave a little squeak, and again I stopped for a moment, overcome by ungovernable fear. Then I silently opened the door and looked out. You know that your door is exactly opposite mine. By the line of red light underneath it, I could see that, at all events, someone was awake and astir within, for the light was brighter than that given by a night light. By the broader band of red light on the right side of it I could also perceive that the door was ajar. I stood stock still and listened. The two sounds of struggling and chokedly crying had both ceased. All the noise that remained was that as of some person quietly moving about on unbooted feet. 'Perhaps Jane's dog Smut is ill and she is sitting up with it; she was saying last night, I remember, that she was afraid it was beginning with the distemper. Perhaps either she or her old man have been taken with some trifling temporary sickness. Perhaps the noise of crying out that I certainly heard was one of them fighting with a nightmare.' Trying, by such like suggestions, to hearten myself up, I stole across the passage and peeped in——"

I pause in my narrative.

"Well?" says Jane, a little impatiently.

She has dropped her flowers. They lie in odorous dewy confusion in her lap. She is listening rather eagerly. I cover my face with my hands.

"Oh! my dear," I cry, "I do not think I can go on. It was *too* dreadful! Now that I am telling it I seem to be doing and hearing it over again——"

"I do not call it very kind to keep me on the rack," she says, with a rather forced laugh. "Probably I am imagining something much worse than the reality. For heaven's sake speak up! What *did* you see?"

I take hold of her hand and continue. "You know that in your room the bed exactly faces the door. Well, when I looked in, looked in with eyes blinking at first, and dazzled by the long darkness they had been in, it seemed to me as if that bed were only one horrible sheet of crimson; but as my sight grew clearer I saw what it was that caused that frightful impression of universal red——" Again I pause with a gasp and feeling of oppressed breathing.

"Go on! Go on!" cries my companion, leaning forward, and speaking with some petulance. "Are you never going to get to the point?"

"Jane," say I solemnly, "do not laugh at me, nor pooh-pooh me, for it is God's truth—as clearly and vividly as I see you now, strong, flourishing, and alive, so clearly, so vividly, with no more of dream haziness nor of contradiction in details than there is in the view I now have of this room and of you—I saw you *both*—you and your husband, lying *dead—murdered*—drowned in your own blood!"

"What, both of us?" she says, trying to laugh, but her healthy cheek has rather paled.

"Both of you," I answer, with growing excitement. "You, Jane, had evidently been the one first attacked—taken off in your sleep—for you were lying just as you would have lain in slumber, only that across your throat from there to there" (touching first one ear and then the other), "there was a huge and yawning gash."

"Pleasant," replies she, with a slight shiver.

"I never saw anyone dead," continue I earnestly, "never until last night. I had not the faintest idea how dead people looked, even people who died quietly, nor has any picture ever given me at all a clear conception of death's dread look. How then could I have *imagined* the hideous contraction and distortion of feature, the staring, starting, open eyes—glazed yet agonized—the tightly clenched teeth that go to make up the picture, that is *now, this very minute,* standing out in ugly vividness before my mind's eye?" I stop, but she does not avail herself of the pause to make any remark, neither does she look any longer at all laughingly inclined.

"And yet," continue I, with a voice shaken by emotion, "it was *you, very* you, not partly you and partly someone else, as is mostly the case in dreams, but as much *you,* as the *you* I am touching now" (laying my finger on her arm as I speak).

"And my old man, Robin," says poor Jane, rather tearfully, after a moment's silence, "what about him? Did you see him? Was he dead too?"

"It was evidently he whom I had heard struggling and crying," I answer, with a strong shudder, which I cannot keep down, "for it was clear that he had fought for his life. He was lying half on the bed and half on the floor, and one clenched hand was grasping a great piece of the sheet; he was lying head downwards, as if, after his last struggle, he had fallen forwards. All his gray hair was reddened and stained, and I could see that the rift in his throat was as deep as that in yours."

"I wish you would stop," cries Jane, pale as ashes, and speaking with an accent of unwilling terror; "you are making me quite sick!"

"I *must* finish," I answer earnestly, "since it has come in time I am sure it has come for some purpose. Listen to me till the end; it is very near." She does not speak, and I take her silence for assent. "I was staring at you both in a stony way," I go on, "feeling—if I felt at all—that I was turning idiotic with horror—standing in exactly the same spot, with my neck craned to look round the door, and my eyes unable to stir from that hideous scarlet bed, when a slight noise, as of someone cautiously stepping on the carpet, turned my stony terror into a living quivering agony.

I looked and saw a man with his back towards me walking across the room from the bed to the dressing table. He was dressed in the dirty fustian of an ordinary workman, and in his hand he held a red wet sickle. When he reached the dressing table he laid it down on the floor beside him, and began to collect all the rings, open the cases of the bracelets, and hurry the trinkets of all sorts into his pockets. While he was thus busy I caught a full view of the reflection of the face in the glass——" I stop for breath, my heart is panting almost as hardly as it seemed to pant during the awful moments I am describing.

"What was he like—what was he like?" cries Jane, greatly excited. "Did you see him distinctly enough to recollect his features again? Would you know him again if you saw him?"

"Should I know my own face if I saw it in the glass?" I ask scornfully. "I see every line of it *now* more clearly than I do yours, though that is before my eyes, and the other only before my memory——"

"Well, what was he like? —Be quick, for heaven's sake."

"The first moment that I caught sight of him," continue I, speaking quickly, "I felt certain that he was Irish; to no other nationality could such a type of face have belonged. His wild, rough hair fell down over his forehead, reaching his shagged and overhanging brows. He had the wide, grinning slit of a mouth—the long nose, the cunningly twinkling eyes—that one so often sees, in combination with a shambling gait and ragged tailcoat, at the railway stations or in the harvest fields at this time of year." A pause. "I do not know how it came to me," I go on presently, "but I felt as convinced as if I had been told—as if I had known it for a positive fact—that he was one of your own laborers—one of your own harvest men. Have you any Irishmen working for you?"

"Of course we have," answers Jane, rather sharply, "but that proves nothing. Do not they, as you observed just now, come over in droves at this time of the year for the harvest?"

"I am sorry," say I, sighing. "I wish you had not. Well, let me finish; I have just done—I had been holding the door handle mechanically in my hand; I suppose I pulled it unconsciously towards me, for the door hinge creaked a little, but quite audibly. To my unspeakable horror the man turned round and saw me. Good God! He would cut my throat too with that red, *red* reaping hook! I tried to get into the passage and lock the door, but the key was in the inside. I tried to scream, I tried to run; but voice and legs disobeyed me. The bed and room and man began to dance before me; a black earthquake seemed to swallow me up, and I suppose I fell down in a swoon. When I awoke *really* the blessed morning had come, and a robin was singing outside my window on an apple

bough. There—you have it all, and now let me look for a Bradshaw, for I am so frightened and unhinged that go I must."

III

"I must own that it has taken away my appetite," I say, with rather a sickly smile, as we sit round the breakfast table.

"I assure you that I meant no insult to your fresh eggs and bread and butter, but I simply *cannot* eat."

"It certainly was an exceptionally dreadful dream," says Jane, whose color has returned, and who is a good deal fortified and reassured by the influences of breakfast and of her husband's skepticism; for a condensed and shortened version of my dream has been told to him, and he has easily laughed it to scorn. "Exceptionally dreadful, chiefly from its extreme consistency and precision of detail. But still, you know, dear, one has had hideous dreams one's self times out of mind and they never came to anything. I remember once I dreamt that all my teeth came out in my mouth at once—double ones and all; but that was ten years ago, and they still keep their situations, nor did I about that time lose any friend, which they say such a dream is a sign of."

"You say that some unaccountable instinct told you that the hero of your dream was one of my own men," says Robin, turning towards me with a covert smile of benevolent contempt for my superstitiousness; "did not I understand you to say so?"

"Yes," reply I, not in the least shaken by his hardly veiled disbelief, "I do not know how it came to me, but I was as much persuaded of that, and am so still, as I am of my own identity."

"I will tell you of a plan then to prove the truth of your vision," returns he, smiling. "I will take you through the fields this morning and you shall see all my men at work, both the ordinary staff and the harvest casuals, Irish and all. If amongst them you find the counterpart of Jane's and my murderer" (a smile) "I will promise *then*—no, not even *then* can I promise to believe you, for there is such a family likeness between all Irishmen, at all events, between all the Irishmen that one sees *out* of Ireland."

"Take me," I say, eagerly, jumping up; "now, this *minute!* You cannot be more anxious nor half so anxious to prove me a false prophet as I am to be proved one."

"I am quite at your service," he answers, "as soon as you please. Jenny, get your hat and come too."

"And if we do *not* find him," says Jane, smiling playfully—"I think

I am growing pretty easy on that head—you will promise to eat a great deal of luncheon and never *mention* Bradshaw again?"

"I promise," reply I, gravely. "And if, on the other hand, we *do* find him, you will promise to put no more obstacles in the way of my going, but will let me depart in peace without taking any offense thereat?"

"It is a bargain," she says gaily. "Witness, Robin."

So we set off in the bright dewiness of the morning on our walk over Robin's farm. It is a grand harvest day, and the whitened sheaves are everywhere drying, drying in the genial sun. We have been walking for an hour, and both Jane and I are rather tired. The sun beats with all his late-summer strength on our heads and takes the force and spring out of our hot limbs.

"The hour of triumph is approaching," says Robin, with a quiet smile, as we draw near an open gate through which a loaded wain, shedding ripe wheat ears from its abundance as it crawls along, is passing. "And time for it too; it is a quarter past twelve, and you have been on your legs for fully an hour. Miss Bellairs, you must make haste and find the murderer, for there is only one more field to do it in."

"Is not there?" I cry eagerly. "Oh, I *am* glad! Thank God, I begin to breathe again."

We pass through the open gate and begin to tread across the stubble, for almost the last load has gone.

"We must get nearer the hedge," says Robin, "or you will not see their faces; they are all at dinner."

We do as he suggests. In the shadow of the hedge we walk close in front of the row of heated laborers, who, sitting or lying on the hedge bank, are eating unattractive-looking dinners. I scan one face after another—honest bovine English faces. I have seen a hundred thousand faces *like* each one of the faces now before me—very like, but the exact counterpart of none. We are getting to the end of the row, I beginning to feel rather ashamed, though infinitely relieved, and to smile at my own expense. I look again, and my heart suddenly stands still and turns to stone within me. He is *there!*—not a hand-breadth from me! Great God! How well I have remembered his face, even to the unsightly small-pox seams, the shagged locks, the grinning, slit mouth, the little sly, base eyes. He is employed in no murderous occupation *now;* he is harmlessly cutting hunks of coarse bread and fat cold bacon with a clasp knife, but yet I have no more doubt that it is *he*—he whom I saw with the crimsoned sickle in his stained hand—than I have that it is I who am stonily, shiveringly staring at him.

"Well, Miss Bellairs, who was right?" asks Robin's cheery voice at my

elbow. "Perish Bradshaw and all his labyrinths! Are you satisfied now? Good heavens!" (catching a sudden sight of my face) "how white you are! Do you mean to say that you have found him at last? Impossible!"

"Yes, I have found him," I answer, in a low and unsteady tone. "I knew I should. Look, there he is!—close to us, the third from the end."

I turn away my head, unable to bear the hideous recollections and associations that the sight of the man calls up, and I suppose that they both look.

"Are you sure that you are not letting your imagination carry you away?" asks he presently, in a tone of gentle, kindly remonstrance. "As I said before, these fellows are all so much alike; they have all the same look of debased, squalid cunning. Oblige me by looking once again, so as to be quite sure."

I obey. Reluctantly I look at him once again. Apparently becoming aware that he is the object of our notice, he lifts his small dull eyes, and looks back at me. It is the same face—they are the same eyes that turned from the plundered dressing table to catch sight of me last night. "There is no mistake," I answer, shuddering from head to foot. "Take me away, please—as quick as you can—out of the field—home!"

They comply, and over the hot fields and through the hot noon air we step silently homewards. As we reach the cool and ivied porch of the house, I speak for the first time. "You believe me *now?*"

He hesitates.

"I was staggered for a moment, I will own," he answers, with candid gravity; "but I have been thinking it over, and, on reflection, I have come to the conclusion that the highly excited state of your imagination is answerable for the heightening of the resemblance which exists between all the Irish of that class into an identity with the particular Irishman you dreamed of, and whose face (by your own showing) you only saw dimly reflected in the glass."

"Not dimly," repeat I emphatically, "unless I now see that sun dimly" (pointing to him, as he gloriously, blindingly blazes from the sky). "You will not be warned by me then?" I continue passionately, after an interval. "You will run the risk of my dream coming true—you will stay on here in spite of it? Oh, if I could persuade you to go from home—anywhere—anywhere—for a time, until the danger was past!"

"And leave the harvest to itself?" answers he, with a smile of quiet sarcasm; "be a loser of two hundred or three hundred pounds, probably, and a laughingstock to my acquaintance into the bargain, and all for—what? A dream—a fancy—a nightmare!"

"But do you know anything of the man?—of his antecedents?—of his character?" I persist eagerly.

He shrugs his shoulders.

"None whatever; nothing to his disadvantage, certainly. He came over with a lot of others a fortnight ago, and I engaged him for the harvesting. For anything I have heard to the contrary, he is simple, inoffensive fellow enough."

I am silenced, but not convinced. I turn to Jane.

"You remember your promise; you will now put no more hindrances in the way of my going?"

"You do not mean to say that you are going, really?" says Jane, who is looking rather awed by what she calls the surprising coincidence, but is still a good deal heartened up by her husband's want of faith.

"I do," reply I, emphatically. "I should go stark staring mad if I were to sleep another night in that room. I shall go to Chester tonight and cross tomorrow from Holyhead."

I do as I say. I make my maid, to her extreme surprise, repack my just unpacked wardrobe, and take an afternoon train to Chester. As I drive away with bag and baggage down the leafy lane, I look back, and see my two friends standing at their gate. Jane is leaning her head on her old man's shoulder, and looking rather wistfully after me; an expression of mingled regret for my departure and vexation at my folly clouding their kind and happy faces. At least my last living recollection of them is a pleasant one.

IV

The joy with which my family welcomes my return is largely mingled with surprise, but still more largely with curiosity, as to the cause of my so sudden reappearance. But I keep my own counsel. I have a reluctance to give the real reason, and possess no inventive faculty in the way of lying, so I give none. I say, "I *am* back: is not that enough for you? Set your minds at rest, for that is as much as you will ever know about the matter."

For one thing, I am occasionally rather ashamed of my conduct. It is not that the impression produced by my dream is *effaced,* but that absence and distance from the scene and the persons of it have produced their natural weakening effect. Once or twice during the voyage, when writhing in laughable torments in the ladies' cabin of the steamboat, I said to myself, "Most likely you are a fool!" I therefore continually ward off the cross-questionings of my family with what defensive armor of silence and evasion I may.

"I feel convinced it was the husband," says one of my sisters, after a long catechism, which, as usual, has resulted in nothing. "You are too loyal to your friend to own it, but I always felt sure that any man who could take compassion on that poor peevish old Jane must be some wonderful freak of nature. Come, confess. Is not he a cross between an ourang-outang and a Methodist parson?"

"He is nothing of the kind," reply I, in some heat, recalling the libeled Robin's clean, fresh-colored *human* face. "You will be very lucky if you ever secure anyone half so kind, pleasant and gentlemanlike."

Three days after my return, I received a letter from Jane:

Weston House, Caulfield, ——shire.

My dear Dinah,

I hope you are safe home again, and that you have made up your mind that two crossings of St. George's Channel within forty-eight hours are almost as bad as having your throat cut, according to the programme you laid out for us. *I have good news for you. Our murderer-elect is* gone. *After hearing of the connection that there was to be between us, Robin naturally was rather interested in him, and found out his name, which is the melodious one of Watty Doolan. After asking his name, he asked other things about him, and finding that he never did a stroke of work and was inclined to be tipsy and quarrelsome, he paid and packed him off at once. He is now, I hope, on his way back to his native shores, and if he murders anybody it will be* you, *my dear. Good-bye, Dinah. Hardly yet have I forgiven you for the way in which you frightened me with your graphic description of poor Robin and me, with our heads loose and waggling.*

Ever yours affectionately,
Jane Watson.

I fold up this note with a feeling of exceeding relief, and a thorough faith that I have been a superstitious, hysterical fool. More resolved than ever am I to keep the reason for my return profoundly secret from my family. The next morning but one we are all in the breakfast room after breakfast, hanging about, and looking at the papers. My sister has just thrown down the *Times,* with a pettish exclamation that there is nothing in it, and that it really is not worth while paying threepence a day to see nothing but advertisements and police reports. I pick it up as she throws it down, and look listlessly over its tall columns from top to bottom. Suddenly my listlessness vanishes. What is this that I am reading?—this in staring capitals?

SHOCKING TRAGEDY AT CAULFIELD

DOUBLE MURDER

I am in the middle of the paragraph before I realize what it is.

From an early hour of the morning this village has been the scene of deep and painful excitement in consequence of the discovery of the atrocious murder of Mr. and Mrs. Watson, of Weston House, two of its most respected inhabitants. It appears that the deceased had retired to rest on Tuesday night at their usual hour, and in their usual health and spirits. The housemaid, on going to call them at the accustomed hour on Wednesday morning, received no answer, in spite of repeated knocking. She therefore at length opened the door and entered. The rest of the servants, attracted by her cries, rushed to the spot, and found the unfortunate gentleman and lady lying on the bed with their throats cut from ear to ear. Life must have been extinct for some hours, as they were both perfectly cold. The room presented a hideous spectacle, being literally swimming in blood. A reaping hook, evidently the instrument with which the crime was perpetrated, was picked up near the door. An Irish laborer of the name of Watty Doolan, discharged by the lamented gentleman a few days ago on account of misconduct, has already been arrested on strong suspicion, as at an early hour on Wednesday morning, he was seen by a farm laborer, who was going to his work, washing his waistcoat at a retired spot in the stream which flows through the meadows below the scene of the murder. On being apprehended and searched, several articles of jewelry, identified as having belonged to Mr. Watson, were discovered in his possession.

I drop the paper and sink into a chair, feeling deadly sick.

So you see that my dream came true, after all.

The facts narrated in the above story occurred in Ireland. The only liberty I have taken with them is in transplanting them to England.

Dr. Isaac Asimov is an Assistant Professor of Biochemistry at Boston University's School of Medicine. He is currently engaged in research on nucleic acids, and has recently published a high-school textbook, The Chemicals of Life. *But his first prominence in scientific circles was achieved when he published—even before earning his Ph.D.—a paper on his discoveries about "Resublimated Thiotimoline," a remarkable substance which according to that august journal,* Astounding Science Fiction, *has a memory like the Red Queen's, and an inclination to react in reversed time.*

Asimov's science-fiction career antedates both his mock-scientific and serious one. He sold his first story at the age of eighteen, and since then has published almost eighty more, as well as eleven novels.

I can imagine no one better qualified than Dr. Asimov to discuss the effects of a sudden unwelcome talent for levitation on the marriage, morale, and professional standing of Dr. Roger Toomey of Carson College.

Belief *by Isaac Asimov*

"Did you ever dream you were flying?" asked Dr. Roger Toomey of his wife.

Jane Toomey looked up. "Certainly!"

Her quick fingers didn't stop their nimble manipulations of the yarn out of which an intricate and quite useless doily was being created. The television set made a muted murmur in the room and the posturings on its screen were, out of long custom, disregarded.

Roger said, "Everyone dreams of flying at some time or other. It's universal. I've done it many times. That's what worries me."

Jane said, "I don't know what you're getting at, dear. I hate to say so." She counted stitches in an undertone.

"When you think about it, it makes you wonder. It's not really flying that you dream of. You have no wings; at least I never had any. There's no effort involved. You're just floating. That's it. Floating."

"When I fly," said Jane, "I don't remember any of the details. Except once I landed on top of City Hall and hadn't any clothes on. Somehow

no one ever seems to pay any attention to you when you're dream-nude. Ever notice that? You're dying of embarrassment but people just pass by."

She pulled at the yarn and the ball tumbled out of the bag and half across the floor. She paid no attention.

Roger shook his head slowly. At the moment, his face was pale and absorbed in doubt. It seemed all angles with its high cheekbones, its long straight nose and the widow's-peak hairline that was growing more pronounced with the years. He was thirty-five.

He said, "Have you ever wondered what makes you dream you're floating?"

"No, I haven't."

Jane Toomey was blond and small. Her prettiness was the fragile kind that does not impose itself upon you but rather creeps on you unaware. She had the bright blue eyes and pink cheeks of a porcelain doll. She was thirty.

Roger said, "Many dreams are only the mind's interpretation of a stimulus imperfectly understood. The stimuli are forced into a reasonable context in a split second."

Jane said, "What are you talking about, darling?"

Roger said, "Look, I once dreamed I was in a hotel, attending a physics convention. I was with old friends. Everything seemed quite normal. Suddenly, there was a confusion of shouting and for no reason at all I grew panicky. I ran to the door but it wouldn't open. One by one, my friends disappeared. They had no trouble leaving the room, but I couldn't see how they managed it. I shouted at them and they ignored me.

"It was borne in upon me that the hotel was on fire. I didn't smell smoke. I just knew there was a fire. I ran to the window and I could see a fire escape on the outside of the building. I ran to each window in turn but none led to the fire escape. I was quite alone in the room now. I leaned out the window, calling desperately. No one heard me.

"Then the fire engines were coming, little red smears darting along the streets. I remember that clearly. The alarm bells clanged sharply to clear traffic. I could hear them, louder and louder till the sound was splitting my skull. I awoke and, of course, the alarm clock was ringing.

"Now I can't have dreamed a long dream designed to arrive at the moment of the alarm-clock ring in a way that builds the alarm neatly into the fabric of the dream. It's much more reasonable to suppose that the dream began at the moment the alarm began and crammed all its sensation of duration into one split second. It was just a hurry-up device of my brain to explain this sudden noise that penetrated the silence."

Jane was frowning now. She put down her crocheting. "Roger! you've been behaving queerly since you got back from the college. You didn't eat much and now this ridiculous conversation. I've never heard you so morbid. What you need is a dose of bicarbonate."

"I need a little more than that," said Roger in a low voice. "Now, what starts a floating dream?"

"If you don't mind, let's change the subject."

She rose, and with firm fingers turned up the sound on the television set. A young gentleman with hollow cheeks and a soulful tenor suddenly raised his voice and assured her, dulcetly, of his never-ending love.

Roger turned it down again and stood with his back to the instrument.

"Levitation!" he said. "That's it. There is some way in which human beings can make themselves float. They have the capacity for it. It's just that they don't know how to use that capacity—except when they sleep. Then, sometimes, they lift up just a little bit, a tenth of an inch maybe. It wouldn't be enough for anyone to notice even if they were watching, but it would be enough to deliver the proper sensation for the start of a floating dream."

"Roger, you're delirious. I wish you'd stop. Honestly."

He drove on. "Sometimes we sink down slowly and the sensation is gone. Then again, sometimes the float control ends suddenly and we drop. Jane, did you ever dream you were falling?"

"Yes, of c—"

"You're hanging on the side of a building or you're sitting at the edge of a seat and suddenly you're tumbling. There's the awful shock of falling and you snap awake, your breath gasping, your heart palpitating. You *did* fall. There's no other explanation."

Jane's expression, having passed slowly from bewilderment to concern, dissolved suddenly into sheepish amusement.

"Roger, you *devil*. And you fooled me! Oh, you rat!"

"What?"

"Oh, no. You can't play it out any more. I know exactly what you're doing. You're making up a plot to a story and you're trying it out on me. I should know better than to listen to you."

Roger looked startled, even a little confused. He strode to her chair and looked down at her, "No, Jane."

"I don't see why not. You've been talking about writing fiction as long as I've known you. If you've got a plot, you might as well write it down. No use just frightening me with it." Her fingers flew as her spirits rose.

"Jane, this is no story."

"But what else—"

"When I woke up this morning, *I dropped to the mattress!*"

He stared at her without blinking. "I dreamed I was flying," he said. "It was clear and distinct. I remember every minute of it. I was lying on my back when I woke up. I was feeling comfortable and quite happy. I just wondered a little why the ceiling looked so queer. I yawned and stretched and *touched* the ceiling. For a minute, I just stared at my arm reaching upward and ending hard against the ceiling.

"Then I turned over. I didn't move a muscle, Jane. I just turned all in one piece because I wanted to. There I was, five feet above the bed. There you were on the bed, sleeping. I was frightened. I didn't know how to get down, but the minute I thought of getting down, I dropped. I dropped slowly. The whole process was under perfect control.

"I stayed in bed fifteen minutes before I dared move. Then I got up, washed, dressed and went to work."

Jane forced a laugh, "Darling, you had *better* write it up. But that's all right. You've just been working too hard."

"Please! Don't be banal."

"People work too hard, even though to say so is banal. After all, you were just dreaming fifteen minutes longer than you thought you were."

"It wasn't a dream."

"Of course it was. I can't even count the times I've dreamed I awoke and dressed and made breakfast; then really woke up and found it was all to do over again. I've even dreamed I was dreaming, if you see what I mean. It can be awfully confusing."

"Look, Jane. I've come to you with a problem because you're the only one I feel I can come to. Please take me seriously."

Jane's blue eyes opened wide. "Darling! I'm taking you as seriously as I can. You're the physics professor, not I. Gravitation is what you know about, not I. Would *you* take it seriously if I told you *I* had found myself floating?"

"No. *No!* That's the hell of it. I don't want to believe it, only I've got to. It was no dream, Jane. I tried to tell myself it was. You have no idea how I talked myself into that. By the time I got to class, I was sure it was a dream. You didn't notice anything queer about me at breakfast, did you?"

"Yes, I did, now that I think about it."

"Well, it wasn't very queer or you would have mentioned it. Anyway, I gave my nine o'clock lecture perfectly. By eleven, I had forgotten the

whole incident. Then, just after lunch, I needed a book. I needed Page and— Well, the book doesn't matter; I just needed it. It was on an upper shelf, but I could reach it. Jane—"

He stopped.

"Well, go on, Roger."

"Look, did you ever try to pick up something that's just a step away? You bend and automatically take a step toward it as you reach. It's completely involuntary. It's just your body's over-all co-ordination."

"All right. What of it?"

"I reached for the book and automatically took a step upward. On air, Jane! On empty air!"

"I'm going to call Jim Sarle, Roger."

"I'm not sick, damn it."

"I think he ought to talk to you. He's a friend. It won't be a doctor's visit. He'll just talk to you."

"And what good will that do?" Roger's face turned red with sudden anger.

"We'll see. Now sit down, Roger. Please." She walked to the phone.

He cut her off, seizing her wrist. "You don't believe me."

"Oh, Roger."

"You don't."

"I believe you. Of course, I believe you. I just want—"

"Yes. You just want Jim Sarle to talk to me. That's how much you believe me. I'm telling the truth but you want me to talk to a psychiatrist. Look, you don't have to take my word for anything. I can prove this. I can prove I can float."

"I *believe* you."

"Don't be a fool. I know when I'm being humored. Stand still! Now watch me."

He backed away to the middle of the room and without preliminary lifted off the floor. He *dangled;* with the toes of his shoes six empty inches from the carpet.

Jane's eyes and mouth were three round O's. She whispered, "Come down, Roger. Oh, dear heaven, come down."

He drifted down, his feet touching the floor without a sound. "You see?"

"Oh, my. Oh, my."

She stared at him, half-frightened, half-sick.

On the television set, a chesty female sang mutedly that flying high with some guy in the sky was her idea of nothing at all.

Roger Toomey stared into the bedroom's darkness. He whispered, "Jane."

"What?"

"You're not sleeping?"

"No."

"I can't sleep, either. I keep holding the headboard to make sure I'm . . . you know."

His hand moved restlessly and touched her face. She flinched, jerking away as though he carried an electric charge.

She said, "I'm sorry. I'm a little nervous."

"That's all right. I'm getting out of bed anyway."

"What are you going to do? You've got to sleep."

"Well, I can't, so there's no sense keeping you awake, too."

"Maybe nothing will happen. It doesn't have to happen every night. It didn't happen before last night."

"How do I know? Maybe I just never went up so high. Maybe I just never woke up and caught myself. Anyway, now it's different."

He was sitting up in bed, his legs bent, his arms clasping his knees, his forehead resting on them. He pushed the sheet to one side and rubbed his cheek against the soft flannel of his pajamas.

He said, "It's bound to be different now. My mind's full of it. Once I'm asleep, once I'm not holding myself down consciously, why, up I'll go."

"I don't see why. It must be such an effort."

"That's the point. It isn't."

"But you're fighting gravity, aren't you?"

"I know, but there's still no effort. Look, Jane, if I only *could* understand it, I wouldn't mind so much."

He dangled his feet out of bed and stood up. "I don't want to talk about it."

His wife muttered, "I don't want to, either." She started crying, fighting back the sobs and turning them into strangled moans, which sounded much worse.

Roger said, "I'm sorry, Jane. I'm getting you all wrought up."

"No, don't touch me. Just . . . just leave me alone."

He took a few uncertain steps away from the bed.

She said, "Where are you going?"

"To the studio couch. Will you help me?"

"How?"

"I want you to tie me down."

"Tie you down?"

"With a couple of ropes. Just loosely, so I can turn if I want to. Do you mind?"

Her bare feet were already seeking her mules on the floor at her side of the bed. "All right," she sighed.

Roger Toomey sat in the small cubbyhole that passed for his office and stared at the pile of examination papers before him. At the moment, he didn't see how he was going to mark them.

He had given five lectures on electricity and magnetism since the first night he had floated. He had gotten through them somehow, though not swimmingly. The students asked ridiculous questions so probably he wasn't making himself as clear as he once did.

Today he had saved himself a lecture by giving a surprise examination. He didn't bother making one up; just handed out copies of one given several years earlier.

Now he had the answer papers and would have to mark them. Why? Did it matter what they said? Or anyone? Was it so important to know the laws of physics? If it came to that, what were the laws? Were there any, really?

Or was it all just a mass of confusion out of which nothing orderly could ever be extracted? Was the universe, for all its appearance, merely the original chaos, still waiting for the Spirit to move upon the face of its deep?

Insomnia wasn't helping him, either. Even strapped in upon the couch, he slept only fitfully, and then always with dreams.

There was a knock at the door.

Roger cried angrily, "Who's there?"

A pause, and then the uncertain answer. "It's Miss Harroway, Dr. Toomey. I have the letters you dictated."

"Well, come in, come in. Don't just stand there."

The department secretary opened the door a minimum distance and squeezed her lean and unprepossessing body into his office. She had a sheaf of papers in her hand. To each was clipped a yellow carbon and a stamped, addressed envelope.

Roger was anxious to get rid of her. That was his mistake. He stretched forward to reach the letters as she approached and felt himself leave the chair.

He moved two feet forward, still in sitting position, before he could bring himself down hard, losing his balance and tumbling in the process. It was too late.

It was entirely too late. Miss Harroway dropped the letters in a flutter-

ing handful. She screamed and turned, hitting the door with her shoulder, caroming out into the hall and dashing down the corridor in a clatter of high heels.

Roger rose, rubbing an aching hip. "Damn," he said forcefully.

But he couldn't help seeing her point. He pictured the sight as she must have seen it; a full-grown man, lifting smoothly out of his chair and gliding toward her in a maintained squat.

He picked up the letters and closed his office door. It was quite late in the day; the corridors would be empty; she would probably be quite incoherent. Still— He waited anxiously for the crowd to gather.

Nothing happened. Perhaps she was lying somewhere in a dead faint. Roger felt it a point of honor to seek her out and do what he could for her, but he told his conscience to go to the devil. Until he found out exactly what was wrong with him, exactly what this wild nightmare of his was all about, he must do nothing to reveal it.

Nothing, that is, more than he had done already.

He leafed through the letters; one to every major theoretical physicist in the country. Home talent was insufficient for this sort of thing.

He wondered if Miss Harroway grasped the contents of the letters. He hoped not. He had couched them deliberately in technical language; more so, perhaps, than was quite necessary. Partly, that was to be discreet; partly, to impress the addressees with the fact that he, Toomey, was a legitimate and capable scientist.

One by one, he put the letters in the appropriate envelopes. The best brains in the country, he thought. Could they help?

He didn't know.

The library was quiet. Roger Toomey closed the *Journal of Theoretical Physics,* placed it on end and stared at its backstrap somberly. The *Journal of Theoretical Physics!* What did any of the contributors to that learned bit of balderdash understand anyway? The thought tore at him. Until so recently they had been the greatest men in the world to him.

And still he was doing his best to live up to their code and philosophy. With Jane's increasingly reluctant help, he had made measurements. He had tried to weigh the phenomenon in the balance, extract its relationships, evaluate its quantities. He had tried, in short, to defeat it in the only way he knew how—by making of it just another expression of the eternal modes of behavior that all the Universe must follow.

(*Must* follow. The best minds said so.)

Only there was nothing to measure. There was absolutely no sensation

of effort to his levitation. Indoors—he dared not test himself outdoors, of course—he could reach the ceiling as easily as he could rise an inch, except that it took more time. Given enough time, he felt, he could continue rising indefinitely; go to the Moon, if necessary.

He could carry weights while levitating. The process became slower, but there was no increase in effort.

The day before he had come on Jane without warning, a stop watch in one hand.

"How much do you weigh?" he asked.

"One hundred ten," she replied. She gazed at him uncertainly.

He seized her waist with one arm. She tried to push him away but he paid no attention. Together, they moved upward at a creeping pace. She clung to him, white and rigid with terror.

"Twenty-two minutes thirteen seconds," he said, when his head nudged the ceiling.

When they came down again, Jane tore away and hurried out of the room.

Some days before he had passed a drug-store scale, standing shabbily on a street corner. The street was empty, so he stepped on and put in his penny. Even though he suspected something of the sort, it was a shock to find himself weighing thirty pounds.

He began carrying handfuls of pennies and weighing himself under all conditions. He was heavier on days on which there was a brisk wind, as though he required weight to keep from blowing away.

Adjustment was automatic. Whatever it was that levitated him maintained a balance between comfort and safety. But he could enforce conscious control upon his levitation just as he could upon his respiration. He could stand on a scale and force the pointer up to almost his full weight and down, of course, to nothing.

He bought a scale two days before and tried to measure the rate at which he could change weight. That didn't help. The rate, whatever it was, was faster than the pointer could swing. All he did was collect data on moduli of compressibility and moments of inertia.

Well—what did it all amount to anyway?

He stood up and trudged out of the library, shoulders drooping. He touched tables and chairs as he walked to the side of the room and then kept his hand unobtrusively on the wall. He had to do that, he felt. Contact with matter kept him continually informed as to his status with respect to the ground. If his hand lost touch with a table or slid upward against the wall—that was it.

The corridor had the usual sprinkling of students. He ignored them.

In these last days, they had gradually learned to stop greeting him. Roger imagined that some had come to think of him as queer and most were probably growing to dislike him.

He passed by the elevator. He never took it any more; going down, particularly. When the elevator made its initial drop, he found it impossible not to lift into the air for just a moment. No matter how he lay in wait for the moment, he hopped and people would turn to look at him.

He reached for the railing at the head of the stairs and just before his hand touched it, one of his feet kicked the other. It was the most ungainly stumble that could be imagined. Three weeks earlier, Roger would have sprawled down the stairs.

This time his autonomic system took over and, leaning forward, spread-eagled, fingers wide, legs half-buckled, he sailed down the flight glider-like. He might have been on wires.

He was too dazed to right himself, too paralyzed with horror to do anything. Within two feet of the window at the bottom of the flight, he came to an automatic halt and hovered.

There were two students on the flight he had come down, both now pressed against the wall, three more at the head of the stairs, two on the flight below, and one on the landing with him, so close they could almost touch one another.

It was very silent. They all looked at him.

Roger straightened himself, dropped to the ground and ran down the stairs, pushing one student roughly out of his way.

Conversation swirled up into exclamation behind him.

"Dr. Morton wants to see me?" Roger turned in his chair, holding one of its arms firmly.

The new department secretary nodded. "Yes, Dr. Toomey."

She left quickly. In the short time since Miss Harroway had resigned, she had learned that Dr. Toomey had something "wrong" with him. The students avoided him. In his lecture room today, the back seats had been full of whispering students. The front seats had been empty.

Roger looked into the small wall mirror near the door. He adjusted his jacket and brushed some lint off but that operation did little to improve his appearance. His complexion had grown sallow. He had lost at least ten pounds since all this had started, though, of course, he had no way of really knowing his exact weight loss. He was generally unhealthy-looking, as though his digestion perpetually disagreed with him and won every argument.

He had no apprehensions about this interview with the chairman of the department. He had reached a pronounced cynicism concerning the levitation incidents. Apparently, witnesses didn't talk. Miss Harroway hadn't. There was no sign that the students on the staircase had.

With a last touch at his tie, he left his office.

Dr. Philip Morton's office was not too far down the hall, which was a gratifying fact to Roger. More and more, he was cultivating the habit of walking with systematic slowness. He picked up one foot and put it before him, watching. Then he picked up the other and put it before him, still watching. He moved along in a confirmed stoop, gazing at his feet.

Dr. Morton frowned as Roger walked in. He had little eyes, wore a poorly trimmed grizzled mustache and an untidy suit. He had a moderate reputation in the scientific world and a decided penchant for leaving teaching duties to the members of his staff.

He said, "Say, Toomey, I got the strangest letter from Linus Deering. Did you write to him on"—he consulted a paper on his desk—"the twenty-second of last month? Is this your signature?"

Roger looked and nodded. Anxiously, he tried to read Deering's letter upside down. This was unexpected. Of the letters he had sent out the day of the Miss Harroway incident, only four had so far been answered.

Three of them had consisted of cold one-paragraph replies that read, more or less: "This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter of the twenty-second. I do not believe I can help you in the matter you discuss." A fourth, from Ballantine of Northwestern Tech, had bumblingly suggested an institute for psychic research. Roger couldn't tell whether he was trying to be helpful or insulting.

Deering of Princeton made five. He had had high hopes of Deering.

Dr. Morton cleared his throat loudly and adjusted a pair of glasses. "I want to read you what he says. Sit down, Toomey, sit down. He says: 'Dear Phil—' "

Dr. Morton looked up briefly with a slightly fatuous smile. "Linus and I met at Federation meetings last year. We had a few drinks together. Very nice fellow."

He adjusted his glasses again and returned to the letter: " 'Dear Phil: Is there a Dr. Roger Toomey in your department? I received a very queer letter from him the other day. I didn't quite know what to make of it. At first, I thought I'd just let it go as another crank letter. Then I thought that since the letter carried your department heading, you ought to know of it. It's just possible someone may be using your staff as part of a

confidence game. I'm enclosing Dr. Toomey's letter for your inspection. I hope to be visiting your part of the country—'

"Well, the rest of it is personal." Dr. Morton folded the letter, took off his glasses, put them in a leather container and put that in his breast pocket. He twined his fingers together and leaned forward.

"Now," he said, "I don't have to read you your own letter. Was it a joke? A hoax?"

"Dr. Morton," said Roger, heavily, "I was serious. I don't see anything wrong with my letter. I sent it to quite a few physicists. It speaks for itself. I've made observations on a case of . . . of levitation and I wanted information about possible theoretical explanations for such a phenomenon."

"Levitation! Really!"

"It's a legitimate case, Dr. Morton."

"You've observed it yourself?"

"Of course."

"No hidden wires? No mirrors? Look here, Toomey, you're no expert on these frauds."

"This was a thoroughly scientific series of observations. There is no possibility of fraud."

"You might have consulted me, Toomey, before sending out these letters."

"Perhaps I should have, Dr. Morton, but, frankly, I thought you might be—unsympathetic."

"Well, thank you. I should hope so. And on department stationery. I'm really surprised, Toomey. Look here, Toomey, your life is your own. If you wish to believe in levitation, go ahead, but strictly on your own time. For the sake of the department and the college, it should be obvious that this sort of thing should not be injected into your scholastic affairs.

"In point of fact, you've lost some weight recently, haven't you, Toomey? Yes, you don't look well at all. I'd see a doctor, if I were you. A nerve specialist, perhaps."

Roger said, bitterly, "A psychiatrist might be better, you think?"

"Well, that's entirely your business. In any case, a little rest—"

The telephone had rung and the secretary had taken the call. She caught Dr. Morton's eye and he picked up his extension.

He said, "Hello. . . . Oh, Dr. Smithers, yes. . . . Um-m-m. . . . Yes. . . . Concerning whom? . . . Well, in point of fact, he's with me right now. . . . Yes. . . . Yes, immediately."

He cradled the phone and looked at Roger thoughtfully. "The Dean wants to see both of us."

"What about, sir?"

"He didn't say." He got up and stepped to the door. "Are you coming, Toomey?"

"Yes, sir." Roger rose slowly to his feet, cramming the toe of one foot carefully under Dr. Morton's desk as he did so.

Dean Smithers was a lean man with a long, ascetic face. He had a mouthful of false teeth that fitted just badly enough to give his sibilants a peculiar half-whistle.

"Close the door, Miss Bryce," he said, "and I'll take no phone calls for a while. Sit down, gentlemen."

He stared at them portentously and added, "I think I had better get right to the point. I don't know exactly what Dr. Toomey is doing, but he must stop."

Dr. Morton turned upon Roger in amazement. "What have you been doing?"

Roger shrugged dispiritedly. "Nothing that I can help." He had underestimated student tongue-wagging after all.

"Oh, come, come." The Dean registered impatience. "I'm sure I don't know how much of the story to discount, but it seems you must have been engaging in parlor tricks; silly parlor tricks quite unsuited to the spirit and dignity of this institution."

Dr. Morton said, "This is all beyond me."

The Dean frowned. "It seems you haven't heard, then. It is amazing to me how the faculty can remain in complete ignorance of matters that fairly saturate the student body. I had never realized it before. I myself heard of it by accident; by a very fortunate accident, in fact, since I was able to intercept a newspaper reporter who arrived this morning looking for someone he called 'Dr. Toomey, the flying professor.' "

"What?" cried Dr. Morton.

Roger listened haggardly.

"That's what the reporter said. I quote him. It seems one of our students had called the paper. I ordered the newspaper man out and had the student sent to my office. According to him, Dr. Toomey flew—I use the word, 'flew,' because that's what the student insisted on calling it—down a flight of stairs and then back up again. He claimed there were a dozen witnesses."

"I went down the stairs only," muttered Roger.

Dean Smithers was tramping up and down along his carpet now. He had worked himself up into a feverish eloquence. "Now mind you, Toomey, I have nothing against amateur theatricals. In my stay in office I have consistently fought against stuffiness and false dignity. I have

encouraged friendliness between ranks in the faculty and have not even objected to reasonable fraternization with students. So I have no objection to your putting on a show for the students *in your own home.*

"Surely you see what could happen to the college once an irresponsible press is done with us. Shall we have a flying-professor craze succeed the flying-saucer craze? If the reporters get in touch with you, Dr. Toomey, I will expect you to deny all such reports categorically."

"I understand, Dean Smithers."

"I trust that we shall escape this incident without lasting damage. I must ask you, with all the firmness at my command, never to repeat your . . . uh . . . performance. If you ever do, your resignation will be requested. Do you understand, Dr. Toomey?"

"Yes," said Roger.

"In that case, good day, gentlemen."

Dr. Morton steered Roger back into his office. This time, he shooed his secretary and closed the door behind her carefully.

"Good heavens, Toomey," he whispered, "has this madness any connection with your letter on levitation?"

Roger's nerves were beginning to twang. "Isn't it obvious? I was referring to myself in those letters."

"You can fly? I mean, levitate?"

"Either word you choose."

"I never heard of such— Damn it, Toomey, did Miss Harroway ever see you levitate?"

"Once. It was an accid—"

"Of course. It's obvious now. She was so hysterical it was hard to make out. She said you had jumped at her. It sounded as though she were accusing you of . . . of—" Dr. Morton looked embarrassed. "Well, I didn't believe that. She was a good secretary, you understand, but obviously not one designed to attract the attention of a young man. I was actually relieved when she left. I thought she would be carrying a small revolver next, or accusing *me*— You . . . you levitated, eh?"

"Yes."

"How do you do it?"

Roger shook his head. "That's my problem. I don't know."

Dr. Morton allowed himself a smile. "Surely, you don't repeal the law of gravity?"

"You know, I think I do. There must be antigravity involved somehow."

Dr. Morton's indignation at having a joke taken seriously was marked. He said, "Look here, Toomey, this is nothing to laugh at."

"*Laugh* at. Great Scott, Dr. Morton, do I look as though I were laughing?"

"Well—you need a rest. No question about it. A little rest and this nonsense of yours will pass. I'm sure of it."

"It's not nonsense." Roger bowed his head a moment, then said, in a quieter tone, "I tell you what, Dr. Morton, would you like to go in to this with me? In some way this will open new horizons in physical science. I don't know how it works; I just can't conceive of any solution. The two of us together—"

Dr. Morton's look of horror penetrated by that time.

Roger said, "I know it all sounds queer. But I'll demonstrate for you. It's perfectly legitimate. I wish it weren't."

"Now, now," Dr. Morton sprang from his seat. "Don't exert yourself. You need a rest badly. I don't think you should wait till June. You go home right now. I'll see that your salary comes through and I'll look after your course. I used to give it myself once, you know."

"Dr. Morton. This is important."

"I know. I know." Dr. Morton clapped Roger on the shoulder. "Still, my boy, you look under the weather. Speaking frankly, you look like hell. You need a long rest."

"I *can* levitate." Roger's voice was climbing again. "You're just trying to get rid of me because you don't believe me. Do you think I'm lying? What would be my motive?"

"You're exciting yourself needlessly, my boy. You let me make a phone call. I'll have someone take you home."

"I tell you I *can* levitate," shouted Roger.

Dr. Morton turned red. "Look, Toomey, let's not discuss it. I don't care if you fly up in the air right this minute."

"You mean seeing isn't believing as far as you're concerned?"

"Levitation? Of course not." The department chairman was bellowing. "If I saw you fly, I'd see an optometrist or a psychiatrist. I'd sooner believe myself insane than that the laws of physics—"

He caught himself, harumphed loudly. "Well, as I said, let's not discuss it. I'll just make this phone call."

"No need, sir. No need," said Roger. "I'll go. I'll take my rest. Goodbye."

He walked out rapidly, moving more quickly than at any time in days. Dr. Morton, on his feet, hands flat on his desk, looked at his departing back with relief.

James Sarle, M.D., was in the living room when Roger arrived home. He was lighting his pipe as Roger stepped through the door, one large-knuckled hand enclosing the bowl. He shook out the match and his ruddy face crinkled into a smile.

"Hello, Roger. Resigning from the human race? Haven't heard from you in over a month."

His black eyebrows met above the bridge of his nose, giving him a rather forbidding appearance that somehow helped him establish the proper atmosphere with his patients.

Roger turned to Jane, who sat buried in an armchair. As usual lately, she had a look of wan exhaustion on her face.

Roger said to her, "Why did you bring him here?"

"Hold it! Hold it, man," said Sarle. "Nobody brought me. I met Jane downtown this morning and invited myself here. I'm bigger than she is. She couldn't keep me out."

"Met her by coincidence, I suppose? Do you make appointments for all your coincidences?"

Sarle laughed, "Let's put it this way. She told me a little about what's been going on."

Jane said, wearily, "I'm sorry if you disapprove, Roger, but it was the first chance I had to talk to someone who would understand."

"What makes you think he understands? Tell me, Jim, do you believe her story?"

Sarle said, "It's not an easy thing to believe. You'll admit that. But I'm trying."

"All right, suppose I flew. Suppose I levitated right now. What would you do?"

"Faint, maybe. Maybe I'd say, 'Holy Pete.' Maybe I'd bust out laughing. Why don't you try, and then we'll see?"

Roger stared at him. "You really want to see it?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"The ones that have seen it screamed or ran or froze with horror. Can you take it, Jim?"

"I think so."

"O.K." Roger slipped two feet upward and executed a slow tenfold *entrechat*. He remained in the air, toes pointed downward, legs together, arms gracefully outstretched in bitter parody.

"Better than Nijinski, eh, Jim?"

Sarle did none of the things he suggested he might do. Except for catching his pipe as it dropped, he did nothing at all.

Jane had closed her eyes. Tears squeezed quietly through the lids.

Sarle said, "Come down, Roger."

Roger did so. He took a seat and said, "I wrote to physicists, men of reputation. I explained the situation in an impersonal way. I said I thought it ought to be investigated. Most of them ignored me. One of them wrote to old man Morton to ask if I were crooked or crazy."

"Oh, Roger," whispered Jane.

"You think that's bad? The Dean called me into his office today. I'm to stop my parlor tricks, he says. It seems I had stumbled down the stairs and automatically levitated myself to safety. Morton says he wouldn't believe I could fly if he saw me in action. Seeing isn't believing in this case, he says, and orders me to take a rest. I'm not going back."

"Roger," said Jane, her eyes opening wide. "Are you serious?"

"I can't go back. I'm sick of them. Scientists!"

"But what will you do?"

"I don't know." Roger buried his head in his hands. He said in a muffled voice, "You tell me, Jim. You're the psychiatrist. Why won't they believe me?"

"Perhaps it's a matter of self-protection, Roger," said Sarle, slowly. "People aren't happy with anything they can't understand. Even some centuries ago when many people *did* believe in the existence of extra-natural abilities, like flying on broomsticks, for instance, it was almost always assumed that these powers originated with the forces of evil.

"People still think so. They may not believe literally in the devil, but they do think that what is strange is evil. They'll fight against believing in levitation—or be scared to death if the fact is forced down their throats. That's true, so let's face it."

Roger shook his head. "You're talking about people, and I'm talking about scientists."

"Scientists are people."

"You know what I mean. I have here a phenomenon. It isn't witchcraft. I haven't dealt with the devil. Jim, there must be a natural explanation. We don't know all there is to know about gravitation. We know hardly anything, really. Don't you suppose it's just barely conceivable that there is some biological method of nullifying gravity? Perhaps I am a mutation of some sort. I have a . . . well, call it a muscle . . . which can abolish gravity. At least it can abolish the effect of gravity on myself. Well, let's investigate it. Why sit on our hands? If we have antigravity, imagine what it will mean to the human race."

"Hold it, Rog," said Sarle. "Think about the matter a while. Why are *you* so unhappy about it? According to Jane, you were almost mad with fear the first day it happened, *before* you had any way of knowing that

science was going to ignore you and that your superiors would be unsympathetic."

"That's right," murmured Jane.

Sarle said, "Now why should that be? Here you had a great, new, wonderful power; a sudden freedom from the deadly pull of gravity."

Roger said, "Oh, don't be a fool. It was—horrible. I couldn't understand it. I still can't."

"Exactly, my boy. It was something you couldn't understand and *therefore* something horrible. You're a physical scientist. You *know* what makes the universe run. Or if you don't know, you know someone else knows. Even if no one understands a certain point, you know that some day someone will know. The key word is *know*. It's part of your life. Now you come face to face with a phenomenon which you consider to violate one of the basic laws of the universe. Scientists say: Two masses will attract one another according to a fixed mathematical rule. It is an inalienable property of matter and space. There are no exceptions. And now you're an exception."

Roger said, glumly, "And how."

"You see, Roger," Sarle went on, "for the first time in history, mankind really has what he considers unbreakable rules. I mean, unbreakable. In primitive cultures, a medicine man might use a spell to produce rain. If it didn't work, it didn't upset the validity of magic. It just meant that the shaman had neglected some part of his spell, or had broken a taboo, or offended a god. In modern theocratic cultures, the commandments of the Deity are unbreakable. Still if a man were to break the commandments and yet prosper, it would be no sign that that particular religion was invalid. The ways of Providence are admittedly mysterious and some invisible punishment awaits.

"Today, however, we have rules that *really* can't be broken, and one of them is the existence of gravity. It works even though the man who invokes it has forgotten to mutter em-em-over-ahr-square."

Roger managed a twisted smile. "You're all wrong, Jim. The unbreakable rules have been broken over and over again. Radioactivity was impossible when it was discovered. Energy came out of nowhere; incredible quantities of it. It was as ridiculous as levitation."

"Radioactivity was an objective phenomenon that could be communicated and duplicated. Uranium would fog photographic film for anyone. A Crookes tube could be built by anyone and would deliver an electron stream in identical fashion for all. You—"

"I've tried communicating—"

"I know. But can you tell me, for instance, how *I* might levitate."

"Of course not."

"That limits others to observation only, without experimental duplication. It puts your levitation on the same plane with stellar evolution, something to theorize about but never experiment with."

"Yet scientists are willing to devote their lives to astrophysics."

"Scientists are people. They can't reach the stars, so they make the best of it. But they can reach you and to be unable to touch your levitation would be infuriating."

"Jim, they haven't even tried. You talk as though I've been studied. Jim, they won't even consider the problem."

"They don't have to. You levitation is part of a whole class of phenomena that won't be considered. Telepathy, clairvoyance, prescience and a thousand other extranatural powers are practically never seriously investigated, even though reported with every appearance of reliability. Rhine's experiments on E.S.P. have annoyed far more scientists than they have intrigued. So you see, they don't have to study you to know they don't want to study you. They know that in advance."

"Is this funny to you, Jim? Scientists refuse to investigate facts; they turn their back on the truth. And you just sit there and grin and make droll statements."

"No, Roger, I know it's serious. And I have no glib explanations for mankind, really. I'm giving you my thoughts. It's what I think. But don't you see? What I'm doing, really, is to try to look at things as they are. It's what you must do. Forget your ideals, your theories, your notions as to what people *ought* to do. Consider what they *are* doing. Once a person is oriented to face facts rather than delusions, problems tend to disappear. At the very least, they fall into their true perspective and become soluble."

Roger stirred restlessly. "Psychiatric gobbledygook! It's like putting your fingers on a man's temple and saying, 'Have faith and you will be cured!' If the poor sap isn't cured, it's because he didn't drum up enough faith. The witch doctor can't lose."

"Maybe you're right, but let's see. What *is* your problem?"

"No catechism, please. You know my problem so let's not horse around."

"You levitate. Is that it?"

"Let's say it is. It'll do as a first approximation."

"You're not being serious, Roger, but actually you're probably right. It's only a first approximation. After all you're tackling that problem. Jane tells me you've been experimenting."

"Experimenting! Ye Gods, Jim, I'm not experimenting. I'm drifting.

I need high-powered brains and equipment. I need a research team and I don't have it."

"Then what's your problem? Second approximation."

Roger said, "I see what you mean. My problem is to get a research team. But I've tried! Man, I've tried till I'm tired of trying."

"How have you tried?"

"I've sent out letters. I've asked— Oh, stop it, Jim. I haven't the heart to go through the patient-on-the-couch routine. You know what I've been doing."

"I know that you've said to people, 'I have a problem. Help me.' Have you tried anything else?"

"Look, Jim. I'm dealing with mature scientists."

"I know. So you reason that the straightforward request is sufficient. Again it's theory against fact. I've told you the difficulties involved in your request. When you thumb a ride on a highway you're making a straightforward request, but most cars pass you by just the same. The point is that the straightforward request has failed. Now what's your problem? Third approximation!"

"To find another approach which won't fail? Is that what you want me to say?"

"It's what you have said, isn't it?"

"So I know it without your telling me."

"Do you? You're ready to quit school, quit your job, quit science. Where's your consistency, Rog? Do you abandon a problem when your first experiment fails? Do you give up when one theory is shown to be inadequate? The same philosophy of experimental science that holds for inanimate objects should hold for people as well."

"All right. What do you suggest I try? Bribery? Threats? Tears?"

James Sarle stood up. "Do you really want a suggestion?"

"Go ahead."

"Do as Dr. Morton said. Take a vacation and to hell with levitation. It's a problem for the future. Sleep in bed and float or don't float; what's the difference. Ignore levitation, laugh at it or even enjoy it. Do anything but worry about it, because it isn't your problem. That's the whole point. It's not your immediate problem. Spend your time considering how to make scientists study something they don't want to study. That is the immediate problem and that is exactly what you've spent no thinking time on as yet."

Sarle walked to the hall closet and got his coat. Roger went with him. Minutes passed in silence.

Then Roger said without looking up, "Maybe you're right, Jim."

"Maybe I am. Try it and then tell me. Good-bye, Roger."

Roger Toomey opened his eyes and blinked at the morning brightness of the bedroom. He called out, "Hey, Jane, where are you?"

Jane's voice answered, "In the kitchen. Where do you think?"

"Come in here, will you?"

She came in. "The bacon won't fry itself, you know."

"Listen, did I float last night?"

"I don't know. I slept."

"You're a help." He got out of bed and slipped his feet into his mules. "Still, I don't think I did."

"Do you think you've forgotten how?" There was sudden hope in her voice.

"I haven't forgotten. See!" He slid into the dining room on a cushion of air. "I just have a feeling I haven't floated. I think it's three nights now."

"Well, that's good," said Jane. She was back at the stove. "It's just that a month's rest has done you good. If I had called Jim in the beginning—"

"Oh, please, don't go through that. A month's rest, my eye. It's just that last Sunday I made up my mind what to do. Since then I've relaxed. That's all there is to it."

"What are you going to do?"

"Every spring Northwestern Tech gives a series of seminars on physical topics. I'll attend."

"You mean, go way out to Seattle."

"Of course."

"What will they be discussing?"

"What's the difference? I just want to see Linus Deering."

"But he's the one who called you crazy, isn't he?"

"He did." Roger scooped up a forkful of scrambled eggs. "But he's also the best man of the lot."

He reached for the salt and lifted a few inches out of his chair as he did so. He paid no attention.

He said, "I think maybe I can handle him."

The spring seminars at Northwestern Tech had become a nationally known institution since Linus Deering had joined the faculty. He was the perennial chairman and lent the proceedings their distinctive tone. He introduced the speakers, led the questioning periods, summed up at the close of each morning and afternoon session and was the soul of conviviality at the concluding dinner at the end of the week's work.

All this Roger Toomey knew by report. He could now observe the ac-

tual workings of the man. Professor Deering was rather under the middle height, was dark of complexion and had a luxuriant and quite distinctive mop of wavy brown hair. His wide, thin-lipped mouth when not engaged in active conversation looked perpetually on the point of a sly smile. He spoke quickly and fluently, without notes, and seemed always to deliver his comments from a level of superiority that his listeners automatically accepted.

At least, so he had been on the first morning of the seminar. It was only during the afternoon session that the listeners began to notice a certain hesitation in his remarks. Even more, there was an uneasiness about him as he sat on the stage during the delivery of the scheduled papers. Occasionally, he glanced furtively toward the rear of the auditorium.

Roger Toomey, seated in the very last row, observed all this tensely. His temporary glide toward normality that had begun when he first thought there might be a way out was beginning to recede.

On the Pullman to Seattle, he had not slept. He had had visions of himself lifting upward in time to the wheel-clacking, of moving out quietly past the curtains and into the corridor, of being awakened into endless embarrassment by the hoarse shouting of a porter. So he had fastened the curtains with safety pins and had achieved nothing by that; no feeling of security; no sleep outside of a few exhausting snatches.

He had napped in his seat during the day, while the mountains slipped past outside, and arrived in Seattle in the evening with a stiff neck, aching bones, and a general sensation of despair.

He had made his decision to attend the seminar far too late to have been able to obtain a room to himself at the Institute's dormitories. Sharing a room was, of course, quite out of the question. He registered at a downtown hotel, locked the door, closed and locked all the windows, shoved his bed hard against the wall and the bureau against the open side of the bed; then slept.

He remembered no dreams, and when he awoke in the morning he was still lying within the manufactured enclosure. He felt relieved.

When he arrived, in good time, at Physics Hall on the Institute's campus, he found, as he expected, a large room and a small gathering. The seminar sessions were held, traditionally, over the Easter vacation and students were not in attendance. Some fifty physicists sat in an auditorium designed to hold four hundred, clustering on either side of the central aisle up near the podium.

Roger took his seat in the last row, where he would not be seen by casual passers-by looking through the high, small windows of the audi-

torium door, and where the others in the audience would have had to twist through nearly a hundred eighty degrees to see him.

Except, of course, for the speaker on the platform—and for Professor Deering.

Roger did not hear much of the actual proceedings. He concentrated entirely on waiting for those moments when Deering was alone on the platform; when only Deering could see him.

As Deering grew obviously more disturbed, Roger grew bolder. During the final summing up of the afternoon, he did his best.

Professor Deering stopped altogether in the middle of a poorly constructed and entirely meaningless sentence. His audience, which had been shifting in their seats for some time stopped also and looked wonderingly at him.

Deering raised his hand and said, gaspingly, "You! You there!"

Roger Toomey had been sitting with an air of complete relaxation—in the very center of the aisle. The only chair beneath him was composed of two and a half feet of empty air. His legs were stretched out before him on the armrest of an equally airy chair.

When Deering pointed, Roger slid rapidly sidewise. By the time fifty heads turned, he was sitting quietly in a very prosaic wooden seat.

Roger looked this way and that, then stared at Deering's pointing finger and rose.

"Are you speaking to me, Professor Deering?" he asked, with only the slightest tremble in his voice to indicate the savage battle he was fighting within himself to keep that voice cool and wondering.

"What are you doing?" demanded Deering, his morning's tension exploding.

Some of the audience were standing in order to see better. An unexpected commotion is as dearly loved by a gathering of research physicists as by a crowd at a baseball game.

"I'm not doing anything," said Roger. "I don't understand you."

"Get out! Leave this hall!"

Deering was beside himself with a mixture of emotions, or perhaps he would not have said that. At any rate, Roger sighed and took his opportunity prayerfully.

He said, loudly and distinctly, forcing himself to be heard over the gathering clamor, "I am Professor Roger Toomey of Carson College. I am a member of the American Physical Association. I have applied for permission to attend these sessions, have been accepted, and have paid my registration fee. I am sitting here as is my right and will continue to do so."

Deering could only say blindly, "Get out!"

"I will not," said Roger. He was actually trembling with a synthetic and self-imposed anger. "For what reason must I get out? What have I done?"

Deering put a shaking hand through his hair. He was quite unable to answer.

Roger followed up his advantage. "If you attempt to evict me from these sessions without just cause, I shall certainly sue the Institute."

Deering said, hurriedly, "I call the first day's session of the Spring Seminars of Recent Advances in the Physical Sciences to a close. Our next session will be in this hall tomorrow at nine in—"

Roger left as he was speaking and hurried away.

There was a knock at Roger's hotel-room door that night. It startled him, froze him in his chair.

"Who is it?" he cried.

The answering voice was soft and hurried. "May I see you?"

It was Deering's voice. Roger's hotel as well as his room number were, of course, recorded with the seminar secretary. Roger had hoped, but scarcely expected, that the day's events would have so speedy a consequence.

He opened the door, said stiffly, "Good evening, Professor Deering."

Deering stepped in and looked about. He wore a very light topcoat that he made no gesture to remove. He held his hat in his hand and did not offer to put it down.

He said, "Professor Roger Toomey of Carson College. Right?" He said it with a certain emphasis, as though the name had significance.

"Yes. Sit down, Professor."

Deering remained standing. "Now what is it? What are you after?"

"I don't understand."

"I'm sure you do. You aren't arranging this ridiculous foolery for nothing. Are you trying to make me seem foolish or is it that you expect to hoodwink me into some crooked scheme? I want you to know it won't work. And don't try to use force now. I have friends who know exactly where I am at this moment. I'll advise you to tell the truth and then get out of town."

"Professor Deering! This is my room. If you are here to bully me, I'll ask you to leave. If you don't go, I'll have you put out."

"Do you intend to continue this . . . this persecution?"

"I have not been persecuting you. I don't know you, sir."

"Aren't you the Roger Toomey who wrote me a letter concerning a case of levitation he wanted me to investigate?"

Roger stared at the man. "What letter is this?"

"Do you deny it?"

"Of course I do. What are you talking about? Have you got the letter?"

Professor Deering's lips compressed. "Never mind that. Do you deny you were suspending yourself on wires at this afternoon's sessions?"

"On wires? I don't follow you at all."

"You were levitating!"

"Would you please leave, Professor Deering? I don't think you're well."

The physicist raised his voice. "Do you deny you were levitating?"

"I think you're mad. Do you mean to say I made magician's arrangements in your auditorium? I was never in it before today and when I arrived you were already present. Did you find wires or anything of the sort after I left?"

"I don't know how you did it and I don't care. *Do* you deny you were levitating?"

"Why, of course I do."

"I saw you. Why are you lying?"

"You saw me levitate? Professor Deering, will you tell me how that's possible? I suppose your knowledge of gravitational forces is enough to tell you that true levitation is a meaningless concept except in outer space. Are you playing some sort of joke on me?"

"Good heavens," said Deering in a shrill voice, "why won't you tell the truth?"

"I am. Do you suppose that by stretching out my hand and making a mystic pass . . . so . . . I can go sailing off into air?" And Roger did so, his head brushing the ceiling.

Deering's head jerked upward, "Ah! There . . . there—"

Roger returned to earth, smiling. "You *can't* be serious."

"You did it again. You just did it."

"Did what, sir?"

"You levitated. You just levitated. You can't deny it."

Roger's eyes grew serious. "I think you're sick, sir."

"I know what I saw."

"Perhaps you need a rest. Overwork—"

"It was *not* a hallucination."

"Would you care for a drink?" Roger walked to his suitcase while Deering followed his footsteps with bulging eyes. The toes of his shoes touched air two inches from the ground and went no lower.

Deering sank into the chair Roger had vacated.

"Yes, please," he said, weakly.

Roger gave him the whiskey bottle, watched the other drink, then gag a bit. "How do you feel now?"

"Look here," said Deering, "have you discovered a way of neutralizing gravity?"

Roger stared. "Get hold of yourself, Professor. If I had antigravity, I wouldn't use it to play games on you. I'd be in Washington. I'd be a military secret. I'd be— Well, I wouldn't be here! Surely all this is obvious to you."

Deering jumped to his feet. "Do you intend sitting in on the remaining sessions?"

"Of course."

Deering nodded, jerked his hat down upon his head and hurried out.

For the next three days, Professor Deering did not preside over the seminar sessions. No reason for his absence was given. Roger Toomey, caught between hope and apprehension, sat in the body of the audience and tried to remain inconspicuous. In this, he was not entirely successful. Deering's public attack had made him notorious while his own strong defense had given him a kind of David versus Goliath popularity.

Roger returned to his hotel room Thursday night after an unsatisfactory dinner and remained standing in the doorway, one foot over the threshold. Professor Deering was gazing at him from within. And another man, a gray fedora shoved well back on his forehead, was seated on Roger's bed.

It was the stranger who spoke. "Come inside, Toomey."

Roger did so. "What's going on?"

The stranger opened his wallet and presented a cellophane window to Roger. He said, "I'm Cannon of the F.B.I."

Roger said, "You have influence with the government, I take it, Professor Deering."

"A little," said Deering.

Roger said, "Well, am I under arrest? What's my crime?"

"Take it easy," said Cannon. "We've been collecting some data on you, Toomey. Is this your signature?"

He held a letter out far enough for Roger to see, but not to snatch. It was the letter Roger had written to Deering which the latter had sent on to Morton.

"Yes," said Roger.

"How about this one?" The federal agent had a sheaf of letters.

Roger realized that he must have collected every one he had sent out,

minus those that had been torn up. "They're all mine," he said, wearily.

Deering snorted.

Cannon said, "Professor Deering tells us that you can float."

"Float? What the devil do you mean, float?"

"Float in the air," said Cannon, stolidly.

"Do you believe anything as crazy as that?"

"I'm not here to believe or not to believe, Dr. Toomey," said Cannon. "I'm an agent of the Government of the United States and I've got an assignment to carry out. I'd co-operate if I were you."

"How can I co-operate in something like this? If I came to you and told you that Professor Deering could float in air, you'd have me flat on a psychiatrist's couch in no time."

Cannon said, "Professor Deering has been examined by a psychiatrist at his own request. However, the government has been in the habit of listening very seriously to Professor Deering for a number of years now. Besides, I might as well tell you that we have independent evidence."

"Such as?"

"A group of students at your college have seen you float. Also, a woman who was once secretary to the head of your department. We have statements from all of them."

Roger said, "What kind of statements? Sensible ones that you would be willing to put into the record and show to my congressman?"

Professor Deering interrupted anxiously, "Dr. Toomey, what do you gain by denying the fact that you can levitate? Your own dean admits that you've done something of the sort. He has told me that he will inform you officially that your appointment will be terminated at the end of the academic year. He wouldn't do that for nothing."

"That doesn't matter," said Roger.

"But why won't you admit I saw you levitate?"

"Why should I?"

Cannon said, "I'd like to point out, Dr. Toomey, that if you have any device for counteracting gravity, it would be of great importance to your government."

"Really? I suppose you have investigated my background for possible disloyalty."

"The investigation," said the agent, "is proceeding."

"All right," said Roger, "let's take a hypothetical case. Suppose I admitted I could levitate. Suppose I didn't know how I did it. Suppose I had nothing to give the government but my body and an insoluble problem."

"How can you know it's insoluble?" asked Deering, eagerly.

"I once asked you to study such a phenomenon," pointed out Roger, mildly. "You refused."

"Forget that. Look," Deering spoke rapidly, urgently. "You don't have a position at the moment. I can offer you one in my department as Associate Professor of Physics. Your teaching duties will be nominal. Full-time research on levitation. What about it?"

"It sounds attractive," said Roger.

"I think it's safe to say that unlimited government funds will be available."

"What do I have to do? Just admit I can levitate?"

"I know you can. I saw you. I want you to do it now for Mr. Cannon."

Roger's legs moved upward and his body stretched out horizontally at the level of Cannon's head. He turned to one side and seemed to rest on his right elbow.

Cannon's hat fell backward onto the bed.

He yelled, "He floats."

Deering was almost incoherent with excitement. "Do you see it, man?"

"I sure see something."

"Then report it. Put it right down in your report, do you hear me? Make a complete record of it. They won't say there's anything wrong with me. I didn't doubt for a minute that I had seen it."

But he couldn't have been so happy if that were entirely true.

"I don't even know what the climate is like in Seattle," wailed Jane, "and there are a million things I have to do."

"Need any help?" asked Jim Sarle from his comfortable position in the depths of the armchair.

"There's nothing you can do. Oh, dear." And she flew from the room, but unlike her husband, she did so figuratively only.

Roger Toomey came in. "Jane, do we have the crates for the books yet? Hello, Jim. When did you come in? And where's Jane?"

"I came in a minute ago and Jane's in the next room. I had to get past a policeman to get in. Man, they've got you surrounded."

"Um-m-m," said Roger, absently. "I told them about you."

"I know you did. I've been sworn to secrecy. I told them it was a matter of professional confidence in any case. Why don't you let the movers do the packing? The government is paying, isn't it?"

"Movers wouldn't do it right," said Jane, suddenly hurrying in again and flouncing down on the sofa. "I'm going to have a cigarette."

"Break down, Roger," said Sarle, "and tell me what happened."

Roger smiled sheepishly. "As you said, Jim, I took my mind off the wrong problem and applied it to the right one. It just seemed to me that I was forever being faced with two alternatives. I was either crooked or crazy. Deering said that flatly in his letter to Morton. The Dean assumed I was crooked and Morton suspected that I was crazy.

"But supposing I could show them that I could really levitate. Well, Morton told me what would happen in that case. Either I would be crooked or the *witness* would be insane. Morton said that—he said that if he saw me fly, he'd prefer to believe himself insane than accept the evidence. Of course, he was only being rhetorical. No man would believe in his own insanity while even the faintest alternative existed. I counted on that.

"So I changed my tactics. I went to Deering's seminar. I didn't *tell* him I could float; I showed him, *and then denied I had done it.* The alternative was clear. I was either lying or he—not I, mind you, but *he*—was mad. It was obvious that he would sooner believe in levitation than doubt his own sanity, once he was really put to the test. All his actions thereafter, his bullying, his trip to Washington, his offer of a job, were all intended only to vindicate his own sanity, not to help me."

Sarle said, "In other words you had made your levitation his problem and not your own."

Roger said, "Did you have anything like this in mind when we had our talk, Jim?"

Sarle shook his head. "I had vague notions but a man must solve his own problems if they're to be solved effectively. Do you think they'll work out the principle of levitation now?"

"I don't know, Jim. I still can't communicate the subjective aspects of the phenomenon. But that doesn't matter. We'll be investigating them and that's what counts." He struck his balled right fist into the palm of his left hand. "As far as I'm concerned the important point is that I made them help me."

"Is it?" asked Sarle, softly. "I should say that the important point is that you let them make *you* help *them,* which is a different thing altogether."

Ray Bradbury is probably better known to the general reading public today than any other science-fantasy writer. There are good reasons for this, and one of them is his favorite theme—a consistent, defiant rejection, by the individual man, of organized science and mechanized society.

Whether or not one tends to sympathize, personally, with Mr. Bradbury's embattled position against the bogeyman of science, there is no doubting that he has touched upon an ever growing fear and worry on the part of many people today—or that the questions he is voicing will have to be answered by physical and social scientists before modern society can learn to live with its powerful new toys.

The Veldt *by Ray Bradbury*

"George, I wish you'd look at the nursery."

"What's wrong with it?"

"I don't know."

"Well, then."

"I just want you to look at it, is all, or call a psychologist in to look at it."

"What would a psychologist want with a nursery?"

"You know very well what he'd want." His wife paused in the middle of the kitchen and watched the stove busy humming to itself, making supper for four.

"It's just that the nursery is different now than it was."

"All right, let's have a look."

They walked down the hall of their soundproofed, Happylife Home, which had cost them thirty thousand dollars installed, this house which clothed and fed and rocked them to sleep and played and sang and was good to them. Their approach sensitized a switch somewhere and the nursery light flicked on when they came within ten feet of it. Similarly, behind them, in the halls, lights went on and off as they left them behind, with a soft automaticity.

"Well," said George Hadley.

They stood on the thatched floor of the nursery. It was forty feet across

by forty feet long and thirty feet high; it had cost half again as much as the rest of the house. "But nothing's too good for our children," George had said.

The nursery was silent. It was empty as a jungle glade at hot high noon. The walls were blank and two-dimensional. Now, as George and Lydia Hadley stood in the center of the room, the walls began to purr and recede into crystalline distance, it seemed, and presently an African veldt appeared, in three dimensions; on all sides, in colors reproduced to the final pebble and bit of straw. The ceiling above them became a deep sky with a hot yellow sun.

George Hadley felt the perspiration start on his brow.

"Let's get out of this sun," he said. "This is a little too real. But I don't see anything wrong."

"Wait a moment, you'll see," said his wife.

Now the hidden odorophonics were beginning to blow a wind of odor at the two people in the middle of the baked veldtland. The hot straw smell of lion grass, the cool green smell of the hidden water hole, the great rusty smell of animals, the smell of dust like a red paprika in the hot air. And now the sounds: the thump of distant antelope feet on grassy sod, the papery rustling of vultures. A shadow passed through the sky. The shadow flickered on George Hadley's upturned, sweating face.

"Filthy creatures," he heard his wife say.

"The vultures."

"You see, there are the lions, far over, that way. Now they're on their way to the water hole. They've just been eating," said Lydia. "I don't know what."

"Some animal." George Hadley put his hand up to shield off the burning light from his squinted eyes. "A zebra or a baby giraffe, maybe."

"Are you sure?" His wife sounded peculiarly tense.

"No, it's a little late to be *sure,*" he said, amused. "Nothing over there I can see but cleaned bone, and the vultures dropping for what's left."

"Did you hear that scream?" she asked.

"No."

"About a minute ago?"

"Sorry, no."

The lions were coming. And again George Hadley was filled with admiration for the mechanical genius who had conceived this room. A miracle of efficiency selling for an absurdly low price. Every home should have one. Oh, occasionally they frightened you with their clinical accuracy, they startled you, gave you a twinge, but most of the time what fun for everyone, not only your own son and daughter, but for

yourself when you felt like a quick jaunt to a foreign land, a quick change of scenery. Well, here it was!

And here were the lions now, fifteen feet away, so real, so feverishly and startlingly real that you could feel the prickling fur on your hand, and your mouth was stuffed with the dusty upholstery smell of their heated pelts, and the yellow of them was in your eyes like the yellow of an exquisite French tapestry, the yellows of lions and summer grass, and the sound of the matted lion lungs exhaling on the silent noontide, and the smell of meat from the panting, dripping mouths.

The lions stood looking at George and Lydia Hadley with terrible green-yellow eyes.

"Watch out!" screamed Lydia.

The lions came running at them.

Lydia bolted and ran. Instinctively, George sprang after her. Outside, in the hall, with the door slammed, he was laughing and she was crying, and they both stood appalled at the other's reaction.

"George!"

"Lydia! Oh, my dear poor sweet Lydia!"

"They almost got us!"

"Walls, Lydia, remember; crystal walls, that's all they are. Oh, they look real, I must admit—Africa in your parlor—but it's all dimensional superreactionary, supersensitive color film and mental tape film behind glass screens. It's all odorophonics and sonics, Lydia. Here's my handkerchief."

"I'm afraid." She came to him and put her body against him and cried steadily. "Did you see? Did you *feel?* It's too real."

"Now, Lydia . . ."

"You've got to tell Wendy and Peter not to read any more on Africa."

"Of course—of course." He patted her.

"Promise?"

"Sure."

"And lock the nursery for a few days until I get my nerves settled."

"You know how difficult Peter is about that. When I punished him a month ago by locking the nursery for even a few hours—the tantrum he threw! And Wendy too. They *live* for the nursery."

"It's got to be locked, that's all there is to it."

"All right." Reluctantly he locked the huge door. "You've been working too hard. You need a rest."

"I don't know—I don't know," she said, blowing her nose, sitting down in a chair that immediately began to rock and comfort her. "Maybe I don't have enough to do. Maybe I have time to think too much. Why

don't we shut the whole house off for a few days and take a vacation?"

"You mean you want to fry my eggs for me?"

"Yes." She nodded.

"And darn my socks?"

"Yes." A frantic, watery-eyed nodding.

"And sweep the house?"

"Yes, yes—oh, yes!"

"But I thought that's why we bought this house, so we wouldn't have to do anything?"

"That's just it. I feel like I don't belong here. The house is wife and mother now and nursemaid. Can I compete with an African veldt? Can I give a bath and scrub the children as efficiently or quickly as the automatic scrub bath can? I cannot. And it isn't just me. It's you. You've been awfully nervous lately."

"I suppose I have been smoking too much."

"You look as if you didn't know what to do with yourself in this house, either. You smoke a little more every morning and drink a little more every afternoon and need a little more sedative every night. You're beginning to feel unnecessary too."

"Am I?" He paused and tried to feel into himself to see what was really there.

"Oh, George!" She looked beyond him, at the nursery door. "Those lions can't get out of there, can they?"

He looked at the door and saw it tremble as if something had jumped against it from the other side.

"Of course not," he said.

At dinner they ate alone, for Wendy and Peter were at a special plastic carnival across town and had televised home to say they'd be late, to go ahead eating. So George Hadley, bemused, sat watching the dining-room table produce warm dishes of food from its mechanical interior.

"We forgot the ketchup," he said.

"Sorry," said a small voice within the table, and ketchup appeared.

As for the nursery, thought George Hadley, it won't hurt for the children to be locked out of it awhile. Too much of anything isn't good for anyone. And it was clearly indicated that the children had been spending a little too much time on Africa. That *sun*. He could feel it on his neck, still, like a hot paw. And the *lions*. And the smell of blood. Remarkable how the nursery caught the telepathic emanations of the children's minds and created life to fill their every desire. The children thought lions, and there were lions. The children thought zebras, and there were zebras. Sun—sun. Giraffes—giraffes. Death and death.

That *last*. He chewed tastelessly on the meat that the table had cut for him. Death thoughts. They were awfully young, Wendy and Peter, for death thoughts. Or, no, you were never too young, really. Long before you knew what death was you were wishing it on someone else. When you were two years old you were shooting people with cap pistols.

But this—the long, hot African veldt—the awful death in the jaws of a lion. And repeated again and again.

"Where are you going?"

He didn't answer Lydia. Preoccupied, he let the lights glow softly on ahead of him, extinguish behind him as he padded to the nursery door. He listened against it. Far away, a lion roared.

He unlocked the door and opened it. Just before he stepped inside, he heard a faraway scream. And then another roar from the lions, which subsided quickly.

He stepped into Africa. How many times in the last year had he opened this door and found Wonderland, Alice, the Mock Turtle, or Aladdin and his Magical Lamp, or Jack Pumpkinhead of Oz, or Dr. Doolittle, or the cow jumping over a very real-appearing moon—all the delightful contraptions of a make-believe world. How often had he seen Pegasus flying in the sky ceiling, or seen fountains of red fireworks, or heard angel voices singing. But now, this yellow-hot Africa, this bake oven with murder in the heat. Perhaps Lydia was right. Perhaps they needed a little vacation from the fantasy which was growing a bit too real for ten-year-old children. It was all right to exercise one's mind with gymnastic fantasies, but when the lively child mind settled on *one* pattern . . . ? It seemed that, at a distance, for the past month, he had heard lions roaring, and smelled their strong odor seeping as far away as his study door. But, being busy, he had paid it no attention.

George Hadley stood on the African grassland alone. The lions looked up from their feeding, watching him. The only flaw to the illusion was the open door through which he could see his wife, far down the dark hall, like a framed picture, eating her dinner abstractedly.

"Go away," he said to the lions.

They did not go.

He knew the principle of the room exactly. You sent out your thoughts. Whatever you thought would appear.

"Let's have Aladdin and his lamp," he snapped.

The veldtland remained; the lions remained.

"Come on, room! I demand Aladdin!" he said.

Nothing happened. The lions mumbled in their baked pelts.

"Aladdin!"

He went back to dinner. "The fool room's out of order," he said. "It won't respond."

"Or——"

"Or what?"

"Or it *can't* respond," said Lydia, "because the children have thought about Africa and lions and killing so many days that the room's in a rut."

"Could be."

"Or Peter's set it to remain that way."

"*Set* it?"

"He may have got into the machinery and fixed something."

"Peter doesn't know machinery."

"He's a wise one for ten. That IQ of his——"

"Nevertheless——"

"Hello, Mom. Hello, Dad."

The Hadleys turned. Wendy and Peter were coming in the front door, cheeks like peppermint candy, eyes like bright blue agate marbles, a smell of ozone on their jumpers from their trip in the helicopter.

"You're just in time for supper," said both parents.

"We're full of strawberry ice cream and hot dogs," said the children, holding hands. "But we'll sit and watch."

"Yes, come tell us about the nursery," said George Hadley.

The brother and sister blinked at him and then at each other. "Nursery?"

"All about Africa and everything," said the father with false joviality.

"I don't understand," said Peter.

"Your mother and I were just traveling through Africa with rod and reel; Tom Swift and his Electric Lion," said George Hadley.

"There's no Africa in the nursery," said Peter simply.

"Oh, come now, Peter. We know better."

"I don't remember any Africa," said Peter to Wendy. "Do you?"

"No."

"Run see and come tell."

She obeyed.

"Wendy, come back here!" said George Hadley, but she was gone. The house lights followed her like a flock of fireflies. Too late, he realized he had forgotten to lock the nursery door after his last inspection.

"Wendy'll look and come tell us," said Peter.

"She doesn't have to tell *me*. I've seen it."

"I'm sure you're mistaken, Father."

"I'm not, Peter. Come along now."

But Wendy was back. "It's not Africa," she said breathlessly.

"We'll see about this," said George Hadley, and they all walked down the hall together and opened the nursery door.

There was a green, lovely forest, a lovely river, a purple mountain, high voices singing, and Rima, lovely and mysterious, lurking in the trees with colorful flights of butterflies, like animated bouquets, lingering in her long hair. The African veldtland was gone. The lions were gone. Only Rima was here now, singing a song so beautiful that it brought tears to your eyes.

George Hadley looked in at the changed scene. "Go to bed," he said to the children.

They opened their mouths.

"You heard me," he said.

They went off to the air closet, where a wind sucked them like brown leaves up the flue to their slumber rooms.

George Hadley walked through the singing glade and picked up something that lay in the corner near where the lions had been. He walked slowly back to his wife.

"What is that?" she asked.

"An old wallet of mine," he said.

He showed it to her. The smell of hot grass was on it and the smell of a lion. There were drops of saliva on it, it had been chewed, and there were blood smears on both sides.

He closed the nursery door and locked it, tight.

In the middle of the night he was still awake and he knew his wife was awake. "Do you think Wendy changed it?" she said at last, in the dark room.

"Of course."

"Made it from a veldt into a forest and put Rima there instead of lions?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I don't know. But it's staying locked until I find out."

"How did your wallet get there?"

"I don't know anything," he said, "except that I'm beginning to be sorry we bought that room for the children. If children are neurotic at all, a room like that——"

"It's supposed to help them work off their neuroses in a healthful way."

"I'm starting to wonder." He stared at the ceiling.

"We've given the children everything they ever wanted. Is this our reward—secrecy, disobedience?"

"Who was it said, 'Children are carpets, they should be stepped on occasionally'? We've never lifted a hand. They're insufferable—let's admit it. They come and go when they like; they treat us as if *we* were offspring. They're spoiled and we're spoiled."

"They've been acting funny ever since you forbade them to take the rocket to New York a few months ago."

"They're not old enough to do that alone, I explained."

"Nevertheless, I've noticed they've been decidedly cool toward us since."

"I think I'll have David McClean come tomorrow morning to have a look at Africa."

"But it's not Africa now, it's Green Mansions country and Rima."

"I have a feeling it'll be Africa again before then."

A moment later they heard the screams.

Two screams. Two people screaming from downstairs. And then a roar of lions.

"Wendy and Peter aren't in their rooms," said his wife.

He lay in his bed with his beating heart. "No," he said. "They've broken into the nursery."

"Those screams—they sound familiar."

"Do they?"

"Yes, awfully."

And although their beds tried very hard, the two adults couldn't be rocked to sleep for another hour. A smell of cats was in the night air.

"Father?" said Peter.

"Yes."

Peter looked at his shoes. He never looked at his father any more, nor at his mother. "You aren't going to lock up the nursery for good, are you?"

"That all depends."

"On what?" snapped Peter.

"On you and your sister. If you intersperse this Africa with a little variety—oh, Sweden perhaps, or Denmark or China——"

"I thought we were free to play as we wished."

"You are, within reasonable bounds."

"What's wrong with Africa, Father?"

"Oh, so now you admit you have been conjuring up Africa, do you?"

"I wouldn't want the nursery locked up," said Peter coldly. "Ever."

"Matter of fact, we're thinking of turning the whole house off for about a month. Live sort of a carefree one-for-all existence."

"That sounds dreadful! Would I have to tie my own shoes instead of letting the shoe tier do it? And brush my own teeth and comb my hair and give myself a bath?"

"It would be fun for a change, don't you think?"

"No, it would be horrid. I didn't like it when you took out the picture painter last month."

"That's because I wanted you to learn to paint all by yourself, son."

"I don't want to do anything but look and listen and smell; what else *is* there to do?"

"All right, go play in Africa."

"Will you shut off the house sometime soon?"

"We're considering it."

"I don't think you'd better consider it any more, Father."

"I won't have any threats from my son!"

"Very well." And Peter strolled off to the nursery.

"Am I on time?" said David McClean.

"Breakfast?" asked George Hadley.

"Thanks, had some. What's the trouble?"

"David, you're a psychologist."

"I should hope so."

"Well, then, have a look at our nursery. You saw it a year ago when you dropped by; did you notice anything peculiar about it then?"

"Can't say I did; the usual violences, a tendency toward a slight paranoia here or there, usual in children because they feel persecuted by parents constantly, but, oh, really nothing."

They walked down the hall. "I locked the nursery up," explained the father, "and the children broke back into it during the night. I let them stay so they could form the patterns for you to see."

There was a terrible screaming from the nursery.

"There it is," said George Hadley. "See what you make of it."

They walked in on the children without rapping.

The screams had faded. The lions were feeding.

"Run outside a moment, children," said George Hadley. "No, don't change the mental combination. Leave the walls as they are. Get!"

With the children gone, the two men stood studying the lions clustered at a distance, eating with great relish whatever it was they had caught.

"I wish I knew what it was," said George Hadley. "Sometimes I can almost see. Do you think if I brought high-powered binoculars here and——"

David McClean laughed dryly. "Hardly." He turned to study all four walls. "How long has this been going on?"

"A little over a month."

"It certainly doesn't *feel* good."

"I want facts, not feelings."

"My dear George, a psychologist never saw a fact in his life. He only hears about feelings; vague things. This doesn't feel good, I tell you. Trust my hunches and my instincts. I have a nose for something bad. This is very bad. My advice to you is to have the whole damn room torn down and your children brought to me every day during the next year for treatment."

"Is it that bad?"

"I'm afraid so. One of the original uses of these nurseries was so that we could study the patterns left on the walls by the child's mind, study at our leisure, and help the child. In this case, however, the room has become a channel toward—destructive thoughts, instead of a release away from them."

"Didn't you sense this before?"

"I sensed only that you had spoiled your children more than most. And now you're letting them down in some way. What way?"

"I wouldn't let them go to New York."

"What else?"

"I've taken a few machines from the house and threatened them, a month ago, with closing up the nursery unless they did their homework. I did close it for a few days to show I meant business."

"Ah, ha!"

"Does that mean anything?"

"Everything. Where before they had a Santa Claus now they have a Scrooge. Children prefer Santas. You've let this room and this house replace you and your wife in your children's affections. This room is their mother and father, far more important in their lives than their real parents. And now you come along and want to shut it off. No wonder there's hatred here. You can feel it coming out of the sky. Feel that sun. George, you'll have to change your life. Like too many others, you've built it around creature comforts. Why, you'd starve tomorrow if something went wrong in your kitchen. You wouldn't know how to tap an egg. Nevertheless, turn everything off. Start new. It'll take time. But we'll make good children out of bad in a year, wait and see."

"But won't the shock be too much for the children, shutting the room up abruptly, for good?"

"I don't want them going any deeper into this, that's all."

The lions were finished with their red feast.

The lions were standing on the edge of the clearing watching the two men.

"Now *I'm* feeling persecuted," said McClean. "Let's get out of here. I never have cared for these damned rooms. Make me nervous."

"The lions look real, don't they?" said George Hadley. "I don't suppose there's any way—"

"What?"

"—that they could *become* real?"

"Not that I know."

"Some flaw in the machinery, a tampering or something?"

"No."

They went to the door.

"I don't imagine the room will like being turned off," said the father.

"Nothing ever likes to die—even a room."

"I wonder if it hates me for wanting to switch it off?"

"Paranoia is thick around here today," said David McClean. "You can follow it like a spoor. Hello." He bent and picked up a bloody scarf. "This yours?"

"No." George Hadley's face was rigid. "It belongs to Lydia."

They went to the fuse box together and threw the switch that killed the nursery.

The two children were in hysterics. They screamed and pranced and threw things. They yelled and sobbed and swore and jumped at the furniture.

"You can't do that to the nursery, you can't!"

"Now, children."

The children flung themselves onto a couch, weeping.

"George," said Lydia Hadley, "turn on the nursery, just for a few moments. You can't be so abrupt."

"No."

"You can't be so cruel."

"Lydia, it's off, and it stays off. And the whole damn house dies as of here and now. The more I see of the mess we've put ourselves in, the more it sickens me. We've been contemplating our mechanical, electronic navels for too long. My God, how we need a breath of honest air!"

And he marched about the house turning off the voice clocks, the stoves, the heaters, the shoe shiners, the shoe lacers, the body scrubbers and swabbers and massagers, and every other machine he could put his hand to.

The house was full of dead bodies, it seemed. It felt like a mechanical

cemetery. So silent. None of the humming hidden energy of machines waiting to function at the tap of a button.

"Don't let them do it!" wailed Peter at the ceiling, as if he were talking to the house, the nursery. "Don't let Father kill everything." He turned to his father. "Oh, I hate you!"

"Insults won't get you anywhere."

"I wish you were dead!"

"We were, for a long while. Now we're going to really start living. Instead of being handled and massaged, we're going to *live*."

Wendy was still crying and Peter joined her again. "Just a moment, just one moment, just another moment of nursery," they wailed.

"Oh, George," said the wife, "it can't hurt."

"All right—all right, if they'll only just shut up. One minute, mind you, and then off forever."

"Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!" sang the children, smiling with wet faces.

"And then we're going on a vacation. David McClean is coming back in half an hour to help us move out and get to the airport. I'm going to dress. You turn the nursery on for a minute, Lydia, just a minute, mind you."

And the three of them went babbling off while he let himself be vacuumed upstairs through the air flue and set about dressing himself. A minute later Lydia appeared.

"I'll be glad when we get away," she sighed.

"Did you leave them in the nursery?"

"I wanted to dress too. Oh, that horrid Africa. What can they see in it?"

"Well, in five minutes we'll be on our way to Iowa. Lord, how did we ever get in this house? What prompted us to buy a nightmare?"

"Pride, money, foolishness."

"I think we'd better get downstairs before those kids get engrossed with those damned beasts again."

Just then they heard the children calling, "Daddy, Mommy, come quick—quick!"

They went downstairs in the air flue and ran down the hall. The children were nowhere in sight. "Wendy? Peter!"

They ran into the nursery. The veldtland was empty save for the lions waiting, looking at them. "Peter, Wendy?"

The door slammed.

"Wendy, Peter!"

George Hadley and his wife whirled and ran back to the door.

"Open the door!" cried George Hadley, trying the knob. "Why, they've

locked it from the outside! Peter!" He beat at the door. "Open up!"

He heard Peter's voice outside, against the door.

"Don't let them switch off the nursery and the house," he was saying.

Mr. and Mrs. George Hadley beat at the door. "Now, don't be ridiculous, children. It's time to go. Mr. McClean'll be here in a minute and . . ."

And then they heard the sounds.

The lions on three sides of them, in the yellow veldt grass, padding through the dry straw, rumbling and roaring in their throats.

The lions.

Mr. Hadley looked at his wife and they turned and looked back at the beasts edging slowly forward, crouching, tails stiff.

Mr. and Mrs. Hadley screamed.

And suddenly they realized why those other screams had sounded familiar.

"Well, here I am," said David McClean in the nursery doorway. "Oh, hello." He stared at the two children seated in the center of the open glade eating a little picnic lunch. Beyond them was the water hole and the yellow veldtland; above was the hot sun. He began to perspire. "Where are your father and mother?"

The children looked up and smiled. "Oh, they'll be here directly."

"Good, we must get going." At a distance Mr. McClean saw the lions fighting and clawing and then quieting down to feed in silence under the shady trees.

He squinted at the lions with his hand up to his eyes.

Now the lions were done feeding. They moved to the water hole to drink.

A shadow flickered over Mr. McClean's hot face. Many shadows flickered. The vultures were dropping down the blazing sky.

"A cup of tea?" asked Wendy in the silence.

J. J. Coupling is the pen name for one of the country's leading communications engineers, the editor of an important technical journal, author of two weighty volumes on electronics, and far and away the best *unpublished poet I have ever encountered at a cocktail party.*

"Mr. Kinkaid's Pasts" brings us back again to the complex problem of predestination vs. *free will. The idea of varying degrees of probability in the future, as expressed in "The Golden Man," is comforting—but immediately poses a fresh difficulty:*

If we assume that the present is just a cross-section of time, coexistent with past and future—and if we further assume that the future is not entirely rigidly set—how can we then deny the same flexibility to the past?

We can't, says Mr. Coupling: "Since the past is not unique," he explains simply. "No one, in fact, can even say that it didn't *happen—not with absolute certainty. But* what didn't *happen, if* it did? That *can never be settled either."*

Mr. Kinkaid's Pasts *by J. J. Coupling*

I am sure that the Company's records are quite adequate and represent the best insurance practice. It is a fine company, and on April 14 I shall have represented it for forty-three years. But I try to feel a personal sort of responsibility for my clients, and I keep a card file in my room to remind me of their interests. This I go through at least once a week; but more often, when I have no other plans, I run through it almost every evening, assessing eventualities and trying to remember my clients as the human beings that they are.

That evening I noticed that I should finally take action concerning the card with the violet tab and the red-and-green marker with the number 27. All cards have a tab; violet is for term insurance. The marker, however, is for premiums in arrears. The colors and the number told me that in just two weeks from that day the policy would lapse. I allow myself that much time to add my personal efforts to the company routines in serving the interests of my clients.

The card bore no photograph opposite the name F. X. Nordstrom

(sometimes I manage to obtain snapshots of my clients), but I remembered the man well. He was a tall, vigorous, blond, bearded man. He had taken out $20,000 of term insurance for two years. The first annual premium had been paid; but the second had not, and later communications had been returned undelivered. I remembered further that Mr. Nordstrom had been very uncommunicative. He had spoken only in answer to direct questions, and then only if absolutely necessary. I had surmised, however, that he had taken the insurance in connection with some business venture. This was rather confirmed by the fact that the first address he gave, c/o S. F. Kinkaid, 710 Starr St., was that of the beneficiary of the policy. This address had been changed by post card (I remembered) to Shepheard's Hotel, Cairo, and that later by air mail (I saved the cover for Samuel T. Henry, whose son, Jeremy S., collects stamps and likes the Near East particularly) to Poste Restante, Luxor. The Company or I had had no occasion to communicate with Mr. Nordstrom there until the second annual premium was due, and as I have noted, the letter was returned undelivered.

As Starr Street is within a few miles of my room, I resolved to call on Mr. Kinkaid after dinner the next day to see if I could ascertain Mr. Nordstrom's whereabouts and be of service to him.

The Green Gables bus took me to Askelon Avenue and Brent Place. From there I had only to walk back one street to Starr, and three blocks and a quarter north brought me to 710.

I found 710 Starr Street to be one of those outmoded houses of the so-called Spanish type: tanned stucco with a red tiled roof. There was a patio to the left front and a large leaded window to the right, with insets of colored glass. The whole place, as nearly as I could tell in the evening, seemed well kept, and the lawn was still damp from the sprinklers, which were then turned off. I reached the front door through a gate in the patio, and the button rang a double chiming bell which brought Mr. Kinkaid himself to the door.

When I had given Mr. Kinkaid my card and explained that I thought he might be of help in locating a client of mine, he kindly asked me into the living room. This, I saw, was fitted as an office with files and large metal storage cabinets along the walls. At the south wall Mr. Kindaid had an oak desk, clear except for a telephone, a calendar and a photograph of a handsome young lady. Now his chair was swiveled away from the desk, so that he faced me across a long oak table, on the other side of which I was seated in an oak office armchair. As I talked with him I noted his features, which I still remember well.

Mr. Kinkaid was about five feet six or seven, and he weighed perhaps

160 pounds. He had a roundish face with a snub nose and blue eyes. His sandy hair, which had thinned considerably (he was perhaps forty-five) was combed across the top of his head, and his eyebrows were sparse and inconspicuous. Perhaps his most notable feature was that his neck was short, so that his head seemed set squarely upon his shoulders, and as these shoulders were hunched forward, he appeared rather to look up at me.

Unlike Mr. Nordstrom, Mr. Kinkaid was very agreeable and open to talk to. I found that Mr. Nordstrom had indeed taken the insurance out for business purposes. Mr. Kinkaid had advanced him the sum of the insurance for a venture to be conducted in Egypt, and the insurance had been a precaution against misadventure on the part of Mr. Nordstrom. Our letters to Egypt had not reached Mr. Nordstrom because he had since returned. Perhaps he had failed to notify us, or perhaps his letter had gone astray. Since that time, Mr. Nordstrom had, unfortunately, disappeared.

Mr. Kinkaid made every effort to be helpful to me, and there ensued a conversation which lasted far into the night. Although I remember the whole thing almost word for word as it occurred, it was of course full of false starts, repetitions and inconsequential details. Here I can only hope to reduce its content to some sort of coherent account.

I may say that throughout Mr. Kinkaid showed himself to be a man of wide interests and sound knowledge. In talking with my clients I pick up a smattering of information concerning the variety of fields which I find they like to discuss, but with Mr. Kinkaid I found myself continually out of my depth, so that I cannot be sure that I have rightly understood him.

From the very start I found myself plunged into a subject of which I have only a superficial knowledge. The venture in which Mr. Nordstrom was engaged had been nothing less than an archeological expedition of limited scope. Mr. Kinkaid, who had, as I could see, a deep interest in the Old Testament, was particularly concerned with the role of the Jews in Egyptian history. He had met Mr. Nordstrom, who was a professional explorer and adventurer, through a mutual friend. This friend was, I might add, the handsome young lady whose photograph stood on Mr. Kinkaid's desk. The idea had come to Mr. Kinkaid of financing a modest expedition to Egypt to search for possible traces of Joseph and his people, by means of first-hand examination of various archeological relics and monuments and, if necessary, through actual excavation. I have a suspicion, perhaps unjust, that this last was to have been a clandestine affair, for in our very long conversation no slightest

mention was made of obtaining the permission of the Egyptian government.

Mr. Nordstrom was to have been gone two years, but he returned after a year only, with a story of some trouble with the authorities. He brought back, however, two relics, which he presumably smuggled from the country. One was a fragmentary mummified skull, and the other was a torn fragment of a papyrus manuscript. These Mr. Nordstrom had obtained from a looted and sand-filled tomb. After consulting his file, Mr. Kinkaid located a numbered black box in one of the steel cabinets and, bringing it to the table, exhibited these relics to me.

The skull lacked the lower jaw, and some of the teeth in the upper jaw were missing. One of those remaining seemed to be filled; Mr. Kinkaid said it was a tin filling, which was common among the ancient Egyptians.

Of the papyrus fragment I could make nothing, but Mr. Kinkaid told me with some show of excitement that the hieroglyphs said nothing less than: *The Book of Joseph, and the account of his stewardship to Potiphar.*

My good parents saw that I received sound religious training, and you can imagine my emotion to think that here lay a contemporary account of Joseph, and that the skull was perhaps that of one who had known him.

Mr. Kinkaid had even greater surprises in store for me, however. Much as he regretted Mr. Nordstrom's precipitate return with no more than these tantalizing fragments, he was delighted at the same time to have obtained so much, and he resolved to have more. This brought him to a subject even more foreign to my understanding than Egyptology. I am not sure that I have even properly identified the field upon which Mr. Kinkaid now touched, but I take it to be a part of the higher mathematics or of quantum physics. I found everything about it bewildering and, indeed, almost miraculous, but who today can gainsay the marvels of science, when cybernetics gives us machines that play games and think far beyond the power of man, when astrophysics reveals the continuing creation of the universe, and when even Dr. Einstein confesses himself baffled by the wonders of wave mechanics?

Mr. Kinkaid's achievement almost outdid these marvels, however. It was nothing less than reaching the time of Joseph and the Pharaohs in one's very person! The principles involved I could not fully grasp, but I gathered that the essential element was mathematical and mental, involving a reorientation of the mind in hyperspace. In this, I learned, the papyrus fragment played an important part, for it served as a sort of com-

pass in directing the minds of Mr. Nordstrom and Mr. Kinkaid to the times of Joseph, just as Mr. Kinkaid's calling to mind the first name of Mr. Nordstrom was essential in directing the latter's return into the present.

This made me think of the magic use of names in primitive societies, as explained to me by Peter J. Mertz, one of my clients who is interested in anthropology. I marveled that as Democritus understood something of atoms in times preceding the rise of modern science, so too, apparently, even primitive peoples have by chance foreseen the results of an even more astonishing penetration of the hidden order of nature.

Mr. Kinkaid assured me that had two not been necessary for such a temporal excursion, he himself would have endeavored to reach the time of Joseph, but he doubted that he could trust anyone less expert than himself to guide him back through the proper use of his given name.

That Mr. Kinkaid himself possessed this facility was shown by the successful return of Mr. Nordstrom from his first journey to the time of Joseph in a venture that was not entirely successful.

It seems that Mr. Kinkaid was troubled almost as much as I had been by the stalwart Mr. Nordstrom's taciturnity, and it was only with difficulty that he pried from him the barest bones of the story.

How Mr. Nordstrom came to just the part of Joseph's career he reached perhaps he alone could tell us. As he and Mr. Kinkaid concentrated on the papyrus and on Joseph, there was a snap, and Mr. Nordstrom found himself in the midst of a tremendous hullabaloo. He was in a large and richly furnished Oriental apartment. Two huge, fat, beardless blacks were holding a handsome, curly-headed young man by either arm. A pretty but somewhat plump woman, her clothes disarrayed, was screaming and pointing. Girls, very scantily clad, were rushing about aimlessly, except for one, who supported the woman and tried to hold a phial under her nose.

Mr. Nordstrom, who had found himself stark naked in the corner of the room, hid behind a drapery and watched these and ensuing events. What immediately followed was that a portly man of middle age strutted onto the scene of disorder. There was a conversation, unintelligible to Nordstrom, and the blacks dragged the handsome and apparently protesting youth away. The portly man left. The girls clustered about the woman, who first collapsed on a couch and then sprang up and shouted angrily, apparently dismissing them. Then she collapsed, sighing and weeping and tossing about in great restlessness.

It was at this point that Nordstrom took action. Just how he secured her co-operation I am not sure. He was, I had noted, a man with an air

of authority, but even so, it must have been hard to explain himself and his condition to a hysterical woman who could not understand a word he said.

Whatever the means of which he availed himself, he managed not only to insinuate himself into the good graces of the woman, who turned out to be none other than Potiphar's wife, but he secured her co-operation to the extent that she clothed him, gave him quarters in her apartment for several months, and, during this period, undertook to teach him the Egyptian language. This, of course, was an absolute requisite if he were to progress further in his mission.

I gather that something went wrong in the meeting of Nordstrom and Potiphar, for a point came at which he found himself secured by the two black giants at Potiphar's command, and he judged it wise to make his escape by returning to the present with the aid of Mr. Kinkaid.

When he had with great labor extracted this general account from Mr. Nordstrom, Mr. Kinkaid was halfway between joy and disappointment. His plan had so nearly succeeded, but Mr. Nordstrom had seen Joseph (if, indeed, the handsome youth had been Joseph) for a few moments only. Still, he had learned the Egyptian language—or so they both thought.

For Mr. Nordstrom's next venture into the time of Joseph disclosed a phenomenon which from the point of view of scientific interest I find perhaps the most fascinating in Mr. Kinkaid's account.

Both Mr. Kinkaid and Mr. Nordstrom had agreed that it would be best to return to the same period, where, or rather, when, Mr. Nordstrom could endeavor to handle his relations with Potiphar more successfully. Accordingly, Mr. Nordstrom found himself naked in the same scene he had encountered before. But it was different! The youth held by the black men was a mean-looking fellow this time, and one of the black men was slightly lame. The apartment was different also, and Potiphar's wife was taller, not so plump, and not nearly so good-looking. Most startling of all to Mr. Nordstrom was the fact that although he had spent months in this period perfecting his knowledge of Egyptian, he could barely catch the drift of what was being said. The vowels were different, and the accents were placed differently. This latter especially made the speech hard to follow.

I must confess that I was no less puzzled than Mr. Nordstrom had been, and I interrupted Mr. Kinkaid's account at this point to ask for an explanation.

If anything could astound me in this age of miracles of science, Mr. Kinkaid's explanation would have, but I have learned that there are

deeper minds than mine, and I accept what I am assured is true and try to make myself understand it.

Suffice it to say, there is no unique past! The uncertainty principle of Heisenberg, which philosophers use to assure us that the world is not a predestined machine, without room for free will, leading to one unique future, just as decisively contradicts the idea of a unique past. No present measurement made on the ultimate particles of matter can predict just where they will go, nor can any such measurement tell exactly whence they have come. Photographs, pictures, manuscripts, monuments and shards of civilizations sketch in rough outlines of the past, but science is helpless to fill in the picture precisely. Thus, there is an infinity of pasts which are consistent with all the evidences in our present universe, and any of these pasts is as much the real past as any other. Mr. Nordstrom had visited one possible past on the first occasion and a different past on the second!

Once this had been explained to me, such knowledge of Egyptology as I once obtained from F. O. Axerson of the city museum, a client of mine, came to my rescue. Of course the spoken language could be different in different pasts, for the Egyptians had signs for neither vowels nor accents. Only the consonants would have to be consistent from past to past!

Mr. Kinkaid himself congratulated me on this observation. I in turn sympathized with him on the unfortunate turn his experiments had taken, for they clearly made it impossible for him ever to ascertain the exact truth about Joseph and the Jews in Egypt. If all versions of the past which do not contradict the present are one as much the true past as another, certainly history can never become the exact science which Mr. Kinkaid had been striving to make it. Indeed, it may even be that such questions as whether Moses is a historical figure or a mythological folk hero have become meaningless.

I observed to Mr. Kinkaid, however, that, looked at broadly, this new fact of science should tend to promote tolerance and respect for the opinions of others, religious or secular, for divergent views on history, sacred or profane, need no longer be regarded as contradictory.

Disappointed as he had been by his effort to get at the unique facts about Joseph, Mr. Kinkaid nevertheless agreed with me in this cheerful view of his discovery, and the conversation passed on to Mr. Nordstrom's further experiences.

It appeared that the taciturn explorer was no better able to establish friendly relations with Potiphar on his second attempt than on the first,

for again he was forced to return hurriedly to our era with no further knowledge about Joseph in any past.

The third attempt was, alas, even less successful, for Mr. Nordstrom had failed to return at all!

Mr. Kinkaid reproached himself concerning this. He believed that in his preoccupation he may not have concentrated on Mr. Nordstrom and on his given name frequently enough.

"You see," Mr. Kinkaid told me, "I was very worried about Wanda at the time."

He indicated that Wanda was the young lady in the photograph on his desk, and he looked so morose that delicacy forbade me to inquire concerning her and his troubles.

With whatever justification, Mr. Kinkaid blamed himself severely for not having kept Mr. Nordstrom and his name more in mind.

"Perhaps," he said, "he had need to return to me to escape some terrible danger, and there was no mind nor token ready to guide him here. Indeed, I fear I have evidence that this was so."

At this, Mr. Kinkaid looked even sadder, and I could not forbear encouraging him to tell me more.

"Mr. Nordstrom," he said, "had traveled to many places, including Ethiopia, before I came to know him. He once told me that a native dentist in that place had filled one of his teeth with tin. This primitive dentistry I associated at the time with the Egyptian practice.

"I fear," Mr. Kinkaid continued, pointing to the skull, "that my colleague finally met with violence at the hands of Potiphar, and that we have his skull here."

Mr. Kinkaid then suggested that while Mr. Nordstrom was almost certainly dead, it would be very hard to establish his decease. Further, as Mr. Nordstrom had returned with some success from two expeditions, the reason for his holding insurance on Mr. Nordstrom's life had ceased to be. We agreed together that it would be wisest merely to let the policy lapse.

By the time we had reached this point it was very late indeed, and I took my leave at 2:26 A.M., asking that I might return some day to pay a friendly visit. To this Mr. Kinkaid readily assented.

Unfortunately, I was never able to do so. Within the week I had further news of Mr. Kinkaid in the *Daily Gazette*. Neighbors had been induced by the evidence of accumulating milk bottles and papers to notify the police, and it was found that Mr. Kinkaid had disappeared. He left behind him all his personal belongings and household goods in their orderly places. Oddly enough, the cabinets in his office were found

empty, and the only contents of that room, except for the furniture, were a skull and a scrap of Egyptian papyrus on his desk, a heap of clothes on the floor, and a brief note, which said simply: *My name is Samuel. Think of me.*

Of this note the police could of course make nothing, although it was clear enough to me. Mr. Kinkaid, hopeless and full of remorse, had decided to venture among the pasts in search of Mr. Nordstrom, and he relied upon me to help him back. My feeling concerning Mr. Kinkaid's state of mind was confirmed when the police discovered that the "Wanda" of the photograph on Mr. Kinkaid's desk (Wanda Mainwaring, a stenographer) had died shortly before from an acute attack diagnosed as gastroenteritis. Mr. Kinkaid must have been very close to her, for he had kindly provided for her cremation and inurnment.

Although I could see that the authorities were completely at sea in dealing with the situation (almost as much so, indeed, as the yellow press with its painful hints of a "jealousy slaying" and deliberate disappearance), a certain natural caution kept me from approaching them. This was reinforced by the fact that my own understanding of some aspects of the situation was incomplete. I had every reason to believe that Mr. Kinkaid was very well off, and yet the police found no trace of money or securities, and Mr. Kinkaid's bank accounts had been recently exhausted. I can only presume that he made some wise disposition of his assets before taking the dangerous step he took.

Needless to say, I have frequently thought rather hopelessly of Mr. Kinkaid, using his name Samuel in my meditations. Sometimes I take the card with the violet tab and the red-and-green marker with the number 27 from the dead file where it now reposes and hold it in my hand the while, in my effort to direct Mr. Kinkaid back to the present. I find it hard to concentrate, however, for my mind continually wanders over the adventures of Mr. Nordstrom in Potiphar's house, and from there to speculations on how astounding may be the possible and valid realities of the events described in the Old Testament.

Truth to tell, from the first I have despaired of my ability to help Mr. Kinkaid back to the present, if indeed he is trying to return. My mind is not only untutored in this new field; I feel that it lacks the power of concentration necessary for accomplishment in science. Mr Kinkaid was unwise in placing so much reliance in me. While I am sorry for him, I do not reproach myself, for I feel that his poor judgment, due, no doubt, to his emotional state, rather than my inadequacy, is at fault.

Although the same natural caution which kept me from approaching the police at the time of these occurrences has prevented my relating

them to anyone subsequently, I have felt it only just to leave a record of such interesting events for such as may care to read it when neither I nor the Company can be embarrassed by my connection with something which was so sensationally misinterpreted in the press of another day.

"Born 1920 on Isle of Dogs, Thames, London, England, of clever organic chemist and daughter of master printer," says Mr. Phillips's terse autobiography. "Raised with fatherly hope of being scientist in cool, clean laboratory, ignoring outside world. Wicked Uncle gave me typewriter at fifteen, so decided to be journalist instead, God help me, and have done little since but nursemaid myriad cares of world—time off, but not enough time to write science fiction. . . ."

What time he gets, he uses to advantage, though. If you like this one, you may also want to look up his earlier "Field Study," a thought-provoking piece about what might be called psichosomatic medicine.

The Warning *by Peter Phillips*

He was an expensive man. Walls of concrete, walls of brick, barriers of steel, of compacted hydrocarbons, more steel, then miles of wasteland isolated him and his helpers from the world.

Outside the perimeter of wire, men in uniforms guarded with their little weapons the Biggest Weapon of All, although its vital factors existed, as yet, only in the brain of the expensive man.

One night, the expensive man sent all his helpers away, on one pretext or another, beyond the far perimeter of barbed wire. Although the theories in his brain might account for the deaths of many thousands of people he had never known, he had no desire to risk the lives of those he did know in an initial experiment.

On video screens and through loud-speakers, some of his trusted assistants watched and heard him enter the underground chamber from which he would conduct the experiment by remote control. Beside them stood cursing government men saying: "He had no right to do this. . . . Supposing anything happens to him. . . ."

At midnight, halfway through the experiment, it happened. Concrete, brick, steel, compacted hydrocarbons flowered into dust in the center of the forbidden area. And despite the protection of his shelter, most of the expensive man died.

Later, men in plain clothes guarded what was left of him.

The wake had been going on for two years now.

The four security men sat in turn in a corner of the silent room. They sat there for six hours each. From noon to six, from six to midnight, midnight to six, six to noon.

At first, they had looked at the dead thing on the bed and wondered how it felt to be dead and buried in your own body.

Now they read detective novels and smoked or looked through the double-paned windows at the silent traffic in the street below.

They were not callous. But speculation and pity had been exhausted early in the two-year vigil.

Yet they still tiptoed into the room when their shift began. On this day, Johnson settled his broad backside in the just vacated chair and opened a paperback.

A nurse glanced over from the bed where she was checking the circulation pump.

She said, "Talkative, aren't you?"

He shrugged and switched his eyes to the thing on the bed.

"He can't hear," said the nurse thinly. "He can't hear or see or speak or feel. He's dead. Why don't you let him die?"

Johnson regarded her in silence for a moment. Then he got up, grasped her wrist gently, led her to the door.

When she had gone, white-faced but unprotesting, he took up the wall phone: "Nurse Byers has cracked."

The superintendent, who was a good neurosurgeon, came in with the new nurse and instructed her in the simple duties. She had already been screened psychologically and for security.

Johnson strolled outside with the super for a few moments.

Dr. MacIntyre said, "You're a tough egg, Bert. What do you think about?"

"My kids, my roses and whodunit. I've quit thinking about—him. He's like a sealed package of goods or a safe. I'm just looking after it until you figure a way to open it without busting what's inside."

"It may be a long wait." MacIntyre flexed his short powerful surgeon's fingers, white and crinkled from constant aseptic washing. "Techniques are developing all the time. But the central nervous system isn't a kid's constructor set. It may be years before we have the know-how to open your prize package."

"Why our package?"

"Isn't it? If he was my private patient, instead of a possession of the government, I'd have eased him out of it long ago; given him the quietus

and let his soul go a-roaming. You were scared that Nurse Byers might do just that. She was the tenth we've had on this case."

Johnson's eyes were green and clear. He looked intently at the surgeon as they reached a branching corridor. He was paid to be suspicious.

MacIntyre's smile was tinged with a sneer. "No, I'm not a nurse. I shan't crack, Bert. I want to know what's inside the package too. But—excuse the dramatics—I also wanted to know how it feels to be the jailer of a soul."

Johnson said, "I'm doing a job. Maybe I don't like it. But don't spring poetry on me."

Johnson went back to the silent room and his chair in the corner and his paperback mystery.

A background thought, holding the indirect vision of an intense purple flare, a microsecond of agony, a red stream of numbers and symbols and a terrible fear, came into his mind and was suppressed before it made contact with the higher centers.

Johnson thought about his kids, his roses and whodunit; and the living part of the dead thing on the bed sent a cry of frustration and despair into the lonely well of the universe.

It would have to be a child. The grown mind was calloused, stultified, guarded by a censor. Wordless thoughts from outside were suppressed as intrusive, impossible fancies.

The ten woman-minds had been more receptive, but their reactions had been of compassion, not understanding.

(So there could be compassion without understanding?)

They had seen his pictures of death and flame not as a warning, but as a plea for release from personal agony. And one by one, just as he had a good grasp on the tendrils of their intuition, they had been taken out of range before he could correct the impressions; before he could show them the relationship between certain mathematical symbols and a thing which must not be done.

It was not telepathy as he had once understood it, because its range seemed limited. Whatever it was, he knew his ability had grown. But still he could not verbalize. Only pictorial communication was possible.

A line of symbols, a flame girdling a great globe—ridiculously like the papier-mâché globe that had adorned a classroom in his grade school—then back to the symbols, with a black, negating cross over them.

That part was now automatic: sending, sending, sending into the blackness, like the radar marker and the radio buoy he'd developed during the war, before his mathematic genius had been conscripted for nuclear

research; before that solo, secret, empiric probe, based on a half-understood question, had given him the dreaded answer and killed his body in the same second.

Time. How long had he been dead?

How long had it been since that strangely tortured milligram of matter had erupted—how long would it be before someone else made a hell-inspired guess and tortured a larger quantity of matter in the same way, to send an unquenchable flame circling the world?

A pool of neurons, trained and specialized over the unfeeling years, whirled and sent forth the automatic signal of agony and warning in elementary pictures.

Johnson blinked at a page of his thriller. Black spots formed a vague cross on the print and there was a slight red haze. Liver trouble. Or maybe he was reading too much.

He glanced at the new nurse. There was a moistness in her eyes as she looked at the thing on the bed but her hands were steady as she check-charted the blood-surrogate composition on the meters.

A looker, too. The uniform didn't flatten all her curves.

Eyes off, Bert Johnson. Wonder what Marie's fixing for dinner?

It would have to be a child, a half-formed mind, open and innocent. He must drive the warning in, scribe the formula and the negating cross on the tender cells. As the child grew, it would seek understanding of the symbols. It would qualify for a hearing on this matter—

A dream of years, when the hot flame (he would not fool himself) might come at any moment.

What fools spoke of verbal telepathy—

Out, further out, to find a child, to tell a child, to plant a guide and an urgent ferment in the mind of a child. Extend the range, each beating cell crying for surcease from the effort.

The energy spent in holding back the final darkness would be dissipated. It would mean death. The barrier would go and the blackness beyond would whelm in.

The eleventh nurse took the metabolism charts to Dr. MacIntyre.

He looked at them and wondered if the thing on the bed was willing itself to death.

"Thanks, Tommy," said the shoeshine customer at the stand opposite the Washington hospital.

Pocket the coin, face the new pair of brogues, get a shine, get a good shine, like the sun that shimmered on the trees down the further avenue and gave people blue-black shadows.

Like the hurtful shine that kept coming into his brain, burning there without sense or purpose.

Flip and slap that sliding cloth in a rhythm counterpointing the beat at the back of his brain.

Delta doo over hexta how
Two three square and nullity now
Infinity marker strike three and out
Line over curve and two dots round about
Finagle the eight-ball and splinter your cue
A canter in Cantor evolved by a Jew
A terrible zero a light you can't see
A zero a zero a zerozerozerozerozero—

"You don't look good," said the pair of brogues kindly.

"Don' feel good," he said, knuckling his eyes. He wanted to turn around and look at a window in the hospital over the way, but that would be crazy too.

Put the brogues together, let them merge; see the feet inside them boil and surge; see the red-hot sun come sweeping down, burning Maggie and Ma and crippled Lemuel, houses and earth melting like candy on a stove.

Tenement on fire.

Must go home. Ma can't get Lem down them stairs alone.

It's hurting my head.

Driving hard into that unprotected mind at the limit of range. It's killing me. Let the child grow up, God, and warn. Stay the fires until the child grows up. Done my best and it's finished me.

I'm going, God. Or I'm coming—

The metabolism meter suddenly registered zero.

The hell with the stand. Must get home. Ma needs me. Tenement on fire. Run. Cross here for downtown. Can get in front of that truck—

NO

It was just in front of the casualty entrance to the hospital. After they'd set the leg and the anesthetic had worn off, a nurse heard his rambling and thought she recognized some Greek symbols.

She brought a doctor. He listened and shrugged. "Some kid rhyme," he said. "Don't you recognize him? It's Tommy. Runs a shoeshine stand at the corner. He's forty-five, but he's got the arrested mentality of a child of seven. He'll never grow up."

One could hardly expect to get clear through a book about psychic powers, without meeting a ghost somewhere along the way. And if a ghost there must be, I can think of none I'd rather meet than one of Anthony Boucher's creations.

Whether Mr. Boucher is writing about werewolves, demons or haunts, he has repeatedly demonstrated a sure hand and a light touch with all matters supernatural.

The author, in addition to writing two major review columns, one of science fantasy and one of mysteries, is editor of the magazine Fantasy and Science Fiction.

The Ghost of Me *by Anthony Boucher*

I gave my reflection hell. I was sleepy, of course. And I still didn't know what noise had waked me; but I told it what I thought of mysterious figures that lurked across the room from you and eventually turned out to be your own image. I did a good job, too; I touched depths of my vocabulary which even the complications of the Votruba case hadn't sounded.

Then I was wide awake and gasping. Throughout all my invective, the reflection had not once moved its lips. I groped behind me for the patient's chair and sat down fast. The reflection remained standing.

Now it was I. There was no doubt of that. Every feature was exactly similar, even down to the scar over my right eyebrow from the time a bunch of us painted Baltimore a mite too thoroughly. But this should have tipped me off from the start: the scar was on the right, not on the left where I've always seen it in a mirror's reversal.

"Who are you?" I asked. It was not precisely a brilliant conversational opening, but it was the one thing I had to know or start baying the moon.

"Who are you?" it asked right back.

Maybe you've come across those cockeyed mirrors which, by some trick arrangement of lenses, show you not the reversed mirror image but your actual appearance, as though you were outside and looking at yourself? Well, this was like that—exactly, detailedly me, but facing me right way round and unreversed. And it stood when I sat down.

"Look," I protested. "Isn't it enough to be a madhouse mirror? Do you have to be an echo, too?"

"Tell me who you are," it insisted quietly. "I think I must be confused."

I hadn't quite plumbed my vocabulary before; I found a couple of fresh words now. "You think you're confused? And what in the name of order and reason do you think I am?"

"That's what I asked you," it replied. "What are you? Because there must be a mistake somewhere."

"All right," I agreed. "If you want to play games. I'll tell you what I am, if you'll do the same. You chase me and I'll chase you. I'm John Adams. I'm a doctor. I got a Rockefeller grant to establish a clinic to study occupational disease among Pennsylvania cement workers—"

"—I'm working on a variation of the Zupperheim theory with excellent results, I smoke Camels, and I'm a registered Democrat but not quite a New Dealer," it concluded, with the gloomiest frown I've ever heard of outside a Russian novel.

My own forehead was not parchment-smooth. "That's all true enough. But how do you know it? And now that I've told you I'm John Adams, will you kindly kick through with your half of the bargain?"

"That's just the trouble," it murmured reluctantly. "There must be a terrible mistake somewhere. I've heard of such things, of course, but I certainly never expected it to happen to me."

I don't have all the patience that a medical man really needs. This time, when I said, "WHO ARE YOU?" it was a wild and ringing shout.

"Well, you see—" it said. "I hardly know how to put this—" it began again. "To be blunt about it," it finally blurted out, "I'm the ghost of John Adams."

I was glad I was sitting down. And I understood now why old Hasenfuss always recommended arms on the patient's chair to give him something to grab when you deliver the verdict. I grabbed now, and grabbed plenty hard.

"You're the—"

"I'm the ghost—"

"—the ghost of—"

"—of John Adams."

"But"—I held onto the chair even tighter—"I *am* John Adams."

"I know," my ghost said. "That's what's so annoying."

I said nothing. That was far too impressive an understatement to bear comment. I groped in the pocket of my dressing gown and found cigarettes. "Do you smoke?" I asked.

"Of course. If John Adams smokes, naturally I do."

I extended the pack.

He shook his head. "I'll have to dematerialize it. Put one on the table."

I obeyed and watched curiously. A hand that was not quite a hand but more a thin pointing shape stretched out and touched the cigarette. It lingered a moment, then came away holding a white cylinder. The cigarette was still on the table.

I lit it and puffed hard. "Tastes just like any other Camel."

"Of course. I took only the nonmaterial part. You wouldn't miss that any more than you miss . . . well, me."

"You mean you're smoking the ghost of a cigarette?"

"You can put it that way."

For the first five puffs it wasn't easy to get the cigarette into my mouth. My hand was more apt to steer it at nose or ear. But with the sixth puff I began to feel as normal and self-possessed as any man talking with his own ghost. I even got argumentative.

"This isn't possible," I protested. "You won't even come into existence until after I'm dead."

"Certainly," my ghost agreed politely. "But you see, you are dead."

"Now look. That's nonsense. Even supernaturally. Because if I were dead . . . well, if I were dead, I'd be my own ghost. I'd be you. There wouldn't be two of us."

"I am glad that I had a clear and logical mind when I was alive. I didn't know but that might have come later; it sometimes does. But this way we can understand each other. What I meant is this: Where I come from, of course I am dead; or if you prefer, you are dead. It means the same thing. Also I am alive and also I am not yet born. You see, I come from outside of time. You follow?"

"I think so. Eternity embraces all time, so when you've gone over from time into eternity, all time coexists for you."

"Not too precise an expression, but I think you grasp the essentials. Then perhaps you can see what's happened. I've simply come back into time at the wrong point."

"How—"

"Imagine yourself at large in three dimensions, facing a fence with an infinite series of two-dimensional slots. Think how easy it'd be to pick the wrong slot."

I thought a while and nodded. "Could be," I admitted. "But if it's that easy, why doesn't it happen more often?"

"Oh, but it does. You've heard of apparitions of the living? You've heard of *Doppelgänger?* You've even heard of hauntings before the fact? Those are all cases like this—just slipping into the wrong slot. But it's

such a damned stupid thing to do. I'm going to take a terrible ribbing for this." My ghost looked more downcast and perplexed than ever.

I started to be consoling. "Look. Don't take it so— Hey!" The implication suddenly hit me. "You said haunting?"

"Yes."

"Is that what you're doing?"

"Well . . . yes."

"But you can't be haunting me?"

"Of course not."

"Then who are you haunting in my room?"

My ghost played with his ghostly cigarette and looked embarrassed. "It's not a thing we care to talk about. Haunting, I mean. It's not much fun and it's rather naïve. But after all, it's—well, it's expected of you when you've been murdered."

I could hear the right arm of the chair crack under my clutch. "When you've been—"

"Yes, I know it's ridiculous and childish; but it's such an old-established custom that I haven't the courage to oppose it."

"Then you've been murdered? And that means I've been murdered? I mean, that means I'm going to be murdered?"

"Oh, yes," he said calmly.

I rose and opened a drawer of the desk. "This," I prescribed, "calls for the internal application of alcoholic stimulants. Damn," I added as the emergency buzzer rang. All I needed was a rush operation now, with my fingers already beginning to jitter.

I opened the door and looked out into star-bright emptiness. "False alarm." I was relieved—and then heard the whiz. I ducked it just in time and got the door closed.

My ghost was curiously contemplating the knife where it stuck quivering in the wall. "Right through me," he observed cheerfully.

It was no sinister and exotic stiletto. Just a plain butcher knife, and all the more chillingly convincing through its very ordinariness. "Your prophecies work fast," I said.

"This wasn't it. It missed. Just wait."

The knife had stopped its shuddering, but mine went on. "Now I really need that stimulant. You drink rye? But of course. I do."

"You don't happen," my ghost asked, "to have any tequila?"

"Tequila? Never tasted it."

"Oh. Then I must have acquired the taste later, before you were murdered."

I was just unscrewing the bottle top, and jumped enough to spill half a jiggerful. "I don't *like* that word."

"You'll get used to it," my ghost assured me. "Don't bother to pour me one. I'll just dematerialize the bottle."

The rye helped. Chatting with your own ghost about your murder seems more natural after a few ounces of whiskey. My ghost seemed to grow more at ease, too, and after the third joint bottle-tilting the atmosphere was practically normal.

"We've got to approach this rationally," I said at last. "Whatever you are, that knife's real enough. And I'm fond of life. Let's see what we can do to stave this off."

"But you can't." My ghost was quietly positive. "Because I—or you—well, let's say we already have been murdered."

"But not at this time."

"Not at this time yet, but certainly *in* this time. Look, I know the rules of haunting. I know that nothing could have sent me to this room unless we'd been killed here."

"But when? How? And above all by whom? Who should want to toss knives at me?"

"It wasn't a knife the real time. I mean it won't be."

"But why—"

My ghost took another healthy swig of dematerialized rye. "I should prefer tequila," he sighed.

"That's too damned bad," I snapped. "But tell me about my murder."

"Don't get into such a dither. What difference does it make? Nothing you can do can possibly affect the outcome. You have sense enough to understand that. Foreknowledge can never conceivably avert. That's the delusion and snare of all prophecy."

"All right. Grant that. Let's pretend it's just my natural curiosity. But *tell me about my murder.*"

"Well—" My ghost was hesitant and sheepish again. "The fact is—" He took a long time to swallow his dematerialized rye, and followed the process with a prolonged dematerialized burp. "To tell you the truth—I don't remember anything about it.

"Now, now!" he added hastily. "Don't blow up. I can't help it. It's dreadfully easy to forget things in eternity. That's what the Greeks meant by the waters of Lethe in the afterworld. Just think how easy it is to forget details in, say, ten years, when the years are happening only one at a time. Then try to imagine how much you could forget in an infinity of years when they're all happening at once."

"But our own murder!" I protested. "You couldn't forget our murder!"

"I have. I know we must have been murdered in this room because here I am haunting it, but I've no idea how or when. Excepting," he added reflectively, "that it must be after we acquired a taste for tequila."

"But you must at least know the murderer. You have to know the guy you're supposed to be haunting. Or do you just haunt a place?"

"No. Not in the strict rules. You merely haunt the place because the murderer will return to the scene of the crime and then you confront him and say: *'Thou art the man!'* "

"And supposing he doesn't return to the scene?"

"That's just the trouble. We know the rules all right. But the murderers don't always. Lots of times they never return at all, and we go on haunting and haunting and getting no place."

"But look!" I exclaimed. "This one will have to return because he hasn't been here yet. I mean this isn't the scene of the crime; it's the scene set for a crime that hasn't happened yet. He'll have to come here to . . . to—"

"To murder us," my ghost concluded cheerfully. "Of course. It's ideal. I can't possibly miss him."

"But if you don't know who he is—"

"I'll know him when I see him. You see, we ghosts are psychic."

"Then if you could tip me off when you recognize him—"

"It wouldn't do you any— What was that?"

"Just a rooster. Dawn comes early these summer mornings. But if I knew who he was, then I—"

"Damn!" said my ghost. "Haunting must be so much simpler in winter with those nice long nights. I've got to be vanishing. See you tonight."

My curiosity stirred again. "Where do you go when you vanish?" But he had already disappeared.

I looked around the empty consulting room. Even the dematerialized rye had vanished. Only the butcher knife remained. I made the natural rye vanish too, and staggered back to bed.

The next morning it all seemed perfectly simple. I had had one hell of a strange vision last night; but on the consulting-room desk stood an empty pint which had been almost full yesterday. That was enough to account for a wilderness of visions.

Even the knife didn't bother me much. It would be accounted for some way—somebody's screwy idea of a gag. Nobody could want to kill me, I thought, and wasn't worried even when a kid in a back-lot baseball game let off a wild pitch that missed my head by an inch.

I just filed away a minor resolve to climb on the wagon if this sort of thing became a habit, and got through a hard day's work at the clinic

with no worries beyond the mildest of hangovers. And when I got the X-rays on Nick Wojcek's girl with her lungs completely healed, and the report that she hadn't coughed for two weeks, I felt so gloriously satisfied that I forgot even the hangover.

"Charlie," I beamed at my X-ray technician, "life is good."

"In Cobbsville?" Charlie asked dourly.

I gloated over those beautiful plates. "Even in Cobbsville."

"Have it your way," said Charlie. "But it'll be better this evening. I'm dropping by your place with a surprise."

"A surprise?"

"Yeah. Friend of mine brought me a present from Mexico."

And even that didn't tip me off. I went on feeling as chipper and confident as ever all through the day's work and dinner at the Greek's, and walked home enjoying the freshness of the evening and fretting over a twist on a new kind of air filter for the factories.

That was why I didn't see the car. I was crossing the street to my house, and my first warning was a bass bellow of "John!" I looked up to see the car a yard away, rolling downhill straight at me. I jumped, stumbled, and sprawled flat in the dust. My knee ached and my nose was bleeding; but the car had missed me, as narrowly as the knife had last night.

I watched it roll on down the hill. There was no driver. It was an old junk heap—just the sort of wreck that would get out of control if carelessly left parked on a steep grade. It was a perfectly plausible accident, and still— The car hit the fence at the bottom of the hill and became literally a junk heap. Nobody showed up to bother about it. I turned to thank Father Svatomir for his shout of warning.

You've seen those little Orthodox churches that are the one spot of curious color in the drab landscape of industrial Pennsylvania? Those plain frame churches that blossom out on top into an exotic bloated spire topped by one of those crosses with an extra slantwise arm?

Father Svatomir was the priest from one of those, and his black garments, his nobly aquiline nose, and his beautifully full and long brown beard made him look as strange and Oriental as his own church. It was always a shock to me to hear his ordinary American accent—he'd been born in Cobbsville and gone back to the Near East to study for the priesthood—and to realize that he was only about my age. That's thirty-two, for the record; but Father Svatomir seemed serenely ageless.

He waved away my thanks. "John, my son, I must speak with you. Alone and seriously."

"O. K., Father"—and I took him around to the door into my own room.

I somehow didn't want to go into the consulting room just yet. I was sure that there was nothing there; but night had fallen by now, and there was no telling.

I sat on the bed, and the priest pulled a chair up close. "John," he began quietly, "do you realize that you are in danger of your life?"

I couldn't help a glance at the door of the consulting room, but I said casually, "Nuts, Father. That little accident out there?"

"Accident? And how many other 'accidents' have befallen you recently?"

I thought of the butcher knife and the wild pitch, but I repeated, "Nuts. That's nonsense. Why should anybody want my life?"

"Because you are doing too much good. No, don't smile, my son. I am not merely indulging in a taste for paradox. I mean this. You are doing too much good and you are in danger of your life. Martyrs are not found in the Church alone. Every field has its martyrs, and you are in most grievous danger of becoming a martyr to your splendid clinic."

"Bosh," I snorted, and wished I believed it.

"Bosh it is indeed, but my parishioners are not notably intellectual. They have brought with them from their own countries a mass of malformed and undigested superstitions. In those superstitions there is some small grain of spiritual truth, and that I seek to salvage whenever possible; but in most of those old-country beliefs there is only ignorance and peril."

"But what's all this to me?"

"They think," said Father Svatomir slowly, "that you are working miracles at the clinic."

"I am," I admitted.

He smiled. "As an agnostic, John, you may call them miracles and think no more of it. But my parishioners cannot see matters so simply. If I, now, were to work these wonders of healing, they would accept the fact as a manifestation of God's greatness; but when you work them—You see, my son, to these poor believing people, all great gifts and all perfect gifts are from above—or from below. Since you, in their sight, are an unbeliever and obviously not an agent of God, why then you must be an agent of the devil."

"Does it matter so long as I heal their lungs from the effects of this damned cement dust?"

"It matters very much indeed to them, John. It matters so much that, I repeat, you are in danger of your life."

I got up. "Excuse me a minute, Father . . . something I wanted to check in the consulting room."

It checked all right. My ghost sat at the desk, large as death. He'd found my copy of *Fanny Hill,* dematerialized it, and settled down to thorough enjoyment.

"I'd forgotten this too," he observed as I came in.

I kept my voice low. "If you can forget our own murder, small wonder you'd forget a book."

"I don't mean the book. I'd forgotten the subject matter. And now it all comes back to me—"

"Look!" I said sharply. "The hell with your memories."

"They're not just mine." He gazed at me with a sort of leering admiration.

"The hell with them anyway. There's a man in the next room warning me that my life's in danger. I'll admit he just saved my life, but this could be a trick. Could he be the man?"

Reluctantly my ghost laid his book aside, came to the door, and peered out. "Uh-uh. We're safe as houses with him."

I breathed. "Stick around. This check-up system's going to be handy."

"You can't prevent what's happened," he said indifferently, and went back to the desk and *Fanny Hill.* As he picked up the book he spoke again, and his voice was wistful. "You haven't got a blonde I could dematerialize?"

I shut the consulting-room door on him and turned back to Father Svatomir. "Everything under control. I've got a notion, Father, that I'm going to prove quite capable of frustrating any attempts to break up my miracle-mongering. Or is it monging?"

"I've talked to them," the priest sighed. "I've tried to make them see the truth that you are indeed God's agent, whatever your own faith. I may yet succeed, but in the meanwhile—" He broke off and stared at the consulting room. "John, my son," he whispered, "What is in that room?"

"Nothing, Father. Just a file that I suddenly remembered needed checking."

"No, John. There's more than that. John, while you were gone, *something* peered at me through that door."

"You're getting jumpy, Father. Stop worrying."

"No. John, there is a spirit in this place."

"Fiddlesticks!"

"Oh, you may not feel affected; but after all, a man of my calling is closer to the spirit world than most."

"Father, your parishioners are corrupting you."

"No. Oh, I have smiled at many of their superstitions. I have even disbelieved in spirits. I knew that they were doctrinally possible and so to be

believed; but I never believed in them personally, as an individual rather than a priest. But now— John, something peered at me."

I swore silently and said aloud, "Calm yourself, Father."

Father Svatomir had risen and was pacing the room, hands clasped like Felix the Cat. "John, my son," he said at last, "you have been a good friend to me and to my parish. I have long been grateful to you, and never been able to prove that gratitude. I shall do so now."

"And how?" I asked, with a certain nervous foreboding.

"John," he paused in his pacing and laid a hand on my shoulder, "John, I am going to exorcise the spirit that haunts this place."

"Hey!" I gasped. "No, Father. Please!" Because, I reasoned hastily to myself, exorcising spirits is all very well, but when it's your own spirit and if that gets exorcised—well, what happens to you then? "No," I insisted. "You can't do that."

"I know, John," he went on in his calm deep voice. "You think that this is more superstition, on a level with the beliefs of my parishioners. But though you do not sense this . . . this *thing* yet, you will in time. I shall save you much pain and discomfort. Wait here, John, while I go fetch some holy water and check up the formula for exorcism. I'm afraid," he added ruefully, "I haven't looked at it since my days in the seminary."

I seized his arm and opened my mouth in protestation too urgent for words.

"John," he said slowly and reproachfully, "are you willfully harboring a spirit?"

A knock on the door cut the scene short and gave me a breathing spell. I like Charlie, but I don't think I'd ever before been so relieved to see him.

"Hi," he said, and "Hi," again to Father Svatomir. "That's the advantage of being celibate," he added. "You can grow a beard. I tried to once, but the waitress down at the Greek's didn't like it."

Father Svatomir smiled faintly.

"Three glasses, mine host," Charlie commanded, and produced from under his arm a tall bottle of greenish glass. "Told you I had a surprise."

I fetched three whiskey glasses and set them on the table. Charlie filled them with a flourish. "Noble stuff, this," he announced. "Want to hear what you gentlemen think of it. There's supposed to be a ritual goes with it, but I like it straight. Down the esophagus, boys!"

Was it Shelley who used the phrase "potable gold"? Whoever it was had surely tasted this liquor. It flowed down like some molten metal that had lost the dangerous power to scorch, but still glowed with rich warmth. While the subtle half-perceived flavor still clove to my mouth, I could feel the tingling heat reach my finger tips.

"By heaven," I cried, "nothing like this has happened to the blood stream since Harvey discovered the circulation. Charlie, my lad, this is henceforth my tipple!"

Father Svatomir beamed and nodded. "I concur heartily. Tell us, Charles, what is this wondrous brew?"

"Tequila," said Charlie, and I dropped my glass.

"What is the trouble, my son? You're pale and trembling."

"Look, Johnny. I know it's high-proof stuff, but it hadn't ought to hit you like that."

I hardly heard them. All I knew was that the one time-barrier separating me from my murder was now removed. I had come to like tequila. I bent over to pick up the glass, and as I did so I saw a hand reach out from the consulting room. It touched the tequila bottle lightly and withdrew clutching a freshly dematerialized fifth.

Charlie refilled the three glasses, "Another one'll put you back on your feet, Johnny. It's swell stuff once you get used to it."

Father Svatomir was still concerned. "John," he insisted, "was it the tequila? Or did you . . . have you sensed what we were speaking of before?"

I gulped the second glass. "I'm all right," I protested. "A couple more of these and I'll— Was that a knock?"

Charlie looked around. "Consulting-room door, I think. Shall I go check?"

I slipped quickly between him and the door. "Never mind. I'll see."

"Had I better go with you?" the priest suggested. "If it were what I warned you of—"

"It's O. K. I'll go."

My ghost was lolling back in my chair with his feet propped up on the desk. One hand held *Fanny Hill* and the other the tequila. "I got a good look at the guy that brought this," he volunteered without looking up. "He's all right."

"Fine. Now I have to let in a patient. Could you briefly disappear?"

"Uh-uh. Not till the cock crows."

"Then please hide. Try that cupboard—I think it's big enough."

He started for the cupboard, returned for book and bottle, and went back to shut himself up in comfort. I opened the outer door a very small crack and said, "Who is it?"

"Me, Dr. Adams. Nick Wojcek."

I opened the door without a tremor. Whatever Father Svatomir might say about the other inhabitants of Cobbsville, I knew I had nothing to fear from the man whose daughter was my most startlingly successful

cure to date. I could still see the pitiful animal terror in his eyes when he brought her to me and the pure joy that glistened in them when I told him she was well.

"Come in, Nick. Sit down and be comfortable."

He obeyed the first half of my injunction, but he fidgeted most uncomfortably. Despite his great height and his grizzled hair, he looked like a painfully uncertain child embarrassed by the presence of strange adults. "My Ljuba," he faltered. "You got those pictures you tell me about?"

"I saw them today. And it's good news, Nick. Your Ljuba is all well again. It's all healed up."

"She stay that way now?"

"I hope to God. But I can't promise. So long as you live in this dump and breathe cement dust day in and day out, I can't guarantee you a thing. But I think she'll be well now. Let her marry some nice young man who'll take her away from here into the clean air."

"No," he said sullenly.

"But come, Nick," I said gently. It was pleasant to argue an old man's foibles for a moment instead of fretting over your approaching murder. "She has to lead her own life."

"You tell me what do? You go to hell!"

I drew back astounded. There was the sheer venom of hatred in that last phrase. "Nick!" I protested.

He was on his feet now, and in his hand was an ancient but none the less lethal-looking revolver. "You make magic," he was saying slowly and harshly. "God would let my Ljuba die. You make her live. Black magic. Don't want daughter from magic."

"Nick," I urged as quietly as I could, "don't be a damned fool. There are people in the next room. Suppose I call for them?"

"I kill you first," said Nick Wojcek simply.

"But they'll find you here. You can't get away. They'll burn you for this, Nick. Then what'll become of Ljuba?"

He hesitated, but the muzzle of the revolver never wavered. Now that I was staring my murder right in the nose, I felt amazingly calm. I could see, in a clear and detached way, just how silly it was to try to avert the future by pre-knowledge. I had thought my ghost would warn me; but there he was in the closet, comfortably curled up with a bottle of liquor and a filthy book, and here I was, staring into Nick Wojcek's revolver. He'd come out afterward of course, my ghost would; he'd get in his haunting and go home. While I . . . only then I'd be my ghost, wouldn't I? I'd go home too—wherever that was.

"If they get me," said Nick at last, "they get me. I get you first."

His grip tightened on the revolver. And at that moment my tardy ghost reeled out of the closet. He brandished the empty green tequila bottle in one hand, and his face was carefree and roistering.

My grinning ghost pointed the bottle dramatically at Nick Wojcek. "THOU ART THE MAN!" he thundered cheerily.

Nick started, whirled, and fired. For an instant he stood rooted and stared first at the me standing by the desk and then at the me slowly sinking to the floor. Then he flung the revolver away and ran terror-stricken from the room.

I was kneeling at my ghost's side where he lay groaning on the floor. "But what happened?" I gasped. "I don't understand."

"Neither do I," he moaned. "Got a little drunk . . . started haunting too soon—" My ghost's form was becoming indistinct.

"But you're a ghost. That knife went right through you. Nothing can wound you."

"That's what I thought. But he did . . . and here I am—" His voice was trailing away too. "Only one thing . . . could have—" Then there was silence, and I was staring at nothing but the empty floor, with a little glistening piece of light metal on it.

Father Svatomir and Charlie were in the room now, and the silence was rapidly crammed with questions. I scrambled to my feet and tried to show more assurance than I felt. "You were right, Father. It was Nick Wojcek. Went for me with that revolver. Luckily he missed, got panicky, and ran away."

"I shall find him," said Father Svatomir gravely. "I think that after this fright I may be able to talk some sense into him; then perhaps he can help me convince the others." He paused and looked down at the gleaming metal. "You see, John? I told you they believed you to be a black magician."

"How so?"

"You notice that? A silver bullet. Ordinary lead cannot harm a magician, but the silver bullet can kill anything. Even a spirit." And he hastened off after Nick Wojcek.

Wordlessly I took the undematerialized tequila bottle from Charlie and paid some serious attention to it. I began to see now. It made sense. My ghost hadn't averted my death—that had been an absurd hope—but he had caused his own. All the confusion came from his faulty memory. He was haunting, not mine, but his own murderer. It was my ghost himself who had been killed in this room.

That was all right. That was fine. I was safe from murder now, and

must have been all along. But what I wanted to know, what I still want to know, what I have to find out and what no one can ever tell me, is this:

What happens after death to a man whose ghost has been already murdered?

Psychokinesis is the modern word for magic. Dr. Rhine defines it as "the direct action of mind on matter," and his statistics, based on experiments with dice-throwing, attribute this faculty (in small but measurable degree) to all normal people. To date, he has found in his tests no sorcerer —sorry, exceptionally talented PK subjects. If he ever does—

Offhand, it seems to me that a flying carpet, for instance, should be apple pie for anyone who was really good *at this stuff. Mr. Cogswell uses broomsticks instead—or rather his characters do. He himself, he says, is "the only 21st-century man in the English Department at the University where I teach. But since my colleagues consider Middle Martian to be a less reputable area of study than Middle English, I spend my working hours teaching freshman composition—a subject about which less is actually known, I might add, than psionics. . . ."*

The Wall Around the World *by Theodore R. Cogswell*

The Wall that went all the way around the world had always been there, so nobody paid much attention to it—except Porgie.

Porgie was going to find out what was on the other side of it—assuming there was another side—or break his neck trying. He was going on fourteen, an age that tends to view the word *impossible* as a meaningless term invented by adults for their own peculiar purposes. But he recognized that there were certain practical difficulties involved in scaling a glassy-smooth surface that rose over a thousand feet straight up. That's why he spent a lot of time watching the eagles.

This morning, as usual, he was late for school. He lost time finding a spot for his broomstick in the crowded rack in the school yard, and it was exactly six minutes after the hour as he slipped guiltily into the classroom.

For a moment, he thought he was safe. Old Mr. Wickens had his back to him and was chalking a pentagram on the blackboard.

But just as Porgie started to slide into his seat, the schoolmaster turned and drawled, "I see Mr. Shirey has finally decided to join us."

The class laughed, and Porgie flushed.

"What's your excuse this time, Mr. Shirey?"

"I was watching an eagle," said Porgie lamely.

"How nice for the eagle. And what was he doing that was of such great interest?"

"He was riding up on the wind. His wings weren't flapping or anything. He was over the box canyon that runs into the East Wall, where the wind hits the Wall and goes up. The eagle just floated in circles, going higher all the time. You know, Mr. Wickens, I'll bet if you caught a whole bunch of eagles and tied ropes to them, they could lift you right up to the top of the Wall!"

"That," said Mr. Wickens, "is possible—if you could catch the eagles. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll continue with the lecture. When invoking Elementals of the Fifth Order, care must be taken to . . ."

Porgie glazed his eyes and began to think up ways and means to catch some eagles.

The next period, Mr. Wickens gave them a problem in practical astrology. Porgie chewed his pencil and tried to work on it, but couldn't concentrate. Nothing came out right—and when he found he had accidentally transposed a couple of signs of the zodiac at the very beginning, he gave up and began to draw plans for eagle traps. He tried one, decided it wouldn't work, started another—

"Porgie!"

He jumped. Mr. Wickens, instead of being in front of the class, was standing right beside him. The schoolmaster reached down, picked up the paper Porgie had been drawing on, and looked at it. Then he grabbed Porgie by the arm and jerked him from his seat.

"Go to my study!"

As Porgie went out the door, he heard Mr. Wickens say, "The class is dismissed until I return!"

There was a sudden rush of large, medium and small-sized boys out of the classroom. Down the corridor to the front door they pelted, and out into the bright sunshine. As they ran past Porgie, his cousin Homer skidded to a stop and accidentally on purpose jabbed an elbow into his ribs. Homer, usually called "Bull Pup" by the kids because of his squat build and pugnacious face, was a year older than Porgie and took his seniority seriously.

"Wait'll I tell Dad about this. You'll catch it tonight!" He gave Porgie another jab and then ran out into the school yard to take command of a game of Warlock.

Mr. Wickens unlocked the door to his study and motioned Porgie inside. Then he shut and locked it carefully behind him. He sat down in the high-backed chair behind his desk and folded his hands.

Porgie stood silently, hanging his head, filled with that helpless guilty anger that comes from conflict with superior authority.

"What were you doing instead of your lesson?" Mr. Wickens demanded.

Porgie didn't answer.

Mr. Wickens narrowed his eyes. The large hazel switch that rested on top of the bookcase beside the stuffed owl lifted lightly into the air, drifted across the room, and dropped into his hand.

"Well?" he said, tapping the switch on the desk.

"Eagle traps," admitted Porgie. "I was drawing eagle traps. I couldn't help it. The Wall made me do it."

"Proceed."

Porgie hesitated for a moment. The switch tapped. Porgie burst out, "I want to see what's on the other side! There's no magic that will get me over, so I've got to find something else!"

Tap went the switch. "Something else?"

"If a magic way was in the old books, somebody would have found it already!"

Mr. Wickens rose to his feet and stabbed one bony finger accusingly at Porgie. "Doubt is the mother of damnation!"

Porgie dropped his eyes to the floor and wished he was some place else.

"I see doubt in you. Doubt is evil, Porgie, *evil!* There are ways permitted to men and ways forbidden. You stand on the brink of the fatal choice. Beware that the Black Man does not come for you as he did for your father before you. Now, bend over!"

Porgie bent. He wished he'd worn a heavier pair of pants.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes, sir," said Porgie sadly.

Mr. Wickens raised the switch over his head. Porgie waited. The switch slammed—but on the desk.

"Straighten up," Mr. Wickens said wearily. He sat down again. "I've tried pounding things into your head and I've tried pounding things on your bottom, and one end is as insensitive as the other. Porgie, can't you understand that you aren't supposed to try and find out new things? The Books contain everything there is to know. Year by year, what is written in them becomes clearer to us."

He pointed out the window at the distant towering face of the Wall that went around the world. "Don't worry about what is on the other side of that! It may be a place of angels or a place of demons—the Books do not tell us. But no man will know until he is ready for that knowledge. Our broomsticks won't climb that high, our charms aren't strong enough.

We need more skill at magic, more understanding of the strange, unseen forces that surround us. In my grandfather's time, the best of the broomsticks wouldn't climb over a hundred feet in the air. But the Adepts in the Great Tower worked and worked until now, when the clouds are low, we can ride right up among them. Someday we will be able to soar all the way to the top of the Wall—"

"Why not now?" Porgie asked stubbornly. "With eagles."

"Because we're not *ready*," Mr. Wickens snapped. "Look at mind talk. It was only thirty years ago that the proper incantations were worked out, and even now there are only a few who have the skill to talk across the miles by just thinking out their words. Time, Porgie—it's going to take time. We were placed here to learn the Way, and everything that might divert us from the search is evil. Man can't walk two roads at once. If he tries, he'll split himself in half."

"Maybe so," said Porgie. "But birds get over the Wall and they don't know any spells. Look, Mr. Wickens, if everything is magic, how come magic won't work on everything? Like this, for instance—"

He took a shiny quartz pebble out of his pocket and laid it on the desk. Nudging it with his finger, he said:

"Stone fly,
Rise on high,
Over cloud
And into sky."

The stone didn't move.

"You see, sir? If words work on broomsticks, they should work on stones, too."

Mr. Wickens stared at the stone. Suddenly it quivered and jumped into the air.

"That's different," said Porgie. "You took hold of it with your mind. Anybody can do that with little things. What I want to know is why the words won't work by themselves."

"We just don't know enough yet," said Mr. Wickens impatiently. He released the stone and it clicked on the desk top. "Every year we learn a little more. Maybe by your children's time we'll find the incantation that will make everything lift." He sniffed. "What do you want to make stones fly for, anyhow? You get into enough trouble just throwing them."

Porgie's brow furrowed. "There's a difference between *making* a thing do something, like when I lift it with my hand or mind, and putting a spell on it so it does the work by itself, like a broomstick."

There was a long silence in the study as each thought his own thoughts.

Finally Mr. Wickens said, "I don't want to bring up the unpleasant past, Porgie, but it would be well to remember what happened to your father. His doubts came later than yours—for a while he was my most promising student—but they were just as strong."

He opened a desk drawer, fumbled in it for a moment, and brought out a sheaf of papers yellow with age. "This is the paper that damned him—*An Enquiry into Non-Magical Methods of Levitation.* He wrote it to qualify for his Junior Adeptship." He threw the paper down in front of Porgie as if the touch of it defiled his fingers.

Porgie started to pick it up.

Mr. Wickens roared, "Don't touch it! It contains blasphemy!"

Porgie snatched back his hand. He looked at the top paper and saw a neat sketch of something that looked like a bird—except that it had two sets of wings, one in front and one in back.

Mr. Wickens put the papers back in the desk drawer. His disapproving eyes caught and held Porgie's as he said, "If you want to go the way of your father, none of *us* can stop you." His voice rose sternly. "But there is one who can. . . . Remember the Black Man, Porgie, for his walk is terrible! There are fires in his eyes and no spell may defend you against him. When he came for your father, there was midnight at noon and a high screaming. When the sunlight came back, they were gone—and it is not good to think where."

Mr. Wickens shook his head as if overcome at the memory and pointed toward the door. "Think before you act, Porgie. Think well!"

Porgie was thinking as he left, but more about the sketch in his father's paper than about the Black Man.

The orange crate with the two boards across it for wings had looked something like his father's drawing, but appearances had been deceiving. Porgie sat on the back steps of his house feeling sorry for himself and alternately rubbing two tender spots on his anatomy. Though they were at opposite ends, and had different immediate causes, they both grew out of the same thing. His bottom was sore as a result of a liberal application of his uncle's hand. His swollen nose came from an aerial crackup.

He'd hoisted his laboriously contrived machine to the top of the woodshed and taken a flying leap in it. The expected soaring glide hadn't materialized. Instead, there had been a sickening fall, a splintering crash, a momentary whirling of stars as his nose banged into something hard.

He wished now he hadn't invited Bull Pup to witness his triumph, because the story'd gotten right back to his uncle—with the usual results.

Just to be sure the lesson was pounded home, his uncle had taken away his broomstick for a week—and just so Porgie wouldn't sneak it out, he'd put a spell on it before locking it away in the closet.

"Didn't feel like flying, anyway," Porgie said sulkily to himself, but the pretense wasn't strong enough to cover up the loss. The gang was going over to Red Rocks to chase bats as soon as the sun went down, and he wanted to go along.

He shaded his eyes and looked toward the Western Wall as he heard a distant halloo of laughing voices. They were coming in high and fast on their broomsticks. He went back to the woodshed so they wouldn't see him. He was glad he had when they swung low and began to circle the house yelling for him and Bull Pup. They kept hooting and shouting until Homer flew out of his bedroom window to join them.

"Porgie can't come," he yelled. "He got licked and Dad took his broom away from him. Come on, gang!"

With a quick looping climb, he took the lead and they went hedge-hopping off toward Red Rocks. Bull Pup had been top dog ever since he got his big stick. He'd zoom up to five hundred feet, hang from his broom by his knees, and then let go. Down he'd plummet, his arms spread and body arched as if he were making a swan dive—and then, when the ground wasn't more than a hundred feet away, he'd call and his broomstick would arrow down after him and slide between his legs, lifting him up in a great sweeping arc that barely cleared the treetops.

"Showoff!" muttered Porgie and shut the woodshed door on the vanishing stick-riders.

Over on the workbench sat the little model of paper and sticks that had got him into trouble in the first place. He picked it up and gave it a quick shove into the air with his hands. It dove toward the floor and then, as it picked up speed, tilted its nose toward the ceiling and made a graceful loop in the air. Leveling off, it made a sudden veer to the left and crashed against the woodshed wall. A wing splintered.

Porgie went to pick it up. "Maybe what works for little things doesn't work for big ones," he thought sourly. The orange crate and the crossed boards had been as close an approximation of the model as he had been able to make. Listlessly, he put the broken glider back on his workbench and went outside. Maybe Mr. Wickens and his uncle and all the rest were right. Maybe there was only one road to follow.

He did a little thinking about it and came to a conclusion that brought forth a secret grin. He'd do it their way—but there wasn't any reason why he couldn't hurry things up a bit. Waiting for his grandchildren to work things out wasn't getting *him* over the Wall.

Tomorrow, after school, he'd start working on his new idea, and this time maybe he'd find the way.

In the kitchen, his uncle and aunt were arguing about him. Porgie paused in the hall that led to the front room and listened.

"Do you think I like to lick the kid? I'm not some kind of an ogre. It hurt me more than it hurt him."

"I notice you were able to sit down afterward," said Aunt Olga dryly.

"Well, what else could I do? Mr. Wickens didn't come right out and say so, but he hinted that if Porgie didn't stop mooning around, he might be dropped from school altogether. He's having an unsettling effect on the other kids. Damn it, Olga, I've done everything for that boy I've done for my own son. What do you want me to do, stand back and let him end up like your brother?"

"You leave my brother out of this! No matter what Porgie does, you don't have to beat him. He's still only a little boy."

There was a loud snort. "In case you've forgotten, dear, he had his thirteenth birthday last March. He'll be a man pretty soon."

"Then why don't you have a man-to-man talk with him?"

"Haven't I tried? You know what happens every time. He gets off with those crazy questions and ideas of his and I lose my temper and pretty soon we're back where we started." He threw up his hands. "I don't know what to do with him. Maybe that fall he had this afternoon will do some good. I think he had a scare thrown into him that he won't forget for a long time. Where's Bull Pup?"

"Can't you call him Homer? It's bad enough having his friends calling him by that horrible name. He went out to Red Rocks with the other kids. They're having a bat hunt or something."

Porgie's uncle grunted and got up. "I don't see why that kid can't stay at home at night for a change. I'm going in the front room and read the paper."

Porgie was already there, flipping the pages of his schoolbooks and looking studious. His uncle settled down in his easy chair, opened his paper, and lit his pipe. He reached out to put the charred match in the ash tray, and as usual the ash tray wasn't there.

"Damn that woman," he muttered to himself and raised his voice: "Porgie."

"Yes, Uncle Veryl?"

"Bring me an ash tray from the kitchen, will you please? Your aunt has them all out there again."

"Sure thing," said Porgie and shut his eyes. He thought of the kitchen until a picture of it was crystal-clear in his mind. The beaten copper ash

tray was sitting beside the sink where his aunt had left it after she had washed it out. He squinted the little eye inside his head, stared hard at the copper bowl, and whispered:

"Ash tray fly,
Follow eye."

Simultaneously he lifted with his mind. The ash tray quivered and rose slowly into the air.

Keeping it firmly suspended, Porgie quickly visualized the kitchen door and the hallway and drifted it through.

"Porgie!" came his uncle's angry voice.

Porgie jumped, and there was a crash in the hallway outside as the bowl was suddenly released and crashed to the floor.

"How many times have I told you not to levitate around the house? If it's too much work to go out to the kitchen, tell me and I'll do it myself."

"I was just practicing," mumbled Porgie defensively.

"Well, practice outside. You've got the walls all scratched up from banging things against them. You know you shouldn't fool around with telekinesis outside sight range until you've mastered full visualization. Now go and get me that ash tray."

Crestfallen, Porgie went out the door into the hall. When he saw where the ash tray had fallen, he gave a silent whistle. Instead of coming down the center of the hall, it had been three feet off course and heading directly for the hall table when he let it fall. In another second, it would have smashed into his aunt's precious black alabaster vase.

"Here it is, Uncle," he said, taking it into the front room. "I'm sorry."

His uncle looked at his unhappy face, sighed and reached out and tousled his head affectionately.

"Buck up, Porgie. I'm sorry I had to paddle you this afternoon. It was for your own good. Your aunt and I don't want you to get into any serious trouble. You know what folks think about machines." He screwed up his face as if he'd said a dirty word. "Now, back to your books—we'll forget all about what happened today. Just remember this, Porgie: If there's anything you want to know, don't go fooling around on your own. Come and ask me, and we'll have a man-to-man talk."

Porgie brightened. "There's something I have been wondering about."

"Yes?" said his uncle encouragingly.

"How many eagles would it take to lift a fellow high enough so he could see what was on the other side of the Wall?"

Uncle Veryl counted to ten—very slowly.

The next day Porgie went to work on his new project. As soon as school was out, he went over to the public library and climbed upstairs to the main circulation room.

"Little boys are not allowed in this section," the librarian said. "The children's division is downstairs."

"But I need a book," protested Porgie. "A book on how to fly."

"This section is only for adults."

Porgie did some fast thinking. "My uncle can take books from here, can't he?"

"I suppose so."

"And he could send me over to get something for him, couldn't he?"

The librarian nodded reluctantly.

Porgie prided himself on never lying. If the librarian chose to misconstrue his questions, it was her fault, not his.

"Well, then," he said, "do you have any books on how to make things fly in the air?"

"What kind of things?"

"Things like birds."

"Birds don't have to be made to fly. They're born that way."

"I don't mean real birds," said Porgie. "I mean birds you make."

"Oh, Animation. Just a second, let me visualize." She shut her eyes and a card catalogue across the room opened and shut one drawer after another. "Ah, that might be what he's looking for," she murmured after a moment, and concentrated again. A large brass-bound book came flying out of the stacks and came to rest on the desk in front of her. She pulled the index card out of the pocket in the back and shoved it toward Porgie. "Sign your uncle's name here."

He did and then, hugging the book to his chest, got out of the library as quickly as he could.

By the time Porgie had worked three-quarters of the way through the book, he was about ready to give up in despair. It was all grown-up magic. Each set of instructions he ran into either used words he didn't understand or called for unobtainable ingredients like powdered unicorn horns and the blood of red-headed female virgins.

He didn't know what a virgin was—all his uncle's encyclopedia had to say on the subject was that they were the only ones who could ride unicorns—but there was a redhead by the name of Dorothy Boggs who lived down the road a piece. He had a feeling, however, that neither she nor her family would take kindly to a request for two quarts of blood, so he kept on searching through the book. Almost at the very end he found a set of instructions he thought he could follow.

It took him two days to get the ingredients together. The only thing that gave him trouble was finding a toad—the rest of the stuff, though mostly nasty and odoriferous, was obtained with little difficulty. The date and exact time of the experiment was important and he surprised Mr. Wickens by taking a sudden interest in his Practical Astrology course.

At last, after laborious computations, he decided everything was ready.

Late that night, he slipped out of bed, opened his bedroom door a crack, and listened. Except for the usual night noises and resonant snores from Uncle Veryl's room, the house was silent. He shut the door carefully and got his broomstick from the closet—Uncle Veryl had relented about that week's punishment.

Silently he drifted out through his open window and across the yard to the woodshed.

Once inside, he checked carefully to see that all the windows were covered. Then he lit a candle. He pulled a loose floorboard up and removed the book and his assembled ingredients. Quickly, he made the initial preparations.

First there was the matter of molding the clay he had taken from the graveyard into a rough semblance of a bird. Then, after sticking several white feathers obtained from last Sunday's chicken into each side of the figure to make wings, he anointed it with noxious mixture he had prepared in advance.

The moon was just setting behind the Wall when he began the incantation. Candlelight flickered on the pages of the old book as he slowly and carefully pronounced the difficult words.

When it came time for the business with the toad, he almost didn't have the heart to go through with it; but he steeled himself and did what was necessary. Then, wincing, he jabbed his forefinger with a pin and slowly dripped the requisite three drops of blood down on the crude clay figure. He whispered:

"Clay of graveyard,
White cock's feather,
Eye of toad,
Rise together!"

Breathlessly he waited. He seemed to be in the middle of a circle of silence. The wind in the trees outside had stopped and there was only the sound of his own quick breathing. As the candlelight rippled, the clay figure seemed to quiver slightly as if it were hunching for flight.

Porgie bent closer, tense with anticipation. In his mind's eye, he saw himself building a giant bird with wings powerful enough to lift him

over the Wall around the World. Swooping low over the schoolhouse during recess, he would wave his hands in a condescending gesture of farewell, and then as the kids hopped on their sticks and tried to follow him, he would rise higher and higher until he had passed the ceiling of their brooms and left them circling impotently below him. At last he would sweep over the Wall with hundreds of feet to spare, over it and then down—down into the great unknown.

The candle flame stopped flickering and stood steady and clear. Beside it, the clay bird squatted, lifeless and motionless.

Minutes ticked by and Porgie gradually saw it for what it was—a smelly clod of dirt with a few feathers stuck in it. There were tears in his eyes as he picked up the body of the dead toad and said softly, "I'm sorry."

When he came in from burying it, he grasped the image of the clay bird tightly in his mind and sent it swinging angrily around the shed. Feathers fluttered behind it as it flew faster and faster until in disgust he released it and let it smash into the rough boards of the wall. It crumbled into a pile of foul-smelling trash and fell to the floor. He stirred it with his toe, hurt, angry, confused.

His broken glider still stood where he had left it on the far end of his workbench. He went over and picked it up.

"At least you flew by yourself," he said, "and I didn't have to kill any poor little toads to make you."

Then he juggled it in his hand, feeling its weight, and began to wonder. It had occurred to him that maybe the wooden wings on his big orange-box glider had been too heavy.

"Maybe if I could get some long thin poles," he thought, "and some cloth to put across the wings . . ."

During the next three months, there was room in Porgie's mind for only one thing—the machine he was building in the roomy old cave at the top of the long hill on the other side of Arnett's Grove. As a result, he kept slipping further and further behind at school.

Things at home weren't too pleasant, either—Bull Pup felt it was his duty to keep his parents fully informed of Porgie's shortcomings. Porgie didn't care though. He was too busy. Every minute he could steal was spent in either collecting materials or putting them together.

The afternoon the machine was finally finished, he could hardly tear himself away from it long enough to go home for dinner. He was barely able to choke down his food, and didn't even wait for dessert.

He sat on the grass in front of the cave, waiting for darkness. Below, little twinkling lights marked the villages that stretched across the plain

for a full forty miles. Enclosing them like encircling arms stretched the dark and forbidding mass of the Wall. No matter where he looked, it stood high against the night. He followed its curve with his eyes until he had turned completely around, and then he shook his fist at it.

Patting the ungainly mass of the machine that rested on the grass beside him, he whispered fiercely, "I'll get over you yet. Old *Eagle* here will take me!"

Old *Eagle* was an awkward, boxkite-like affair; but to Porgie she was a thing of beauty. She had an uncovered fuselage composed of four long poles braced together to make a rectangular frame, at each end of which was fastened a large wing.

When it was dark enough, he climbed into the open frame and reached down and grabbed hold of the two lower members. Grunting, he lifted until the two upper ones rested under his armpits. There was padding there to support his weight comfortably once he was air-borne. The bottom of the machine was level with his waist and the rest of him hung free. According to his thinking, he should be able to control his flight by swinging his legs. If he swung forward, the shifting weight should tilt the nose down; if he swung back, it should go up.

There was only one way to find out if his ifs were right. The *Eagle* was a heavy contraption. He walked awkwardly to the top of the hill, the cords standing out on his neck. He was scared as he looked down the long steep slope that stretched out before him—so scared that he was having trouble breathing. He swallowed twice in a vain attempt to moisten his dry throat, and then lunged forward, fighting desperately to keep his balance as his wabbling steps gradually picked up speed.

Faster he went, and faster, his steps turning into leaps as the wing surfaces gradually took hold. His toes scraped through the long grass and then they were dangling in free air.

He was aloft.

Not daring even to move his head, he slanted his eyes down and to the left. The earth was slipping rapidly by a dozen feet below him. Slowly and cautiously, he swung his feet back. As the weight shifted, the nose of the glider rose. Up, up he went, until he felt a sudden slowing down and a clumsiness of motion. Almost instinctively, he leaned forward again, pointing the nose down in a swift dip to regain flying speed.

By the time he reached the bottom of the hill, he was a hundred and fifty feet up. Experimentally, he swung his feet a little to the left. The glider dipped slightly and turned. Soaring over a clump of trees, he felt a sudden lifting as an updraft caught him.

Up he went—ten, twenty, thirty feet—and then slowly began to settle again.

The landing wasn't easy. More by luck than by skill, he came down in the long grass of the meadow with no more damage than a few bruises. He sat for a moment and rested, his head spinning with excitement. He had flown like a bird, without his stick, without uttering a word. There *were* other ways than magic!

His elation suddenly faded with the realization that, while gliding down was fun, the way over the Wall was *up*. Also, and of more immediate importance, he was half a mile from the cave with a contraption so heavy and unwieldy that he could never hope to haul it all the way back up the hill by himself. If he didn't get it out of sight by morning, there was going to be trouble, serious trouble. People took an unpleasant view of machines and those who built them.

Broomsticks, he decided, had certain advantages, after all. They might not fly very high, but at least you didn't have to walk home from a ride.

"If I just had a great big broomstick," he thought, "I could lift the *Eagle* up with it and fly her home."

He jumped to his feet. It might work!

He ran back up the hill as fast as he could and finally, very much out of breath, reached the entrance of the cave. Without waiting to get back his wind, he jumped on his stick and flew down to the stranded glider.

Five minutes later, he stepped back and said:

"Broomstick fly,
Rise on high,
Over cloud
And into sky."

It didn't fly. It couldn't. Porgie had lashed it to the framework of the *Eagle*. When he grabbed hold of the machine and lifted, nine-tenths of its weight was gone, canceled out by the broomstick's lifting power.

He towed it back up the hill and shoved it into the cave. Then he looked uneasily at the sky. It was later than he had thought. He should be home and in bed—but when he thought of the feeling of power he had had in his flight, he couldn't resist hauling the *Eagle* back out again.

After checking the broomstick to be sure it was still fastened tightly to the frame, he went swooping down the hill again. This time when he hit the thermal over the clump of trees, he was pushed up a hundred feet before he lost it. He curved through the darkness until he found it again and then circled tightly within it.

Higher he went and higher, higher than any broomstick had ever gone!

When he started to head back, though, he didn't have such an easy time of it. Twice he was caught in downdrafts that almost grounded him before he was able to break loose from the tugging winds. Only the lifting power of his broomstick enabled him to stay aloft. With it bearing most of the load, the *Eagle* was so light that it took just a flutter of air to sweep her up again.

He landed the glider a stone's throw from the mouth of his cave.

"Tomorrow night!" he thought exultantly as he unleashed his broomstick. "Tomorrow night!"

There was a tomorrow night, and many nights after that. The *Eagle* was sensitive to every updraft, and with care he found he could remain aloft for hours, riding from thermal to thermal. It was hard to keep his secret, hard to keep from shouting the news, but he had to. He slipped out at night to practice, slipping back in again before sunrise to get what sleep he could.

He circled the day of his fourteenth birthday in red and waited. He had a reason for waiting.

In the World within the Wall, fourteenth birthdays marked the boundary between the little and the big, between being a big child and a small man. Most important, they marked the time when one was taken to the Great Tower where the Adepts lived and given a full-sized broomstick powered by the most potent of spells, sticks that would climb to a full six hundred feet, twice the height that could be reached by the smaller ones the youngsters rode.

Porgie needed a man-sized stick, needed that extra power, for he had found that only the strongest of updrafts would lift him past the three-hundred-foot ceiling where the lifting power of his little broomstick gave out. He had to get up almost as high as the Wall before he could make it across the wide expanse of flat plain that separated him from the box canyon where the great wind waited.

So he counted the slowly passing days and practiced flying during the rapidly passing nights.

The afternoon of his fourteenth birthday found Porgie sitting on the front steps expectantly, dressed in his best and waiting for his uncle to come out of the house. Bull Pup came out and sat down beside him.

"The gang's having a coven up on top of old Baldy tonight," he said. "Too bad you can't come."

"I can go if I want to," said Porgie.

"How?" said Bull Pup and snickered. "You going to grow wings and

fly? Old Baldy's five hundred feet up and your kid stick won't lift you that high."

"Today's my birthday."

"You think you're going to get a new stick?"

Porgie nodded.

"Well, you ain't. I heard Mom and Dad talking. Dad's mad because you flunked alchemy. He said you had to be taught a lesson."

Porgie felt sick inside, but he wouldn't let Bull Pup have the satisfaction of knowing it.

"I don't care," he said. "I'll go to the coven if I want to. You just wait and see."

Bull Pup was laughing when he hopped on his stick and took off down the street. Porgie waited an hour, but his uncle didn't come out.

He went into the house. Nobody said anything about his new broomstick until after supper. Then his uncle called him into the living room and told him he wasn't getting it.

"But, Uncle Veryl, you promised!"

"It was a conditional promise, Porgie. There was a big if attached to it. Do you remember what it was?"

Porgie looked down at the floor and scuffed one toe on the worn carpet. "I tried."

"Did you really, son?" His uncle's eyes were stern but compassionate. "Were you trying when you fell asleep in school today? I've tried talking with you and I've tried whipping you and neither seems to work. Maybe this will. Now you run upstairs and get started on your studies. When you can show me that your marks are improving, we'll talk about getting you a new broomstick. Until then, the old one will have to do."

Porgie knew that he was too big to cry, but when he got to his room he couldn't help it. He was stretched out on his bed with his face buried in the pillows when he heard a hiss from the window. He looked up to see Bull Pup sitting on his stick, grinning malevolently at him.

"What do you want?" sniffed Porgie.

"Only little kids cry," said Bull Pup.

"I wasn't crying. I got a cold."

"I just saw Mr. Wickens. He was coming out of that old cave back of Arnett's Grove. He's going to get the Black Man, I'll bet."

"I don't know anything about that old cave," said Porgie, sitting bolt upright on his bed.

"Oh, yes, you do. I followed you up there one day. You got a machine in there. I told Mr. Wickens and he gave me a quarter. He was real interested."

Porgie jumped from his bed and ran toward the window, his face red and his fists doubled. "I'll fix you!"

Bull Pup backed his broomstick just out of Porgie's reach, and then stuck his thumbs in his ears and waggled his fingers. When Porgie started to throw things, he gave a final taunt and swooped away toward old Baldy and the coven.

Porgie's uncle was just about to go out in the kitchen and fix himself a sandwich when the doorbell rang. Grumbling, he went out into the front hall. Mr. Wickens was at the door. He came into the house and stood blinking in the light. He seemed uncertain as to just how to begin.

"I've got bad news for you," he said finally. "It's about Porgie. Is your wife still up?"

Porgie's uncle nodded anxiously.

"She'd better hear this, too."

Aunt Olga put down her knitting when they came into the living room.

"You're out late, Mr. Wickens."

"It's not of my own choosing."

"Porgie's done something again," said his uncle.

Aunt Olga sighed. "What is it this time?"

Mr. Wickens hesitated, cleared his throat, and finally spoke in a low hushed voice: "Porgie's built a machine. The Black Man told me. He's coming after the boy tonight."

Uncle Veryl dashed up the stairs to find Porgie. He wasn't in his room.

Aunt Olga just sat in her chair and cried shrilly.

The moon stood high and silverlit the whole countryside. Porgie could make out the world far below him almost as if it were day. Miles to his left, he saw the little flickering fires on top of old Baldy where the kids were holding their coven. He fought an impulse and then succumbed to it. He circled the *Eagle* over a clump of trees until the strong rising currents lifted him almost to the height of the Wall. Then he twisted his body and banked over toward the distant red glowing fires.

Minutes later, he went silently over them at eight hundred feet, feeling out the air currents around the rocks. There was a sharp downdraft on the far side of Baldy that dropped him suddenly when he glided into it, but he made a quick turn and found untroubled air before he fell too far. On the other side, toward the box canyon, he found what he wanted, a strong rising current that seemed to have no upward limits.

He fixed its location carefully in his mind and then began to circle

down toward the coven. Soon he was close enough to make out individual forms sitting silently around their little fires.

"Hey, Bull Pup," he yelled at the top of his lungs.

A stocky figure jumped to its feet and looked wildly around for the source of the ghostly voice.

"Up here!"

Porgie reached in his pocket, pulled out a small pebble and chucked it down. It cracked against a shelf of rock four feet from Bull Pup. Porgie's cousin let out a howl of fear. The rest of the kids jumped up and reared back their heads at the night sky, their eyes blinded by firelight.

"I told you I could come to the coven if I wanted to," yelled Porgie, "but now I don't. I don't have any time for kid stuff; I'm going over the Wall!"

During his last pass over the plateau he wasn't more than thirty feet up. As he leaned over, his face was clearly visible in the firelight.

Placing one thumb to his nose he waggled his fingers and chanted, "Nyah, nyah, nyah, you can't catch me!"

His feet were almost scraping the ground as he glided out over the drop-off. There was an anxious second of waiting and then he felt the sure steady thrust of the upcurrent against his wings.

He looked back. The gang was milling around, trying to figure out what had happened. There was an angry shout of command from Bull Pup, and after a moment of confused hesitation they all made for their brooms and swooped up into the air.

Porgie mentally gauged his altitude and then relaxed. He was almost at their ceiling and would be above it before they reached him.

He flattened out his glide and yelled, "Come on up! Only little kids play that low!"

Bull Pup's stick wouldn't rise any higher. He circled impotently, shaking his fist at the machine that rode serenely above him.

"You just wait," he yelled. "You can't stay up there all night. You got to come down some time, and when you do we'll be waiting for you."

"Nyah, nyah, nyah," chanted Porgie and mounted higher into the moonlit night.

When the updraft gave out, he wasn't as high as he wanted to be, but there wasn't anything he could do about it. He turned and started a flat glide across the level plain toward the box canyon. He wished now that he had left Bull Pup and the other kids alone. They were following along below him. If he dropped down to their level before the canyon winds caught him, he was in trouble.

He tried to flatten his glide still more, but instead of saving altitude he went into a stall that dropped him a hundred feet before he was able to regain control. He saw now that he could never make it without dropping to Bull Pup's level.

Bull Pup saw it, too, and let out an exultant yell: "Just you wait! You're going to get it good!"

Porgie peered over the side into the darkness where his cousin rode, his pug face gleaming palely in the moonlight.

"Leave him alone, gang," Bull Pup shouted. "He's mine!"

The rest pulled back and circled slowly as the *Eagle* glided quietly down among them. Bull Pup darted in and rode right alongside Porgie.

He pointed savagely toward the ground: "Go down or I'll knock you down!"

Porgie kicked at him, almost upsetting his machine. He wasn't fast enough. Bull Pup dodged easily. He made a wide circle and came back, reaching out and grabbing the far end of the *Eagle's* front wing. Slowly and maliciously, he began to jerk it up and down, twisting violently as he did so.

"Get down," he yelled, "or I'll break it off!"

Porgie almost lost his head as the wrenching threatened to throw him out of control.

"Let go!" he screamed, his voice cracking.

Bull Pup's face had a strange excited look on it as he gave the wing another jerk. The rest of the boys were becoming frightened as they saw what was happening.

"Quit it, Bull Pup!" somebody called. "Do you want to kill him?"

"Shut up or you'll get a dose of the same!"

Porgie fought to clear his head. His broomstick was tied to the frame of the *Eagle* so securely that he would never be able to free it in time to save himself. He stared into the darkness until he caught the picture of Bull Pup's broomstick sharply in his mind. He'd never tried to handle anything that big before, but it was that or nothing.

Tensing suddenly, he clamped his mind down on the picture and held it hard. He knew that words didn't help, but he uttered them anyway:

"Broomstick stop,
Flip and flop!"

There was a sharp tearing pain in his head. He gritted his teeth and held on, fighting desperately against the red haze that threatened to swallow him. Suddenly there was a half-startled, half-frightened squawk

from his left wingtip, and Bull Pup's stick jerked to an abrupt halt, gyrating so madly that its rider could hardly hang on.

"All right, the rest of you," screamed Porgie. "Get going or I'll do the same thing to you!"

They got, arcing away in terrified disorder. Porgie watched as they formed a frightened semicircle around the blubbering Bull Pup. With a sigh of relief, he let go with his mind.

As he left them behind in the night, he turned his head back and yelled weakly, "Nyah, nyah, nyah, you can't catch me!"

He was only fifty feet off the ground when he glided into the far end of the box canyon and was suddenly caught by the strong updraft. As he soared in a tight spiral, he slumped down against the arm rests, his whole body shaking in delayed reaction.

The lashings that held the front wing to the frame were dangerously loose from the manhandling they had received. One more tug and the whole wing might have twisted back, dumping him down on the sharp rocks below. Shudders ran through the *Eagle* as the supports shook in their loose bonds. He clamped both hands around the place where the rear wing spar crossed the frame and tried to steady it.

He felt his stick's lifting power give out at three hundred feet. The *Eagle* felt clumsy and heavy, but the current was still enough to carry him slowly upward. Foot by foot he rose toward the top of the Wall, losing a precious hundred feet once when he spiraled out of the updraft and had to circle to find it. A wisp of cloud curled down from the top of the Wall and he felt a moment of panic as he climbed into it.

Momentarily, there was no left or right or up or down. Only damp whiteness. He had the feeling that the *Eagle* was falling out of control; but he kept steady, relying on the feel for the air he had gotten during his many practice flights.

The lashings had loosened more. The full strength of his hands wasn't enough to keep the wing from shuddering and trembling. He struggled resolutely to maintain control of ship and self against the strong temptation to lean forward and throw the *Eagle* into a shallow dive that would take him back to normalcy and safety.

He was almost at the end of his resolution when with dramatic suddenness he glided out of the cloud into the clear moon-touched night. The upcurrent under him seemed to have lessened. He banked in a gentle arc, trying to find the center of it again.

As he turned, he became aware of something strange, something different, something almost frightening. For the first time in his life, there

was no Wall to block his vision, no vast black line stretching through the night.

He was above it!

There was no time for looking. With a loud *ping*, one of the lashings parted and the leading edge of the front wing flapped violently. The glider began to pitch and yaw, threatening to nose over into a plummeting dive. He fought for mastery, swinging his legs like desperate pendulums as he tried to correct the erratic side swings that threatened to throw him out of control. As he fought, he headed for the Wall.

If he were to fall, it would be on the other side. At least he would cheat old Mr. Wickens and the Black Man.

Now he was directly over the Wall. It stretched like a wide road underneath him, its smooth top black and shining in the moonlight. Acting on quick impulse, he threw his body savagely forward and to the right. The ungainly machine dipped abruptly and dove toward the black surface beneath it.

Eighty feet, seventy, sixty, fifty—he had no room to maneuver, there would be no second chance—thirty, twenty—

He threw his weight back, jerking the nose of the *Eagle* suddenly up. For a precious second the wings held, there was a sharp breaking of his fall; then, with a loud cracking noise, the front wing buckled back in his face. There was a moment of blind whirling fall and a splintering crash that threw him into darkness.

Slowly, groggily, Porgie pulled himself up out of the broken wreckage. The *Eagle* had made her last flight. She perched precariously, so near the outside edge of the wall that part of her rear wing stretched out over nothingness.

Porgie crawled cautiously across the slippery wet surface of the top of the Wall until he reached the center. There he crouched down to wait for morning. He was exhausted, his body so drained of energy that in spite of himself he kept slipping into an uneasy sleep.

Each time he did, he'd struggle back to consciousness trying to escape the nightmare figures that scampered through his brain. He was falling, pursued by wheeling batlike figures with pug faces. He was in a tiny room and the walls were inching in toward him and he could hear the voice of Bull Pup in the distance chanting, "You're going to get it." And then the room turned into a long dark corridor and he was running. Mr. Wickens was close behind him and he had long sharp teeth and he kept yelling, "Porgie! Porgie!"

He shuddered back to wakefulness, crawled to the far edge of the Wall and, hanging his head over, tried to look down at the Outside

World. The clouds had boiled up and there was nothing underneath him but gray blankness hiding the sheer thousand-foot drop. He crawled back to his old spot and looked toward the East, praying for the first sign of dawn. There was only blackness there.

He started to doze off again and once more he heard the voice: "Porgie! Porgie!"

He opened his eyes and sat up. The voice was still calling, even though he was awake. It seemed to be coming from high up and far away.

It came closer, closer, and suddenly he saw it in the darkness—a black figure wheeling above the Wall like a giant crow. Down it came, nearer and nearer, a man in black with arms outstretched and long fingers hooked like talons!

Porgie scrambled to his feet and ran, his feet skidding on the slippery surface. He looked back over his shoulder. The black figure was almost on top of him. Porgie dodged desperately and slipped.

He felt himself shoot across the slippery surface toward the edge of the Wall. He clawed, scrabbling for purchase. He couldn't stop. One moment he felt wet coldness slipping away under him; the next, nothingness as he shot out into the dark and empty air.

He spun slowly as he fell. First the clouds were under him and then they tipped and the star-flecked sky took their places. He felt cradled, suspended in time. There was no terror. There was nothing.

Nothing—until suddenly the sky above him was blotted out by a plummeting black figure that swooped down on him, hawklike and horrible.

Porgie kicked wildly. One foot slammed into something solid and for an instant he was free. Then strong arms circled him from behind and he was jerked out of the nothingness into a world of falling and fear.

There was a sudden strain on his chest and then he felt himself being lifted. He was set down gently on the top of the Wall.

He stood defiant, head erect, and faced the black figure.

"I won't go back. You can't make me go back."

"You don't have to go back, Porgie."

He couldn't see the hooded face, but the voice sounded strangely familiar.

"You've earned your right to see what's on the other side," it said. Then the figure laughed and threw back the hood that partially covered its face.

In the bright moonlight, Porgie saw Mr. Wickens!

The schoolmaster nodded cheerfully. "Yes, Porgie, I'm the Black Man. Bit of a shock, isn't it?"

Porgie sat down suddenly.

"I'm from the Outside," said Mr. Wickens, seating himself carefully on the slick black surface. "I guess you could call me a sort of observer."

Porgie's spinning mind couldn't catch up with the new ideas that were being thrown at him. "Observer?" he said uncomprehendingly. "Outside?"

"Outside. That's where you'll be spending your next few years. I don't think you'll find life better there and I don't think you'll find it worse. It'll be different, though, I can guarantee that." He chuckled. "Do you remember what I said to you in my office that day—that Man can't follow two paths at once, that Mind and Nature are bound to conflict? That's true, but it's also false. You can have both, but it takes two worlds to do it.

"Outside, where you're going, is the world of the machines. It's a good world, too. But the men who live there saw a long time ago that they were paying a price for it; that control over Nature meant that the forces of the Mind were neglected, for the machine is a thing of logic and reason, but miracles aren't. Not yet. So they built the Wall and they placed people within it and gave them such books and such laws as would insure development of the powers of the Mind. They were right, too. There is magic down there now. Not as much as you might think, though. Broomsticks aren't, for example—they're really disguised machines, machines built Outside containing tiny anti-gravitational units, and controlling devices that will react to the human voice. So with all the other things that words seem to activate."

"But—but why the Wall?" asked Porgie.

"Because their guess was right. There is magic." He pulled a bunch of keys from his pocket. "Lift it, Porgie."

Porgie stared at it until he had the picture in his mind and then let his mind take hold, pulling with invisible hands until the keys hung high in the air. Then he dropped them back into Mr. Wickens's hand.

"What was that for?"

"Outsiders can't do that," said the schoolmaster. "And they can't do conscious telepathy—what you call mind talk—either. They can't because they really don't believe such things can be done. The people inside the Wall do, for they live in an atmosphere of magic. But once these things are worked out, and become simply a matter of training and method, then the ritual, the mumbo-jumbo, the deeply ingrained belief in the existence of supernatural forces will be no longer necessary.

"These phenomena will be only tools that anybody can be trained to use, and the crutches can be thrown away. Then the Wall will come

tumbling down. But until then—" he stopped and frowned in mock severity—"there will always be a Black Man around to see that the people inside don't split themselves up the middle trying to walk down two roads at once."

There was a lingering doubt in Porgie's eyes. "But you flew without a machine."

The Black Man opened his cloak and displayed a small gleaming disk that was strapped to his chest. "Little ones like this are what make your broomsticks fly. The only difference is that this one has no built-in limits." He tapped it gently. "A machine, Porgie. A machine just like your glider, only of a different sort and much better. It's almost as good as levitation. Mind and Nature—magic and science—they'll get together eventually."

He wrapped his cloak about him again. "It's cold up here. Shall we go? Tomorrow is time enough to find out what is Outside the Wall that goes around the World."

"Can't we wait until the clouds lift?" asked Porgie wistfully. "I'd sort of like to see it for the first time from up here."

"We could," said Mr. Wickens, "but there is somebody you haven't seen for a long time waiting for you down there. If we stay up here, he'll be worried."

Porgie looked up blankly. "I don't know anybody Outside. I—" He stopped suddenly. He felt as if he were about to explode. "Not my father!"

"Who else? He came out the easy way. Come, now, let's go and show him what kind of man his son has grown up to be. Are you ready?"

"I'm ready," said Porgie.

"Then help me drag your contraption over to the other side of the Wall so we can drop it Inside. When the folk find the wreckage in the morning, they'll know what the Black Man does to those who build machines instead of tending to their proper business. It should have a salutary effect on Bull Pup and the others."

He walked over to the wreckage of the *Eagle* and began to tug at it.

"Wait," said Porgie. "Let me." He stared at the broken glider until his eyes began to burn. Then he gripped and pulled.

Slowly, with an increasing consciousness of mastery, he lifted until the glider floated free and was rocking gently in the slight breeze that rippled across the top of the great Wall. Then, with a sudden shove, he swung it far out over the abyss and released it.

The two stood silently, side by side, watching the *Eagle* pitch downward on broken wings. When it was lost in the darkness below, Mr.

Wickens took Porgie in his strong arms and stepped confidently to the edge of the Wall.

"Wait a second," said Porgie, remembering a day in the schoolmaster's study and a switch that had come floating obediently down through the air. "If you're from Outside, how come you can do lifting?"

Mr. Wickens grinned. "Oh, I was born Inside. I went over the Wall for the first time when I was just a little older than you are now."

"In a glider?" asked Porgie.

"No," said the Black Man, his face perfectly sober. "I went out and caught myself a half-dozen eagles."

From broomsticks to rocket ships in one easy apport—and from fantasy to science fiction in the same jump. There is absolutely nothing in common between Mr. Cogswell's story and Mr. Sheckley's, except that both of them consider the hypothetical use of PK (also known as telekinesis *and* apportation*) as an aid to mechanical means of travel.*

Robert Sheckley, one of the brightest of the new talents in science fantasy, here combines the two favorite themes of the genre *today:—psi functions and space travel.*

Operating Instructions *by Robert Sheckley*

Since this was such an important moment, Captain Powell walked into the main room with a light, inconsequential air. He thought fleetingly of whistling, but decided against it. Spacemen were adept at smelling out little inconsistencies.

"Hi," he said, dropping into a padded chair. Danton, the navigator, yawned elaborately and nodded. Arriglio, the power engineer, glanced at his watch.

"We still blasting on schedule, Sam?"

"Sure," Powell said. "Two hours." Both men nodded, as though flights to Mars were an everyday occurrence. Powell paused, then said in an offhand manner, "We're adding another crew member."

"What for?" Danton asked at once, suspicion in every plane of his tanned face. Arriglio's mouth tightened ominously.

"Last-minute order from Command Three," Powell said casually. The two men didn't move, but they seemed to come physically closer. Powell wondered what made spacemen so clannish.

"What's this job going to be?" Arriglio asked. He was small and dark, with close-fitting, curly black hair and sharp teeth. He looked like an unusually intelligent wire-haired terrier; one prepared to bark at a strange dog even before seeing him.

"You boys know about the psi's, don't you?" Powell asked, with seeming inconsistency.

"Sure," Arriglio answered promptly. "Those crazy guys."

"No, they're not crazy," Danton said, his broad face thoughtful.

"I suppose you know," Powell said, "that a man named Waverley has been organizing the psi's, trying to find jobs for them. He's got telepaths, lightning calculators, all sorts of things."

"I read it in the papers," Danton said. He raised a thick blond eyebrow. "That's the extrasensory stuff, isn't it?"

"That's right. Well, Waverley has been taking these psi's out of the side shows and placing them in regular work. He feels that there's a place for their talents."

"So our extra crew member is a psi?" Danton said.

"That's right," Powell said, observing the two men carefully. Spacemen were funny ducks. Many of them adjusted to their lonely, dangerous work by adopting an intense asociality. Spacemen were extreme conservatives, also, in the world's newest work. Of course, that conservatism had survival value. If something old works, why try something new that may cost you your life?

It all tended to make acceptance of the psi very difficult.

"Who needs him?" Arriglio asked angrily. He had a notion that his authority in the engine room might be superseded. "We don't need any mind reader aboard this ship."

"He's not a mind reader," Powell said. "The man we're getting will fill a very important place."

"What's he supposed to do?" Danton asked.

Powell hesitated, then said, "He's going to help us in our take-off."

"How?" Danton asked.

"He's a telekinetic psi," Powell said quickly. "He's going to push."

Danton didn't say anything. Arriglio stared for a moment, then burst into laughter.

"Push! You mean he's going to run along behind and shove?"

"Maybe he's going to carry *Venture* on his back!"

"Sam, where did you leave your brains?"

Powell grinned at the taunts, congratulating himself on his phrasing. It was better to have them laughing at him than fighting with him.

He stroked his mustache and said, "He'll be here pretty soon."

"You're serious?" Danton asked.

"Absolutely."

"But Sam—"

"Let me explain," Powell said. "Telekinesis—which is what this man does—is an unexplained form of power. It involves moving masses—often large ones—with no evident physical interaction. And it *does* work."

The two men were listening intently, though skeptically. Powell glanced at his watch and went on.

"Command figured that if this man could exert some of that force on our take-off, we'd save an appreciable amount of fuel. That would give us a nice safety margin."

Both men nodded. They were all for saving fuel. It was the biggest single problem in space flight. Only so much could be packed; and then, a little error in calculation, a little added expenditure of the precious stuff —and that was it. Of the five ships that had gone out so far, two had been lost for that very reason.

"I assure you," Powell said, "he won't infringe on your jobs. All he's going to do is try to give this thing a push." He smiled, and prepared to give them the rest of the unpleasant news.

"Well, as long as he leaves me alone," Danton said.

"Sorry," Powell told them, "but you can't leave him alone."

"What?"

Powell had many qualifications for his job. The most important one couldn't be taught in college, though. Powell knew how to handle people. He called upon that ability now.

"Psi's, you know, aren't normal people. They're maladjusted, unhappy. There even seems to be some correlation between that and their psi abilities. If we want this psi to help us, we're going to have to treat him right."

"I wasn't planning on spitting on him," Arriglio said.

"You'll have to do better than that," Powell said. "I had a long talk with Waverley about this. He gave me a list of operating instructions." He drew a piece of paper from his breast pocket.

"He gave *you* operating instructions?"

"Sure. For the psi. Listen now." He straightened the paper and began to read:

"Psi ability has perhaps existed as long as man himself. But operationally, it is very new. Already it has shown some of its potentialities as an extension of man's will. But it will be a while before we understand the why and how of it.

"Therefore, for the interim, these empirically derived operating rules are given as an aid to those working with the psi. We have found that the best results—and often the only results—are obtained by using them.

"Operationally, the psi may be considered a unit of tricky, delicate, powerful machinery. Like all machines, certain maintenance and operating rules must be observed.

"To function, any machine must be:

1. Well-seated.

2. Fueled.

3. Oiled.

4. Regulated.

Taking these in order we find:

1. *In order to function at all, a psi must feel at home, secure, wanted.*

2. *Praise must be afforded the psi at frequent intervals. Since the psi is unstable, his ego must be periodically boosted.*

3. *Understanding and sympathy must be used at all times when dealing with the psi.*

4. *The psi must be allowed to run at his own pace. Excess pressure will break him.*"

Powell looked up and smiled. "That's all there is to it."

"Sam," Danton asked softly, "isn't it enough trouble running a ship without wet-nursing a neurotic?"

"Sure it is," Powell said. "But imagine what it would mean to us—to space flight—if we could get off Earth with most of our fuel intact."

"That's true," Arriglio said, remembering times he had sweated blood over the fuel gauges.

"Here's a copy of the operating instructions for each of you," Powell said, taking them out of his pocket. "I want you to learn them better than you know your own names."

"Great," Arriglio said, frowning at the typed sheet. "Are you sure he can do this pushing?"

"No," Powell admitted. "No one knows for sure. His ability works about 65 per cent of the time."

"Oh, no," Danton said.

"I'm going to bring him in now, so get those papers out of sight when you hear us." He smiled, showing his teeth. "Rest ye merry." And left the room. He began to whistle as he walked down the corridor. They had taken it very well, on the whole.

In ten minutes he returned. "Boys, this is Billy Walker. Walker, Steve Danton, Phil Arriglio."

"Hiya," Walker said. He was tall—a good six-three, Powell estimated—and impossibly thin. A floating nimbus of pale yellow hair remained on his bald, bony skull. He had a long-nosed, homely, unhappy face, and at the moment he was biting his flat lower lip.

A nice-looking companion for a few months, Powell thought.

"Have a seat, Walker," Arriglio said, shaking Walker's hand enthusiastically.

"Sure. How's everything, boy?" Danton said.

Powell suppressed a smile. *In order to function at all, a psi must feel at*

home, secure, wanted. The boys were making the best of the bargain. They knew what that extra push at take-off could mean.

Walker sat down, eying them suspiciously.

"How do you like our ship?" Arriglio asked.

"It's O.K.," Walker said, with the air of a man who has seen bigger and better; despite the fact that this was the only completed spaceship, at present, in the United States.

"How do you feel about the trip?" Danton asked.

"Just another trip," Walker answered, leaning back in his chair. "Shouldn't be too tough."

"Would you like to see the rest of the ship?" Powell asked hastily. He could see that Arriglio was smoldering, and Danton didn't look too happy.

"Naw," Walker said. "I'll get plenty of chance later."

There was an awkward silence, which didn't seem to bother Walker. Powell watched him out of the corner of his eye as he lighted a cigarette. Neuroticism he had expected. But Walker was plain arrogant.

Walker grunted and thrust his hands in his pockets. Powell watched and realized that the man was clenching and unclenching his fists.

He must be nervous, Powell thought, and tried to think of something pleasant to say.

"How fast you figure you'll shove the ship?" Arriglio asked. Walker looked at him scornfully. "Fast as she'll take," he said, and gulped convulsively.

Not nervous, Powell decided. Scared. Just plain scared, and trying to hide it.

"Well, you'll find this a nice little boat," Danton said inanely.

"Nice little boat," Arriglio repeated.

"I want a candy bar," Walker said.

"How about a cigarette?" Powell said, offering him one.

"I think I'll just step outside and get a candy bar. There's gotta be a hawker on the landing field."

"We're off soon," Powell said. "I'd like to run through the briefing—"

"Nuts," Walker said succinctly, and left.

"I'll kill that guy before we're through," Arriglio murmured when Walker was out of the room. Danton looked grim.

"We'll just have to bear him," Powell said. "He'll fit in."

"He's insufferable," Danton said. They sat and glared at the doorway. Powell began to feel sorry for himself. What had Command talked him into?

"I decided I didn't want a candy bar," Walker said, coming back into

the room. He looked from face to face. "You guys been talking about me?"

"Why should we?" Arriglio asked abruptly.

"You guys probably figure I can't push this crate," Walker said.

"Now look," Powell said sternly. "We don't think any such thing. Each of us will do his job, and that's all there is to it."

Walker just looked at him.

"Let's go through the briefing," Powell said. "Come with me, Walker."

He led Walker into the control room and showed him the line of force diagrams, explained the sequence of orders and told him what he was supposed to do. Walker listened carefully, still chewing his lower lip.

"Look, Captain," he said. "I'll do my best."

"Fine," Powell said, rolling up his charts and laying them aside.

"Just don't count on me too much," the psi said, and hurried out of the room. Powell shook his head and checked his instruments.

Powell strapped himself in, and snapped on the intercom.

"Danton. Set?"

"Set, Captain."

"Arriglio."

"Just a moment—set, Captain."

"Walker?"

"Yeah."

"Right." Powell received his field clearance from the tower. He leaned back. "Ten seconds. Main drive on."

"On," Arriglio said. A roar shook the ship as the engines leaped into violent life.

"Get it up," Powell said, reading his dials. "Fine. Hold it there. Danton. Get set on auxiliary."

"I'm on."

"Six seconds. Walker, stand by."

"Yes, sir."

"Four seconds." Half a dozen fine adjustments, oxygen.

"Two seconds. One second."

"Blast! Come in, Walker!"

The ship started to rise, balancing on her jets. Then, a great force seized her. Powell was slammed back in his seat, knowing that Walker's telekinetic force was shoving now. He read the climb dial. As soon as they had reached five hundred feet, he cut a switch.

"Main drive off! Give it all you've got, Walker!"

The roar stopped, but the ship leaped forward faster. The ship per-

formed an incredible wrench. Powell wondered what it was. Not acceleration, certainly. . . .

The ship was wrenched again. Powell gasped and blacked out.

When he recovered, the ship was surrounded by the blackness of space. Acceleration was still a giant hand against his chest, but he struggled forward and looked out a port.

Stars, of course.

Powell grinned weakly and decided to buy Walker a drink when they got back. The erratic, powerful psi dynamo had functioned—with a vengeance. He wondered how far from Earth they were.

Touching the instrument panel, he got a screen-view behind him. He searched it for the blue-green globe of Earth.

Earth wasn't there.

Manipulating the view, he quickly found Sol. But why was it so small? Earth's sun looked about the size of a large pea.

Where were they?

Powell unstrapped himself. He could feel that the ship was beginning to lose its acceleration. He checked his instruments and calculated their velocity.

Fantastic!

"Danton!" he shouted into the intercom.

"Ouch," Danton said. "Brother!"

"Get up here and check our position. Arriglio?"

"Yes, Sam?"

"See how Walker is," Powell looked out at the stars again, then at the sun. Finally he frowned and rechecked his figures. He *had* to be wrong.

Half an hour later, Danton came up with an answer. "As near as I can figure out," he said, "we're somewhere between Saturn and Jupiter. Probably closer to Saturn."

"That's impossible," Powell said flatly.

"Sure," Danton agreed. "Try it yourself." Powell went over the navigator's figures, but could find no error in them. They were five hundred million miles from Mars, give or take ten million.

Powell shook his head. The figures had no real emotional impact on him. They couldn't, since no one could grasp what five hundred million miles really meant. He reduced it, automatically, to an understandable size.

Which was just as well, under the circumstances.

"So here we are," he said matter-of-factly. "Well," Arriglio came in, and he asked him, "how are we on fuel?"

"So-so," Arriglio said. "That psi-assisted take-off saved us a lot, of course. But we still haven't got enough."

"Of course not," Powell agreed. A ship powered for a Mars trip, with refueling on the planet, couldn't expect to get back from Saturn.

Saturn! He tried to think what that meant in terms of straight-line acceleration, but gave it up. The telekineticized ship must have skipped a portion of space, somehow.

Walker came into the room, his lips pallid and twitching. "Did you say we were around Saturn?" he asked.

"Saturn's orbit," Powell said, automatically forcing a grin. "Saturn is on the other side of the sun now." He widened the grin, and remembered rule two in the operating instructions. *Praise must be afforded the psi at frequent intervals.*

"Boy," he said, "you've really got something there. Magnificent!"

"I suppose . . . I suppose—" Walker looked at them, his face drawn into a pout. Then he started to cry.

"Take it easy," Powell said, feeling extremely uncomfortable. His machine didn't seem to be responding.

"I knew I'd louse it up," the psi dynamo blubbered. "I just knew it."

"Nothing's lost," Powell said, keeping his voice pleasant and even. "You just don't know your own strength. You'll bring us back."

"I can't," Walker said, covering his face with his big hands. "I can't do it any more."

"What?" Danton shouted.

"I can't! I've lost the power! I felt it all whoosh out of me! I can't do it any more!" He screamed the last at them, and half-sat, half-slid to the deck. Placing his face against his knees he wept uncontrollably.

"Come on," Powell said to Danton. Together they lifted Walker and carried him to his bunk. Danton gave him a sedative, and they watched until the psi fell into a restless sleep. Then they returned to the Main Room.

"Well," Arriglio said. They didn't answer him. The three men sat down and stared out a port.

After a while, Danton said, "If he really can't do it any more—"

"Suppose he's a one-shot?" Arriglio said in a whisper.

With an effort Powell turned from the port. "I don't think so," he said. "You don't lose psi power that easily, I've heard." He had heard no such thing; but morale was still a factor.

"The point is," Danton said, "he doesn't have to lose it. If he just believes he's lost it—"

"We'll talk him out of that," Powell said. "Just think of him as a machine. A tricky one—but we've got the manual."

"I hope some of the spare parts aren't on Earth," Danton said.

They were silent for a few moments.

"We'd better get the engines going," Powell said. "We have to turn the ship, or we'll be out of the system in no time."

"That's going to take a bit of fuel," Arriglio said.

"Can't help it. Work out the curve, will you, Danton? As tight as we can take."

"Right," Danton said.

"And then we'll eat."

Once the ship was turning, they ate. Then they held a conference.

"It's all up to us," Powell said. "His arrogance before we took off was sheer bluff. Now his nerve is shot. We have to restore his confidence."

"Easy," Arriglio said. "Telephone a psychiatrist."

"Very funny," Danton said.

"Not so funny," Powell told them. "A psychiatrist might come in very handy now. In the absence of one, we have the operating instructions."

Danton and Arriglio took out their copies and looked them over.

"For the duration," Powell said, "we'll have to think of Walker as a machine. It brought us out here. It can take us back. Now, any suggestions on getting it back in running order?"

"I've got an idea," Danton said hesitantly. They discussed it for several minutes, and decided it was worth a try. Arriglio went back for Walker.

When he came in, Powell and Danton were shuffling a deck of cards. "Care for some poker?" Powell asked carelessly. "Nothing else to do until we round the curve."

"Do you want me to play?" Walker asked in a whisper.

"Sure. Sit down." The tall psi took a chair self-consciously, and picked up his cards. The game began.

Since the psi is unstable, his ego must be periodically boosted. It was the craziest game Powell had ever seen. They had decided to let Walker win, in hopes of restoring his confidence. But Walker was a hard man to lose to. Timidly he glanced at his cards and threw in hand after hand. He folded when anyone raised. His hands ran amazingly low, even with Arriglio's skillful dealing. Walker never even opened a hand.

But the men were persistent. Silently they worked, throwing away good cards in hopes of getting poor ones. They tried to beat Walker to

the punch by folding before he could. Bit by bit, Walker forged ahead.

Powell watched the psi play. The man's sad, homely face was tense with strain. He took each card as though his life depended on it.

Powell had never seen a man who played so seriously, and so poorly.

Finally, a big pot came up. Walker, who hadn't drawn any cards, seemed to pick up confidence. He bet. Powell had drawn one card, splitting up a pair. He raised. Danton and Arriglio raised. Walker hesitated, then raised back.

After several rounds, Walker called.

Powell had a ten high. Arriglio had an eight, and Danton a queen. Walker had stayed with an ace.

"Good bluffing," Powell said. Walker stood up, his face contorted.

"I can't lose," he said in a strange voice.

"Don't worry about it," Danton said.

"I put you guys in this fix—and then I win your dough," Walker said. He hurried away.

Only then did Powell realize that Walker had wanted to lose. Expiation, he thought, but didn't bother to explain it to Danton and Arriglio. He hurried after Walker.

Walker was sitting on his bunk, staring at his hands. Powell sat down beside him and offered him a cigarette. He felt safe in doing so, since their food and water would run out long before their oxygen.

"No thank you," Walker said dully.

"What's wrong?" Powell asked.

"Oh, me," Walker said. "I've gone and done it again."

"Done what?"

"Loused everything up. I've always done something like that. You can count on it."

Understanding and sympathy must be used at all times when dealing with the psi.

"No reason to feel that way," Powell said in a soothing, fatherly voice. "You did something no one else could. That push you gave the ship—"

"Wonderful, wasn't it?" Walker said bitterly. "I pushed us right where we didn't want to go."

"It was still the most wonderful thing I've ever seen."

"And now what?" Walker said, knotting his fingers together in agony. "I can't get us back. I've killed us!"

"You can't blame yourself—" Powell began, but Walker interrupted him.

"I can! It's my fault!" He started to cry, and wiped his nose on his sleeve.

"All you have to do is push us back," Powell said.

"I've told you," Walker gasped, his eyes wild. "I've lost it. I can't do it any more." His voice started to get louder.

"Now listen to me," Powell said sternly. "You don't lose it. That's defeatist talk." He went smoothly into his best inspirational speech, one reserved for extra-bad moments. It was good, he had to admit. He talked about the stars and Earth, and science, and man's mission on the planets. He talked of the undeveloped psi powers, and their importance in the scheme of things.

Walker stopped crying. He listened, his eyes knotted on Powell's face.

Powell told him about the future of psi, making it up as he went along. How the psi powers would some day link the stars. But until that day, it was up to men like Walker to lead the way.

And a great deal more.

"Come on, boy," Powell cried, after he saw that his audience was thoroughly hooked. "You haven't lost it. Try again!"

"I will!" Walker wiped his nose on his sleeve again and shut his eyes. Cords in his neck stood out. Powell held on to the side of the bunk and watched his precious dynamo begin to operate.

Across the room a door flew open, then slammed shut. Walker's face grew red.

Fascinated, Powell watched the psi's face. The long nose glistened with sweat, the wide lips were peeled back. Walker was in an agony of concentration.

Then he relaxed, and sagged back against the bunk.

"I can't do it," he said. "I just can't."

Powell wanted to tell him to try again. But he remembered Rule 4: *The psi must be allowed to run at his own pace. Excess pressure will break him.*

"Take a rest," Powell said, resisting a strong temptation to throttle the man. He stood up, taking care to keep his face expressionless.

"I've killed you all," Walker said.

Powell left the room.

The ship rounded the great curve and started the long fall sunwards. Arriglio cut the engines, mourning the expenditure of fuel. They were *really* short now. Just how short, Danton set out to discover.

In free fall now, with all apparent motion stopped, the ship seemed to hang in space. The sun grew in size—too slowly. Much too slowly.

Walker remained in his bunk, refusing any more conversation. Powell knew that the man was judging himself—and condemning, over and over again. He wanted to do something about it, but couldn't figure out what.

"Here's the score," Danton said, in the Main Room. He showed Powell a graph. "Here's course and speed, here's destination." He pointed out the lines. "We run out of food here—" The line fell far short of their destination. "And we run out of water here." That line was still shorter.

"How about if we accelerate?" Powell asked.

"Too far to go," Danton said. "I've tried juggling it every way around, and it still comes out no good. We couldn't even make it if we ate each other, and drank the blood."

"That's a pleasant thought, you gory pig," Arriglio said from the other side of the room.

"Don't you like it?" Danton asked.

"Not a bit." Arriglio pushed himself off a wall and floated forward, moving easily in the weightless ship.

"Then do something about it," Danton said, pushing himself forward to meet Arriglio.

"Hey, stop it," Powell said. "Come on, break it up." The two men parted suddenly.

"The guy I'd like to get is that—"

"Stop it," Powell said sharply. He heard a noise. Walker floated in. Powell hoped he hadn't heard the conversation.

"Come on in," Powell said.

"Sure, pull up a chair," Danton said, with an effort at friendliness.

Powell knew that they would love to cut Walker into little pieces; but the requirements of the situation forced them to be pleasant to him. It was an added strain, having to cater to the man who had put them in this spot.

"I wanted to say—" Walker began.

"Go on," Arriglio encouraged, determined not to be outdone by Danton. "Go on, boy." His tone was friendly, but his bleak eyes contradicted it.

"I wanted to say I'm sorry," Walker said. "I wouldn't have even gone on this trip, only Mr. Waverley thought I should."

"We understand," Danton said, his fingers clenching into fists.

"Sure, it's all right," Arriglio said.

"You all hate me," Walker said, and floated out.

"Haven't you guys any control over yourselves?" Powell asked when

Walker was gone. "Rule 3, remember? *Understanding and sympathy must be used at all times—*"

"I *was* understanding," Arriglio said angrily. Danton nodded.

"Understanding! The way you looked at him!"

"I'm sorry, Captain," Arriglio said formally. "I'm no actor. If I don't like a guy, I don't like him." He glared at Danton. Danton glared back.

"I told you to think of him as a machine," Powell said. "Arriglio, I've seen you pamper those engines of yours outrageously."

"Sure," Arriglio said, "but I can swear at them, too, and kick 'em if I want to."

That was the trouble, Powell thought, with working with a sentient machine. You couldn't take out your frustrations on it.

"Well, don't start anything, you two," Powell said.

Arriglio pushed himself to the opposite side of the room, found the cards and started to deal himself a hand of solitaire.

Powell went to the control room to think things out.

Outside the port the stars glittered. Dead space lay, a grave five hundred million miles long.

There had to be a solution. Start from there.

A way out, Powell thought. Their psi dynamo had functioned on the way out. Why wasn't he functioning now?

He took out the instructions Waverley had given him and studied them.

These empirically derived operating rules are given—

Those rules were a long way from the truth, Powell thought. Waverley still had a long way to go.

Certain maintenance and operating rules must be observed—

They had observed them, to the best of their ability. Theoretically, there should be nothing wrong with the psi. But still, the delicate intricate dynamo in Walker's mind refused to function.

Powell slapped a hand against his thigh. It was so frustrating to have all that power bottled there. Enough to take them home with ease—enough, probably, to take them to Alpha Centauri, or the galactic center. And they couldn't tap it.

Because they didn't know how to operate the machinery.

Operating instructions. He was no psychiatrist. He couldn't hope to cure Walker of his neuroticisms. All he could do was relieve them enough to get him to work.

What had he left out?

He read back over the instructions, and an idea began forming in his mind. There *was* something else. He almost had it now—

"Captain!"

"What do you want?" Powell asked, angry for the first time on the trip. He had been so close! He glared at Danton.

"It's Walker, Sam. He's locked himself in one of the rooms. I think he's going to kill himself!"

Powell pushed himself against a wall and shot down a corridor, Danton following. Arriglio was at the door, hammering on it and shouting. Powell pushed him aside and floated up.

"Walker. Can you hear me?"

Silence.

"Bring something to get this open," Powell whispered. "Walker!" he shouted again. "Don't do anything foolish."

"I'm doing it," Walker's voice came through.

"Don't! As captain of this ship I order you—"

Walker's gurgle cut him short.

Arriglio hurried back with a blowtorch. They melted the lock, and Powell swore he would never ride another ship with as much as a door in it. If he ever rode another ship.

They burst the door open and floated in. Then Arriglio burst into laughter.

Their unhappy, overloaded dynamo was floating in mid air, his arms and legs jerking grotesquely. Around his neck was a rope, the other end attached to a stanchion in the ceiling. The amazing fool had tried to hang himself—in weightless free fall.

But then, suddenly, it wasn't so funny. Walker was strangling, and they were unable to loosen the rope. Frantically they worked on it, trying to get some purchase in the weightless air. Finally, Danton had the foresight to burn the rope loose with the torch.

Walker had knotted the rope to the ceiling, tying the other end around his neck. But to make it really effective, he had tied a constrictor knot in it. This knot would tighten easily, and stay tight. It could be loosened only by yanking both ends in a certain way.

Walker had tied the ends around the back of his neck in a square knot, out of reach. He had braced himself against the ceiling, and kicked off hard. The knot had tightened—

It was a close thing, and an adequate measure of Walker's desperation.

"Pull him up," Powell said. He glared at the gasping, red-faced Walker, and tried to think.

He had coaxed him and kidded him, followed the rules and added

the oil of sympathy and the fuel of praise. And what had he gotten?

His precious machine had almost ruined itself.

That's no way to run anything, he told himself. If I want an engine to turn over, I turn it over. I don't stand around patting its case. To hell with the rules!

"We're through playing games," Powell said, and he was addressing all of them now. "Take your positions. We're blasting off."

He silenced their questions with a glare, and pushed himself off.

In the control room he said a silent prayer. Then he snapped on the intercom.

"Danton. Set?"

"Set, Captain."

"Arriglio?"

"All set."

"Walker?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ten seconds. Main drive on." The engines thundered into life.

"Get it up there," Powell said. "I want max plus."

"Right, Captain."

"Danton, get set on auxiliary."

"Set, Captain."

"Six seconds. Walker, stand by."

"Yes, sir," the frightened voice of Walker said.

"Four seconds," Powell said, hoping that Walker wouldn't have time to tell himself he couldn't do it.

"Two seconds." Come on, he told himself. This had better be it. Let it be it.

One second.

"Blast! Come in, Walker!"

The ship surged forward, but he could feel no response from Walker. The ship was operating on her engines alone.

"Fine, Walker," Powell said coolly. "Give her some more."

Still there was no response.

"Excellent work," Powell said. "Arriglio, cut the main drive. Take over, Walker."

For an agonizing second there was nothing. And then the ship surged forward.

There was a wrench, milder than on the take-off, and the stars began to blur.

"Get your course from Danton," he said to Walker. "Fine work, Mr. Walker."

So that was it, Powell thought. Those rules Waverley had given him might work on Earth. But in a stress situation—well, he had some interesting information to bring back.

Walker's self-induced paralysis had passed in the swift, taken-for-granted orders. Naturally.

Cancel all other instructions. The cardinal rule for operating the psi:

A psi is a human being, and must be treated as one. A psi's abilities must be accepted—and used—as accomplished skills, not freak talents.

"Sir?"

"Yes?" Powell said, recognizing Walker's voice.

"Shall I boost her up a little faster?" the psi asked.

"Do so, Mr. Walker," Powell said in a fine, serious, commanding voice.

The dramatic personnel of this book contains an abnormally high percentage of psychiatrists, psychologists and medical men of one sort or another. That's natural enough, all things considered. The content of this book is disproportionately weighted in the direction of precognition and its problems. That's natural enough, too, if you consider the fascination the subject holds for the editor.

It seems reasonable, however, to inquire as to why a story should be added at this juncture which concerns a precognitive dream and takes place in a psychiatrist's office.

The answer is simple: John Collier wrote it, and it is therefore completely unlike anything else you have read, in or out of this book.

Interpretation of a Dream *by John Collier*

A young man entered the office of a well-known psychiatrist, whom he addressed as follows: "Doctor, save me!"

"By all means," responded the mind specialist suavely. "After all, that is what I am here for."

"But you can't," cried the young man distractedly. "You can't! You can't! Nothing can save me!"

"At all events," said the psychiatrist soothingly, "it will do no harm to talk it over."

With that he waved his hands a little, smiled with a rather soapy and ingratiating expression, and before he knew it the young man was seated in a deep armchair, with his face to the light, pouring out his story.

"My name," said he, "is Charles Rotifer. I am employed in the office of an accountant, who occupies the top story of this skyscraper. I am twenty-eight years of age, single, engaged to be married. My fiancée is the best and dearest girl in the world, beautiful as an angel, and with lovely golden hair. I mention this because it is relevant to my story."

"It is indeed," said the psychiatrist. "Gold is the symbol of money. Have you a retentive attitude toward money? For example, you say you are employed in an office. Have you saved anything considerable out of your salary?"

"Yes, I have," replied the young man. "I've saved quite a bit."

"Please continue, Mr. Rotifer," said the psychiatrist, benevolently. "You were speaking of your fiancée. Later on I shall have to ask you one or two rather intimate questions on that subject."

"And I will answer them," returned the young man. "There is nothing in our relationship that needs to be concealed—at all events from a psychologist. All is complete harmony between us, and there is nothing about her that I could wish altered, except perhaps her little habit of gesturing rather too freely as she speaks."

"I will make a note of that," said the other, scribbling on his pad.

"It is not of the least importance," said the young man. "I hardly know why I mentioned it, except to indicate how perfect she is. But, Doctor, thirty-eight nights ago I dreamed a dream."

"Thirty-eight, indeed!" observed the mind doctor, jotting down the figure. "Tell me frankly, when you were an infant, did you by any chance have a nurse, a teacher or a female relative, on whom perhaps you might have had a little fixation, who happened to be thirty-eight years of age?"

"No, Doctor," said the young man, "but there are thirty-nine floors to this skyscraper."

The psychiatrist gave him a penetrating glance. "And does the form and height of this building suggest anything to you?"

"All I know," said the young man obstinately, "is that I dreamed I was outside the window of our office at the top, in the air, falling."

"Falling!" said the psychiatrist, raising his eyebrows. "And what were your sensations at that moment?"

"I was calm," replied the young man. "I imagine I was falling at the normal rate, but my mind seemed to work very fast. I had leisure to reflect, to look around me. The view was superb. In a moment I had reached the ornamental stonework which separates our windows from those immediately below. Then I woke up."

"And that simple, harmless, perfectly ordinary little dream has been preying on your mind?" asked the psychiatrist in a jocular tone. "Well, my dear sir . . ."

"Wait a moment," said his visitor. "On the following night I dreamed the same dream, or rather, a continuation of it. There I was, spread-eagled in mid air—like this—passing the ornamental stonework, looking into the window of the floor below, which is also occupied by our firm. I saw my friend, Don Straker, of our tax department, bending over his desk. He looked up. He saw me. His face took on an expression of the utmost astonishment. He made a movement as if to rise from his seat, no doubt to rush to the window. But compared with mine, his movements

were indescribably slow. I remember thinking, 'He will be too late.' Then I dropped below his window, and down to the dividing line between that floor and the next. As I did so, I woke."

"Well," said the brain doctor. "What have we here? The dream of one night is resumed on the night following. That is a very ordinary occurrence."

"Possibly," said the young man. "However, on the next night, there I was, having just passed the dividing line between that floor and the floor below. I had slipped into a recumbent posture, with one leg slightly raised, like this."

"Yes, yes," said the psychiatrist, "I see. It is not necessary to demonstrate. You nearly knocked over my ash tray."

"I'm sorry," said the young man. "I'm afraid I have picked up the habit from Maisie. Maisie is my fiancée. When she wants to say how she did a thing, she just shows you. She acts it out. It was the night she told me how she slipped and fell on the icy pavement on Seventy-second Street, that we became engaged. Well, as I say, there I was, falling past another floor, looking about me in all directions. The hills of New Jersey looked magnificent. A high-flying pigeon coasted in my direction, and regarded me with a round eye, devoid of any expression whatsoever. Then he banked and sheered off. I could see the people in the street below, or rather their hats, jammed as closely as black pebbles on a beach. Even as I looked, one or two of these black pebbles suddenly turned white. I realized I was attracting attention."

"Tell me this," said the psychiatrist. "You seem to have had a good deal of time for thought. Did you recollect why you were falling; whether you had thrown yourself, or slipped, or what?"

"Doctor, I really don't know," said the young man. "Not unless my last dream, which I had last night, sheds any light on the matter. Most of the time I was just looking around, falling faster all the time, of course, but thinking faster to make up for it. Naturally I tried to think of subjects of importance, seeing it was my last opportunity. Between the seventeenth and the sixteenth floors, for example, I thought a lot about democracy and the world crisis. It seemed to me that where most people are making a big mistake is . . ."

"Perhaps, for the moment, we had better keep to the experience itself," said the brain doctor.

"Well," said the young man, "at the fifteenth floor I looked in at the window, and, really, I never believed such things happened! Not in offices, anyway. And, Doctor, next day I paid a visit to the fifteenth floor here, just out of curiosity. And those offices are occupied by a

theatrical agent. Doctor, don't you think that confirms my dream?"

"Calm yourself," said the psychiatrist. "The names of all the firms in this building are listed on the wall directory on the main floor. You no doubt retained an unconscious memory which you adroitly fitted into your dream."

"Well, after that," said the young man, "I began to look down a good deal more. I'd take just a quick glance into each window as I passed, but mostly I was looking downwards. By this time there were big patches of white among the dark, pebblelike hats below. In fact, pretty soon they were clearly distinguishable as hats and faces. I saw two taxicabs swerve toward one another and collide. A woman's scream drifted up out of the confused murmur below. I felt I agreed with her. I was in a reclining posture, and already I felt an anticipatory pain in the parts that would touch the ground first. So I turned face downwards—like this—but that was horrible. So I put my feet down, but then they hurt. I tried to fall head first, to end it sooner, but that didn't satisfy me. I kept on twisting and turning—like this."

"Please relax," said the psychiatrist. "There is no need to demonstrate."

"I'm sorry," said the young man. "I picked up the habit from Maisie."

"Sit down," said the psychiatrist, "and continue."

"Last night," said the young man despairingly, "was the thirty-eighth night."

"Then," said the psychiatrist, "you must have got down to this level, for this office is on the mezzanine floor."

"I was," cried the young man. "And I was outside this very window, descending at terrific speed. I looked in. Doctor, I saw you! As clearly as I see you now!"

"Mr. Rotifer," replied the psychiatrist with a modest smile, "I very frequently figure in my patients' dreams."

"But I wasn't your patient then," said the young man. "I didn't even know you existed. I didn't know till this morning, when I came to see who occupied this office. Oh, Doctor, I was so relieved to find you were not a theatrical agent!"

"And why were you relieved?" asked the specialist blandly.

"Because you were not alone. In my dream, I mean. A young woman was with you. A young woman with beautiful golden hair. And she was sitting on your knee, Doctor, and her arms were around your neck. I felt certain it was another theatrical agency. And then I thought, 'That is very beautiful golden hair. It is like my Maisie's hair.' At that moment you both looked toward the window. It was she! Maisie! My own Maisie!"

The psychiatrist laughed very heartily. "My dear sir," said he, "you may set your mind entirely at rest."

"All the same," said the young man, "this morning, in the office, I have been a prey to an unbearable curiosity, an almost irresistible urge to jump, just to see what I should see."

"You would have had the mortification," said the psychiatrist, "of seeing that there were no grounds whatever for your rash act. Your fiancée is not a patient of mine; therefore she could not have had one of those harmless little transferences, as we call them, which have been known to lead to ardent behavior on the part of the subject. Besides, our profession has its ethics, and nothing ever happens in the office. No, my dear sir, what you have described to me is a relatively simple condition, a recurrent dream, a little neurotic compulsion—nothing that cannot be cured in time. If you can visit me three or four times a week, I am confident that a very few years will show a decided improvement."

"But Doctor," cried the young man in despair, "I am due to hit the ground at any moment!"

"But only in a dream," said the psychiatrist reassuringly. "Be sure to remember it clearly, and note particularly if you bounce. Meanwhile, return to your office, carry on with your work, and worry as little as possible about it."

"I will try to do so," said the young man. "But really you are astonishingly like yourself as I saw you in my dream, even to that little pearl tie pin."

"That," said the psychiatrist, as he bowed him smilingly out, "was a gift from a very well-known lady, who was always falling in her dreams." So saying, he closed the door behind his visitor, who departed shaking his head in obstinate melancholy. The psychiatrist then seated himself at his desk and placed the tips of his fingers together, as psychiatrists always do while they are pondering over how much a new patient may be good for.

His meditation was interrupted by his secretary, who thrust her head in at the door. "Miss Mimling to see you," she said. "Her appointment is at two-thirty."

"Show her in," said the psychiatrist, and rose to greet the new entrant, who proved to be a young woman with the appearance of a rather wild mouse, upon whose head someone has let fall a liberal splash of peroxide. She was in a very agitated state. "Oh, Doctor," she said, "I just *had* to telephone you, for when I saw your name in the book, of course I knew it was you. I saw your name on the door. In my dream, Doctor. In my dream."

"Let us talk it over very quietly," said the healer of souls, trying to maneuver her into the deep armchair. She was fidgety, however, and perched herself upon the corner of his desk. "I don't know if you think there is anything *in* dreams," she said. "But this was such an extraordinary one.

"I dreamed I came up to your door, and there was your name on it, just as it is out there. That's how it was I came to look you up in the telephone book, and there it was again. So I felt I just had to come and see you.

"Well, I dreamed I came into your office, and I was sitting here on the desk, just like this, talking to you, and all of a sudden—of course I know it was only a dream—I felt a feeling—well, really I hardly know how to tell you. It seemed to me as if you were my father, my big brother and a boy I once knew called Herman Myers, all rolled into one. I don't know how I could feel like that, even in a dream, for I am engaged to a young man I love with all my conscious mind, and I thought with my unconscious, too. Oh, it's awful of me!"

"My dear young lady," purred the psychiatrist, "this is nothing more or less than the phenomenon of transference. It is something which can happen to anybody, and usually it does."

"Yes," said she, "but it made me transfer myself to your knee and put my arms around your neck like this."

"Now! now!" murmured the psychiatrist gently. "I'm afraid you are acting out a neurotic impulse."

"I always act things out," she said. "They say it makes me the life and soul of a party. But, Doctor, then I happened to look out of the window, like this, and . . . Wow! There he is! There he was! It was Charlie! Oh, what a terrible look he gave us as he went by!"

In the past, telepathy and all the associated psi *faculties have ordinarily been thought of as very special talents, the exclusive possession of a gifted few. In the last five or six years, however, there has been an increasing tendency to think of the various* psi *functions as normal human attributes, latent or unconscious in most of us at the present time, and—like intelligence or creative ability or memory—more strongly present in some than in others.*

The question, of course, arises— Why *latent? If we have these powers, why don't we know it? Why don't we use them?*

Miss MacLean's answer is devastatingly simple. "Defense Mechanism" was one of her first published stories, and is to my mind still one of her best.

Defense Mechanism *by Katherine MacLean*

The article was coming along smoothly, words flowing from the typewriter in pleasant simple sequence, swinging to their predetermined conclusion like a good tune. Ted typed contentedly, adding pages to the stack at his elbow.

A thought, a subtle modification of the logic of the article began to glow in his mind, but he brushed it aside impatiently. This was to be a short article, and there was no room for subtlety. His articles sold, not for depths, but for an oddly individual quirk that he could give to commonplaces.

While he typed a little faster, faintly in the echoes of his thought, the theme began to elaborate itself richly with correlations, modifying qualifications and humorous parenthetical remarks. An eddy of especially interesting conclusions tried to insert itself into the main stream of his thoughts. Furiously he typed along the dissolving thread of his argument.

"Shut up," he snarled. "Can't I have any privacy around here?"

The answer was not a remark, it was merely a concept; two electrochemical calculators pictured with the larger in use as a control mech, taking a dangerously high inflow, and controlling it with high resistance and blocks, while the smaller one lay empty and unblocked, its unresistant circuits ramifying any impulses received along the easy channels of

pure calculation. Ted recognized the diagram as something borrowed from his amateur concepts of radio and psychology.

"All right. So I'm doing it myself. So you can't help it!" He grinned grudgingly. "Answering back at your age!"

Under the impact of a directed thought the small circuits of the idea came in strongly, scorching their reception and rapport diagram into his mind in flashing repetitions, bright as small lightning strokes. Then it spread and the small other brain flashed into brightness, reporting and repeating from every center. Ted even received a brief kinesthetic sensation of lying down, before it was all cut off in a hard bark of thought that came back in the exact echo of his own irritation.

"Tune down!" it ordered furiously. "You're blasting in too loud and jamming everything up! What do you want, an idiot child?"

Ted blanketed down desperately, cutting off all thoughts, relaxing every muscle, but the angry thoughts continued coming in strongly a moment before fading.

"Even when I take a nap," they said, "he starts thinking at me! Can't I get any peace and privacy around here?"

Ted grinned. The kid's last remark sounded like something a little better than an attitude echo. It would be hard to tell when the kid's mind grew past a mere selective echoing of outside thoughts and became true personality, but that last remark was a convincing counterfeit of a sincere kick in the shin. Conditioned reactions can be efficient.

All the luminescent streaks of thought faded and merged with the calm meaningless ebb and flow of waves in the small sleeping mind. Ted moved quietly into the next room and looked down into the blue-and-white crib. The kid lay sleeping, his thumb in his mouth and his chubby face innocent of thought. Junior—Jake.

It was an odd stroke of luck that Jake was born with this particular talent. Because of it they would have to spend the winter in Connecticut, away from the mental blare of crowded places. Because of it Ted was doing free lance in the kitchen, instead of minor editing behind a New York desk. The winter countryside was wide and wind-swept, as it had been in Ted's own childhood, and the warm contacts with the stolid personalities of animals through Jake's mind were already a pleasure. Old acquaintances—Ted stopped himself skeptically. He was no telepath. He decided that it reminded him of Ernest Thompson Seton's animal biographies, and went back to typing, dismissing the question.

It was pleasant to eavesdrop on things through Jake, as long as the subject was not close enough to the article to interfere with it.

Five small boys let out of kindergarten came trooping by on the road,

chattering and throwing pebbles. Their thoughts came in jumbled together in distracting cross currents, but Ted stopped typing for a moment, smiling, waiting for Jake to show his latest trick. Babies are hypersensitive to conditioning. The burnt hand learns to yank back from fire, the unresisting mind learns automatically to evade too many clashing echoes of other minds.

Abruptly the discordant jumble of small-boy thoughts and sensations delicately untangled into five compartmented strands of thoughts, then one strand of little-boy thoughts shoved the others out, monopolizing and flowing easily through the blank baby mind, as a dream flows by without awareness, leaving no imprint of memory, fading as the children passed over the hill. Ted resumed typing, smiling. Jake had done the trick a shade faster than he had yesterday. He was learning reflexes easily enough to demonstrate normal intelligence. At least he was to be more than a gifted moron.

A half hour later, Jake had grown tired of sleeping and was standing up in his crib, shouting and shaking the bars. Martha hurried in with a double armload of groceries.

"Does he want something?"

"Nope. Just exercising his lungs." Ted stubbed out his cigarette and tapped the finished stack of manuscript contentedly. "Got something here for you to proofread."

"Dinner first," she said cheerfully, unpacking food from the bags. "Better move the typewriter and give us some elbow room."

Sunlight came in the windows and shone on the yellow table top, and glinted on her dark hair as she opened packages.

"What's the local gossip?" he asked, clearing off the table. "Anything new?"

"Meat's going up again," she said, unwrapping peas and fillets of mackerel. "Mrs. Watkin's boy, Tom, is back from the clinic. He can see fine now, she says."

He put water on to boil and began greasing a skillet while she rolled the fillets in cracker crumbs. "If I'd had to run a flame thrower during the war, I'd have worked up a nice case of hysteric blindness myself," he said. "I call that a legitimate defense mechanism. Sometimes it's better to be blind."

"But not all the time," Martha protested, putting baby food in the double boiler. In five minutes lunch was cooking.

"Whaaaa—" wailed Jake.

Martha went into the baby's room, and brought him out, cuddling

him, and crooning, "What do you want, Lovekins? Baby isn't hungry yet, is ims. Baby just wants to be cuddled, doesn't baby."

"Yes," said Ted.

She looked up, startled, and her expression changed, became withdrawn and troubled, her dark eyes clouded in difficult thought.

Concerned, he asked, "What is it, Honey?"

"Ted, you shouldn't—" She struggled with words. "I know, it is handy to know what he wants, whenever he cries. It's handy having you tell me, but I don't— It isn't right somehow. It isn't *right.*"

Jake waved an arm and squeaked randomly. He looked unhappy. Ted took him and laughed, making an effort to sound confident and persuasive. It would be impossible to raise the kid in a healthy way if Martha began to feel he was a freak. "Why isn't it right? It's normal enough. Look at ESP. Everybody has that, according to Rhine."

"ESP is different," she protested feebly, but Jake chortled and Ted knew he had her. He grinned, bouncing Jake up and down in his arms.

"Sure it's different," he said cheerfully. "ESP is queer. ESP comes in those weird accidental little flashes that contradict time and space. With clairvoyance you can see through walls, and read pages from a closed book in France. ESP, when it comes, is so ghastly precise it seems like tips from old Omniscience himself. It's enough to drive a logical man insane, trying to explain it. It's illogical, incredible, and random. But what Jake has is just limited telepathy. It is starting out fuzzy and muddled and developing toward accuracy by plenty of trial and error, like sight, or any other normal sense. You don't mind communicating by English, so why mind communicating by telepathy?"

She smiled wanly. "But he doesn't weigh much, Ted. He's not growing as fast as it says he should in the baby book."

"That's all right. I didn't really start growing myself until I was about two. My parents thought I was sickly."

"And look at you now." She smiled genuinely. "All right, you win. But when does he start talking English? I'd like to understand him, too. After all, I'm his mother."

"Maybe this year, maybe next year," Ted said teasingly. "I didn't start talking until I was three."

"You mean that you don't want him to learn," she told him indignantly, and then smiled coaxingly at Jake. "You'll learn English soon for Mummy, won't you, Lovekins?"

Ted laughed annoyingly. "Try coaxing him next month or the month after. Right now he's not listening to all these thoughts, he's just collecting associations and reflexes. His cortex might organize impressions on

a logic pattern he picked up from me, but it doesn't know what it is doing any more than this fist knows that it is in his mouth. That right, bud?" There was no demanding thought behind the question, but instead, very delicately, Ted introspected to the small world of impression and sensation that flickered in what seemed a dreaming corner of his own mind. Right then it was a fragmentary world of green and brown that murmured with wind.

"He's out eating grass with the rabbit." Ted told her.

Not answering, Martha started putting out plates. "I like animal stories for children," she said determinedly. "Rabbits are nicer than people."

Putting Jake in his pen, Ted began to help. He kissed the back of her neck in passing. "Some people are nicer than rabbits."

Wind rustled tall grass and tangled vines where the rabbit snuffled and nibbled among the sun-dried herbs, moving on habit, ignoring the abstract meaningless contact of minds, with no thought but deep content.

Then for a while Jake's stomach became aware that lunch was coming, and the vivid business of crying and being fed drowned the gentler distant neural flow of the rabbit.

Ted ate with enjoyment, toying with an idea fantastic enough to keep him grinning, as Martha anxiously spooned food into Jake's mouth. She caught him grinning and indignantly began justifying herself. "But he only gained four pounds, Ted. I have to make sure he eats something."

"Only!" he grinned. "At that rate he'd be thirty feet high by the time he reaches college."

"So would any baby." But she smiled at the idea, and gave Jake his next spoonful still smiling. Ted did not tell his real thought, that if Jake's abilities kept growing in a straight-line growth curve, by the time he was old enough to vote he would be God, but he laughed again, and was rewarded by an answering smile from both of them.

The idea was impossible, of course. Ted knew enough biology to know that there could be no sudden smooth jumps in evolution. Smooth changes had to be worked out gradually through generations of trial and selection. Sudden changes were not smooth, they crippled and destroyed. Mutants were usually monstrosities.

Jake was no sickly freak, so it was certain that he would not turn out very different from his parents. He could be only a little better. But the contrary idea had tickled Ted and he laughed again. "Boom food," he told Martha. "Remember those straight-line growth curves in the story?"

Martha remembered, smiling, "Redfern's dream—sweet little man, dreaming about a growth curve that went straight up." She chuckled, and

fed Jake more spoonfuls of strained spinach, saying, "Open wide. Eat your boom food, darling. Don't you want to grow up like King Kong?"

Ted watched vaguely, toying now with a feeling that these months of his life had happened before, somewhere. He had felt it before, but now it came back with a sense of expectancy, as if something were going to happen.

It was while drying the dishes that Ted began to feel sick. Somewhere in the far distance at the back of his mind a tiny phantom of terror cried and danced and gibbered. He glimpsed it close in a flash that entered and was cut off abruptly in a vanishing fragment of delirium. It had something to do with a tangle of brambles in a field, and it was urgent.

Jake grimaced, his face wrinkled as if ready either to smile or cry. Carefully Ted hung up the dish towel and went out the back door, picking up a billet of wood as he passed the woodpile. He could hear Jake whimpering, beginning to wail.

"Where to?" Martha asked, coming out the back door.

"Dunno." Ted answered. "Gotta go rescue Jake's rabbit. It's in trouble."

Feeling numb, he went across the fields, through an outgrowth of small trees, climbed a fence into a field of deep grass and thorny tangles of raspberry vines, and started across.

A few hundred feet into the field there was a hunter sitting on an outcrop of rock, smoking, with a successful bag of two rabbits dangling near him. He turned an inquiring face to Ted.

"Sorry," Ted told him rapidly, "but that rabbit is not dead yet. It can't understand being upside down with its legs tied." Moving with shaky urgency he took his penknife and cut the small animal's pulsing throat, then threw the wet knife out of his hand into the grass. The rabbit kicked once more, staring still at the tangled vines of refuge, then its near-sighted baby eyes lost their glazed bright stare and became meaningless.

"Sorry," the hunter said. He was a quiet-looking man with a sagging, middle-aged face.

"That's all right," Ted replied, "but be a little more careful next time, will you? You're out of season anyhow." He looked up from the grass to smile stiffly at the hunter. It was difficult. There was a crowded feeling in his head, like a coming headache, or a stuffy cold. It was difficult to breathe, difficult to think.

It occurred to Ted then to wonder why Jake had never put him in touch with an adult. After a frozen stoppage of thought he laboriously started the wheels again and realized that something had put them in

touch with the mind of the hunter, and that was what was wrong. His stomach began to rise. In another minute he would retch.

Ted stepped forward and swung the billet of wood in a clumsy sidewise sweep. The hunter's rifle went off and missed as the middle-aged man tumbled face first into the grass.

Wind rustled the long grass and stirred the leafless branches of trees. Ted could hear and think again, standing still and breathing in deep, shuddering breaths of air to clean his lungs. Briefly he planned what to do. He would call the sheriff and say that a hunter hunting out of season had shot at him and he had been forced to knock the man out. The sheriff would take the man away, out of thought range.

Before he started back to telephone he looked again at the peaceful, simple scene of field and trees and sky. A memory of horror came into clarity. The hunter had been psychotic.

Thinking back, Ted recognized parts of it, like faces glimpsed in writhing smoke. The evil symbols of psychiatry, the bloody poetry of the Golden Bough, that had been the law of mankind in the five hundred thousand lost years before history. Torture and sacrifice, lust and death, a mechanism in perfect balance, a short circuit of conditioning through a glowing channel of symbols, an irreversible and perfect integration of traumas. It is easy to go mad, but it is not easy to go sane.

"Shut up!" Ted had been screaming inside his mind as he struck. "Shut up."

It had stopped. It had shut up. The symbols were fading without having found root in his mind. The sheriff would take the man away out of thought reach, and there would be no danger. It had stopped.

The burned hand avoids the fire. Something else had stopped. Ted's mind was queerly silent, queerly calm and empty, as he walked home across the winter fields, wondering how it had happened at all, kicking himself with humor for a suggestible fool, not yet missing—Jake.

And Jake lay awake in his pen, waving his rattle in random motions, and crowing "glaglagla gla—" in a motor sensory cycle.

He would be a normal baby, as Ted had been, and as Ted's father before him.

And as all mankind was "normal."