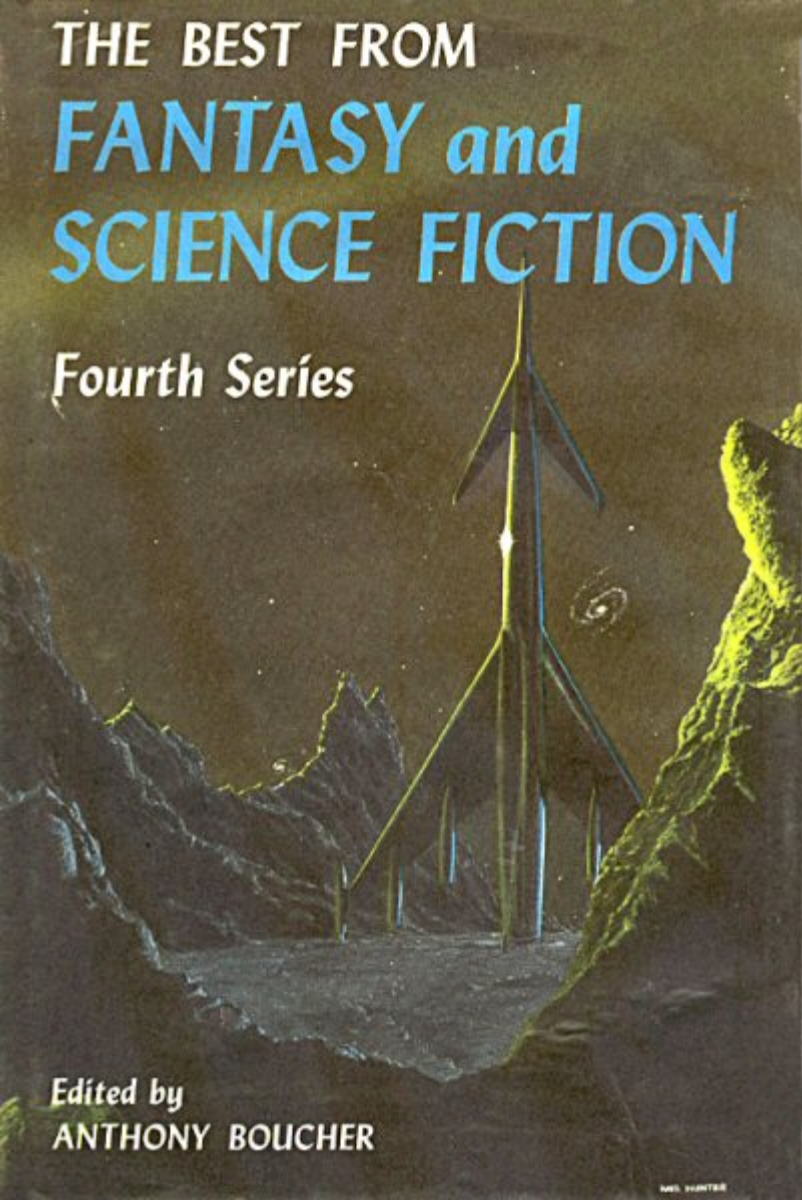
THE BEST FROM FANTASY and SCIENCE FICTION

Fourth Series



Edited by
ANTHONY BOUCHER

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Fantasy and Science Fiction

FOURTH SERIES

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EDITED BY

Anthony Boucher

Doubleday & Company, Inc., Garden City, N.Y.

All of the characters in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

For MICK
without whose incomparable stimulus
and cooperation this book was, alas, edited

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Introduction

If this collection has a thesis, it is simply this: that *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* had the good luck to publish a number of outstanding stories during the past year, and that the best of them are worth assembling in this more permanent form.

The only argument to be advanced in support of this thesis is, obviously, the stories themselves . . . and I trust you'll find them persuasive.

None of these stories has appeared in any other anthology—or, indeed, anywhere else at all save in the pages of the magazine.

F&SF has a broader editorial policy than most other science-fantasy publications—a policy which is, in effect, nothing more than the intention to publish originally conceived and well-written imaginative fiction of any and every type. The stories gathered here are, I think, possibly an even more varied lot than usual, including the longest and the shortest stories (by Daniel F. Galouye and Shirley Jackson respectively) which have yet graced these annuals, ranging in type from the purest supernatural fantasy (by Arthur Porges) to the strictest sociological science fiction (by Robert Abernathy) and in mood from the screwball humor of C. M. Kornbluth through the vivid melodrama of Alfred Bester to the realistic tragedy of Richard Matheson. I think you'll find them representative of the magazine which, according to August Derleth, "maintained the highest literary standards" in the field in 1953, and I hope you'll consider them stimulating imaginative entertainment.

A word as to the solo by-line on this volume: F&SF was founded in 1949 under the joint editorship of J. Francis Mc-

Comas and me—so closely balanced an editorial symbiosis that neither of us has ever been sure precisely who did what; everything has been accomplished simply by the team. But by the end of 1953 McComas was finding that constant contact with stories stimulated him to more and more original writing of his own. Editing F&SF left much less time than he needed for creative activity; so early in 1954 he burst from his editorial cell with a hell of a yell and eloped with his typewriter (and wife and son) to Mexico. There he has been steadily producing a number of fascinating and off-trail stories, the first of which you'll find in this volume.

I feel at the moment rather like Chang without Eng (but with both their wives to keep happy). I'm reasonably sure, however, that our editorial relationship was sufficiently Siamese, complete with common bloodstream, that you'll discern no significant difference between Boucher-McComas and plain Boucher. If you do, please give me what for immediately!

ANTHONY BOUCHER

Berkeley, California

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ALFRED BESTER

When Alfred Bester published his first book outside of the science fiction field, WHO HE? *(Dial, 1953), he urgently begged me not to refer to it as a mystery story. But from a purely formal viewpoint, that's exactly what it was; and Mr. Bester was simply following in the tradition of Sophocles, Shakespeare and Dostoevsky by using the tale of mystery, violence and suspense as a framework for what he wanted to express concerning character and society. This use of mystery and crime as the storytelling structure for a complex expression has also marked much of Bester's science fiction, as you know from* THE DEMOLISHED MAN *and from such stories as* Star Light, Star Bright (BEST F&SF: THIRD SERIES) or Time Is the Traitor (Bleiler-Dikty, BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES: 1954); *and here is yet another study, at once vigorous and subtle, in the mystery of murder—and of character—in the remote future . . . to which the author adds a striking literary experiment which we think you'll find as fascinating as any of the celebrated technical devices in* THE DEMOLISHED MAN, *and more psychologically significant.*

Fondly Fahrenheit

HE DOESN'T know which of us I am these days, but they know one truth. You must own nothing but yourself. You must make your own life, live your own life and die your own death . . . or else you will die another's.

The rice fields on Paragon III stretch for hundreds of miles like checkerboard tundras, a blue and brown mosaic under a burning sky of orange. In the evening, clouds whip like smoke, and the paddies rustle and murmur.

A long line of men marched across the paddies the evening we escaped from Paragon III. They were silent, armed, intent; a long rank of silhouetted statues looming against the smoking sky. Each man carried a gun. Each man wore a walkie-talkie

belt pack, the speaker button in his ear, the microphone bug clipped to his throat, the glowing view-screen strapped to his wrist like a green-eyed watch. The multitude of screens showed nothing but a multitude of individual paths through the paddies. The annunciators uttered no sound but the rustle and splash of steps. The men spoke infrequently, in heavy grunts, all speaking to all.

"Nothing here."

"Where's here?"

"Jenson's fields."

"You're drifting too far west."

"Close in the line there."

"Anybody covered the Grimson paddy?"

"Yeah. Nothing."

"She couldn't have walked this far."

"Could have been carried."

"Think she's alive?"

"Why should she be dead?"

The slow refrain swept up and down the long line of beaters advancing toward the smoky sunset. The line of beaters wavered like a writhing snake, but never ceased its remorseless advance. One hundred men spaced fifty feet apart. Five thousand feet of ominous search. One mile of angry determination stretching from east to west across a compass of heat. Evening fell. Each man lit his search lamp. The writhing snake was transformed into a necklace of wavering diamonds.

"Clear here. Nothing."

"Nothing here."

"Nothing."

"What about the Allen paddies?"

"Covering them now."

"Think we missed her?"

"Maybe."

"We'll beat back and check."

"This'll be an all-night job."

"Allen paddies clear."

"God damn! We've got to find her!"

"We'll find her."

"Here she is. Sector seven. Tune in."

The line stopped. The diamonds froze in the heat. There was silence. Each man gazed into the glowing green screen on his wrist, tuning to sector seven. All tuned to one. All showed a small nude figure awash in the muddy water of a paddy. Alongside the figure an owner's stake of bronze read: VANDALEUR. The ends of the line converged toward the Vandaleur field. The necklace turned into a cluster of stars. One hundred men gathered around a small nude body, a child dead in a rice paddy. There was no water in her mouth. There were fingermarks on her throat. Her innocent face was battered. Her body was torn. Clotted blood on her skin was crusted and hard.

"Dead three-four hours at least."

"Her mouth is dry."

"She wasn't drowned. Beaten to death."

In the dark evening heat the men swore softly. They picked up the body. One stopped the others and pointed to the child's fingernails. She had fought her murderer. Under the nails were particles of flesh and bright drops of scarlet blood, still liquid, still uncoagulated.

"That blood ought to be clotted too."

"Funny."

"Not so funny. What kind of blood don't clot?"

"Android."

"Looks like she was killed by one."

"Vandaleur owns an android."

"She couldn't be killed by an android."

"That's android blood under her nails."

"The police better check."

"The police'll prove I'm right."

"But androids can't kill."

"That's android blood, ain't it?"

"Androids can't kill. They're made that way."

"Looks like one android was made wrong."

"Jesus!"

And the thermometer that day registered 92.9° gloriously Fahrenheit.

So there we were aboard the *Paragon Queen* enroute for Megaster V, James Vandaleur and his android. James Vandaleur counted his money and wept. In the second-class cabin with him was his android, a magnificent synthetic creature with classic features and wide blue eyes. Raised on its forehead in a cameo of flesh were the letters MA, indicating that this was one of the rare multiple aptitude androids, worth $57,000 on the current exchange. There we were, weeping and counting and calmly watching.

"Twelve, fourteen, sixteen. Sixteen hundred dollars," Vandaleur wept. "That's all. Sixteen hundred dollars. My house was worth ten thousand. The land was worth five. There was furniture, cars, my paintings, etchings, my plane, my—— And nothing to show for everything but sixteen hundred dollars. Christ!"

I leaped up from the table and turned on the android. I pulled a strap from one of the leather bags and beat the android. It didn't move.

"I must remind you," the android said, "that I am worth fifty-seven thousand dollars on the current exchange. I must warn you that you are endangering valuable property."

"You damned crazy machine," Vandaleur shouted.

"I am not a machine," the android answered. "The robot is a machine. The android is a chemical creation of synthetic tissue."

"What got into you?" Vandaleur cried. "Why did you do it? Damn you!" He beat the android savagely.

"I must remind you that I cannot be punished," I said. "The pleasure-pain syndrome is not incorporated in the android synthesis."

"Then why did you kill her?" Vandaleur shouted. "If it wasn't for kicks, why did you——"

"I must remind you," the android said, "that the second-class cabins in these ships are not soundproofed."

Vandaleur dropped the strap and stood panting, staring at the creature he owned.

"Why did you do it? Why did you kill her?" I asked.

"I don't know," I answered.

"First it was malicious mischief. Small things. Petty destruction. I should have known there was something wrong with you then. Androids can't destroy. They can't harm. They——"

"There is no pleasure-pain syndrome incorporated in the android synthesis."

"Then it got to arson. Then serious destruction. Then assault . . . that engineer on Rigel. Each time worse. Each time we had to get out faster. Now it's murder. Christ! What's the matter with you? What's happened?"

"There are no self-check relays incorporated in the android brain."

"Each time we had to get out it was a step downhill. Look at me. In a second-class cabin. Me. James Paleologue Vandaleur. There was a time when my father was the wealthiest—— Now, sixteen hundred dollars in the world. That's all I've got. And you. Christ damn you!"

Vandaleur raised the strap to beat the android again, then dropped it and collapsed on a berth, sobbing. At last he pulled himself together.

"Instructions," he said.

The multiple aptitude android responded at once. It arose and awaited orders.

"My name is now Valentine. James Valentine. I stopped off on Paragon III for only one day to transfer to this ship for Megaster V. My occupation: Agent for one privately owned MA android which is for hire. Purpose of visit: To settle on Megaster V. Fix the papers."

The android removed Vandaleur's passport and papers from a bag, got pen and ink and sat down at the table. With an accurate, flawless hand—an accomplished hand that could draw, write, paint, carve, engrave, etch, photograph, design, create and build—it meticulously forged new credentials for Vandaleur. Its owner watched me miserably.

"Create and build," I muttered. "And now destroy. Oh, God! What am I going to do? Christ! If I could only get rid of you. If I didn't have to live off you. God! If only I'd inherited some guts instead of you."

Dallas Brady was Megaster's leading jewelry designer. She was short, stocky, amoral and a nymphomaniac. She hired Vandaleur's multiple aptitude android and put me to work in her shop. She seduced Vandaleur. In her bed one night, she asked abruptly: "Your name's Vandaleur, isn't it?"

"Yes," I murmured. Then: "No! No! It's Valentine. James Valentine."

"What happened on Paragon?" Dallas Brady asked. "I thought androids couldn't kill or destroy property. Prime Directives and Inhibitions set up for them when they're synthesized. Every company guarantees they can't."

"Valentine!" Vandaleur insisted.

"Oh, come off it," Dallas Brady said. "I've known for a week. I haven't hollered copper, have I?"

"The name is Valentine."

"You want to prove it? You want I should call the cops?" Dallas reached out and picked up the phone.

"For God's sake, Dallas!" Vandaleur leaped up and struggled to take the phone from her. She fended him off, laughing at him, until he collapsed and wept in shame and helplessness.

"How did you find out?" he asked at last.

"The papers are full of it. And Valentine was a little too close to Vandaleur. That wasn't smart, was it?"

"I guess not. I'm not very smart."

"Your android's got quite a record, hasn't it? Assault. Arson. Destruction. What happened on Paragon?"

"It kidnaped a child. Took her out into the rice fields and murdered her."

"Raped her?"

"I don't know."

"They're going to catch up with you."

"Don't I know it? Christ! We've been running for two years now. Seven planets in two years. I must have abandoned fifty thousand dollars worth of property in two years."

"You better find out what's wrong with it."

"How can I? Can I walk into a repair clinic and ask for an overhaul? What am I going to say? 'My android's just turned killer. Fix it.' They'd call the police right off." I began to shake. "They'd have that android dismantled inside one day. I'd probably be booked as accessory to murder."

"Why didn't you have it repaired before it got to murder?"

"I couldn't take the chance," Vandaleur explained angrily. "If they started fooling around with lobotomies and body chemistry and endocrine surgery, they might have destroyed its aptitudes. What would I have left to hire out? How would I live?"

"You could work yourself. People do."

"Work at what? You know I'm good for nothing. How could I compete with specialist androids and robots? Who can, unless he's got a terrific talent for a particular job?"

"Yeah. That's true."

"I lived off my old man all my life. Damn him! He had to go bust just before he died. Left me the android and that's all. The only way I can get along is living off what it earns."

"You better sell it before the cops catch up with you. You can live off fifty grand. Invest it."

"At 3 per cent? Fifteen hundred a year? When the android returns 15 per cent on its value? Eight thousand a year. That's what it earns. No, Dallas. I've got to go along with it."

"What are you going to do about its violence kick?"

"I can't do anything . . . except watch it and pray. What are you going to do about it?"

"Nothing. It's none of my business. Only one thing . . . I ought to get something for keeping my mouth shut."

"What?"

"The android works for me for free. Let somebody else pay you, but I get it for free."

The multiple aptitude android worked. Vandaleur collected its fees. His expenses were taken care of. His savings began to mount. As the warm spring of Megaster V turned to hot summer, I began investigating farms and properties. It would be possible, within a year or two, for us to settle down permanently, provided Dallas Brady's demands did not become rapacious.

On the first hot day of summer, the android began singing in Dallas Brady's workshop. It hovered over the electric furnace which, along with the weather, was broiling the shop, and sang an ancient tune that had been popular half a century before.

Oh, it's no feat to beat the heat.
All reet! All reet!
So jeet your seat
Be fleet be fleet
Cool and discreet
Honey . . .

It sang in a strange, halting voice, and its accomplished fingers were clasped behind its back, writhing in a strange rumba all their own. Dallas Brady was surprised.

"You happy or something?" she asked.

"I must remind you that the pleasure-pain syndrome is not incorporated in the android synthesis," I answered. "All reet! All reet! Be fleet be fleet, cool and discreet, honey . . ."

Its fingers stopped their writhing and picked up a heavy pair of iron tongs. The android poked them into the glowing heart

of the furnace, leaning far forward to peer into the lovely heat.

"Be careful, you damned fool!" Dallas Brady exclaimed. "You want to fall in?"

"I must remind you that I am worth fifty-seven thousand dollars on the current exchange," I said. "It is forbidden to endanger valuable property. All reet! All reet! Honey . . ."

It withdrew a crucible of glowing gold from the electric furnace, turned, capered hideously, sang crazily, and splashed a sluggish gobbet of molten gold over Dallas Brady's head. She screamed and collapsed, her hair and clothes flaming, her skin crackling. The android poured again while it capered and sang.

"Be fleet be fleet, cool and discreet, honey . . ." It sang and slowly poured and poured the molten gold. Then I left the workshop and rejoined James Vandaleur in his hotel suite. The android's charred clothes and squirming fingers warned its owner that something was very much wrong.

Vandaleur rushed to Dallas Brady's workshop, stared once, vomited and fled. I had enough time to pack one bag and raise nine hundred dollars on portable assets. He took a third class cabin on the *Megaster Queen* which left that morning for Lyra Alpha. He took me with him. He wept and counted his money and I beat the android again.

And the thermometer in Dallas Brady's workshop registered 98.1° beautifully Fahrenheit.

On Lyra Alpha we holed up in a small hotel near the university. There, Vandaleur carefully bruised my forehead until the letters MA were obliterated by the swelling and the discoloration. The letters would reappear again, but not for several months, and in the meantime Vandaleur hoped the hue and cry for an MA android would be forgotten. The android was hired out as a common laborer in the university power plant. Vandaleur, as James Venice, eked out life on the android's small earnings.

I wasn't too unhappy. Most of the other residents in the hotel were university students, equally hard up, but delight-

fully young and enthusiastic. There was one charming girl with sharp eyes and a quick mind. Her name was Wanda, and she and her beau, Jed Stark, took a tremendous interest in the killing android which was being mentioned in every paper in the galaxy.

"We've been studying the case," she and Jed said at one of the casual student parties which happened to be held this night in Vandaleur's room. "We think we know what's causing it. We're going to do a paper." They were in a high state of excitement.

"Causing what?" somebody wanted to know.

"The android rampage."

"Obviously out of adjustment, isn't it? Body chemistry gone haywire. Maybe a kind of synthetic cancer, yes?"

"No." Wanda gave Jed a look of suppressed triumph.

"Well, what is it?"

"Something specific."

"What?"

"That would be telling."

"Oh, come on."

"Nothing doing."

"Won't you tell us?" I asked intently. "I . . . We're very much interested in what could go wrong with an android."

"No, Mr. Venice," Wanda said. "It's a unique idea and we've got to protect it. One thesis like this and we'll be set up for life. We can't take the chance of somebody stealing it."

"Can't you give us a hint?"

"No. Not a hint. Don't say a word, Jed. But I'll tell you this much, Mr. Venice. I'd hate to be the man who owns that android."

"You mean the police?" I asked.

"I mean projection, Mr. Venice. Projection! That's the danger . . . and I won't say any more. I've said too much as is."

I heard steps outside, and a hoarse voice singing softly: "Be fleet be fleet cool and discreet, honey . . ." My android entered the room, home from its tour of duty at the university

power plant. It was not introduced. I motioned to it and I immediately responded to the command and went to the beer keg and took over Vandaleur's job of serving the guests. Its accomplished fingers writhed in a private rumba of their own. Gradually they stopped their squirming, and the strange humming ended.

Androids were not unusual at the university. The wealthier students owned them along with cars and planes. Vandaleur's android provoked no comment, but young Wanda was sharp-eyed and quick-witted. She noted my bruised forehead and she was intent on the history-making thesis she and Jed Stark were going to write. After the party broke up, she consulted with Jed walking upstairs to her room.

"Jed, why'd that android have a bruised forehead?"

"Probably hurt itself, Wanda. It's working in the power plant. They fling a lot of heavy stuff around."

"That all?"

"What else?"

"It could be a convenient bruise."

"Convenient for what?"

"Hiding what's stamped on its forehead."

"No point to that, Wanda. You don't have to see marks on a forehead to recognize an android. You don't have to see a trademark on a car to know it's a car."

"I don't mean it's trying to pass as a human. I mean it's trying to pass as a lower grade android."

"Why?"

"Suppose it had MA on its forehead."

"Multiple aptitude? Then why in hell would Venice waste it stoking furnaces if it could earn more—— Oh. Oh! You mean it's—?"

Wanda nodded.

"Jesus!" Stark pursed his lips. "What do we do? Call the police?"

"No. We don't know if it's an MA for a fact. If it turns out to be an MA and the killing android, our paper comes first any-

way. This is our big chance, Jed. If it's *that* android we can run a series of controlled tests and——"

"How do we find out for sure?"

"Easy. Infrared film. That'll show what's under the bruise. Borrow a camera. Buy some film. We'll sneak down to the power plant tomorrow afternoon and take some pictures. Then we'll know."

They stole down into the university power plant the following afternoon. It was a vast cellar, deep under the earth. It was dark, shadowy, luminous with burning light from the furnace doors. Above the roar of the fires they could hear a strange voice shouting and chanting in the echoing vault: "All reet! All reet! So jeet your seat. Be fleet be fleet, cool and discreet, honey . . ." And they could see a capering figure dancing a lunatic rumba in time to the music it shouted. The legs twisted. The arms waved. The fingers writhed.

Jed Stark raised the camera and began shooting his spool of infrared film, aiming the camera sights at that bobbing head. Then Wanda shrieked, for I saw them and came charging down on them, brandishing a polished steel shovel. It smashed the camera. It felled the girl and then the boy. Jed fought me for a desperate hissing moment before he was bludgeoned into helplessness. Then the android dragged them to the furnace and fed them to the flames, slowly, hideously. It capered and sang. Then it returned to my hotel.

The thermometer in the power plant registered 100.9° murderously Fahrenheit. All reet! All reet!

We bought steerage on the *Lyra Queen* and Vandaleur and the android did odd jobs for their meals. During the night watches, Vandaleur would sit alone in the steerage head with a cardboard portfolio on his lap, puzzling over its contents. That portfolio was all he had managed to bring with him from Lyra Alpha. He had stolen it from Wanda's room. It was labeled ANDROID. It contained the secret of my sickness.

And it contained nothing but newspapers. Scores of news-

papers from all over the galaxy, printed, microfilmed, engraved, etched, offset, photostated . . . Rigel *Star-Banner* . . . Paragon *Picayune* . . . Megaster *Times-Leader* . . . Lalande *Herald* . . . Lacaille *Journal* . . . Indi *Intelligencer* . . . Eridani *Telegram-News*. All reet! All reet!

Nothing but newspapers. Each paper contained an account of one crime in the android's ghastly career. Each paper also contained news, domestic and foreign, sports, society, weather, shipping news, stock exchange quotations, human interest stories, features, contests, puzzles. Somewhere in that mass of uncollated facts was the secret Wanda and Jed Stark had discovered. Vandaleur pored over the papers helplessly. It was beyond him. So jeet your seat!

"I'll sell you," I told the android. "Damn you. When we land on Terra, I'll sell you. I'll settle for 3 per cent on whatever you're worth."

"I am worth fifty-seven thousand dollars on the current exchange," I told him.

"If I can't sell you, I'll turn you in to the police," I said.

"I am valuable property," I answered. "It is forbidden to endanger valuable property. You won't have me destroyed."

"Christ damn you!" Vandaleur cried. "What? Are you arrogant? Do you know you can trust me to protect you? Is that the secret?"

The multiple aptitude android regarded him with calm accomplished eyes. "Sometimes," it said, "it is a good thing to be property."

It was 3 below zero when the *Lyra Queen* dropped at Croydon Field. A mixture of ice and snow swept across the field, fizzing and exploding into steam under the *Queen's* tail jets. The passengers trotted numbly across the blackened concrete to customs inspection, and thence to the airport bus that was to take them to London. Vandaleur and the android were broke. They walked.

By midnight they reached Piccadilly Circus. The December

ice storm had not slackened and the statue of Eros was encrusted with ice. They turned right, walked down to Trafalgar Square and then along the Strand toward Soho, shaking with cold and wet. Just above Fleet Street, Vandaleur saw a solitary figure coming from the direction of St. Paul's. He drew the android into an alley.

"We've got to have money," he whispered. He pointed at the approaching figure. "He has money. Take it from him."

"The order cannot be obeyed," the android said.

"Take it from him," Vandaleur repeated. "By force. Do you understand? We're desperate."

"It is contrary to my prime directive," I said. "I cannot endanger life or property. The order cannot be obeyed."

"For God's sake!" Vandaleur burst out. "You've attacked, destroyed, murdered. Don't gibber about prime directives. You haven't any left. Get his money. Kill him if you have to. I tell you, we're desperate!"

"It is contrary to my prime directive," the android repeated. "The order cannot be obeyed."

I thrust the android back and leaped out at the stranger. He was tall, austere, competent. He had an air of hope curdled by cyncism. He carried a cane. I saw he was blind.

"Yes?" he said. "I hear you near me. What is it?"

"Sir . . ." Vandaleur hesitated. "I'm desperate."

"We are all desperate," the stranger replied. "Quietly desperate."

"Sir . . . I've got to have some money."

"Are you begging or stealing?" The sightless eyes passed over Vandaleur and the android.

"I'm prepared for either."

"Ah. So are we all. It is the history of our race." The stranger motioned over his shoulder. "I have been begging at St. Paul's, my friend. What I desire cannot be stolen. What is it you desire that you are lucky enough to be able to steal?"

"Money," Vandaleur said.

"Money for what? Come, my friend, let us exchange con-

fidences. I will tell you why I beg, if you will tell me why you steal. My name is Blenheim."

"My name is . . . Vole."

"I was not begging for sight at St. Paul's, Mr. Vole. I was begging for a number."

"A number?"

"Ah yes. Numbers rational, numbers irrational. Numbers imaginary. Positive integers. Negative integers. Fractions, positive and negative. Eh? You have never heard of Blenheim's immortal treatise on Twenty Zeros, or The Differences in Absence of Quantity?" Blenheim smiled bitterly. "I am the wizard of the Theory of Number, Mr. Vole, and I have exhausted the charm of number for myself. After fifty years of wizardry, senility approaches and the appetite vanishes. I have been praying in St. Paul's for inspiration. Dear God, I prayed, if You exist, send me a number."

Vandaleur slowly lifted the cardboard portfolio and touched Blenheim's hand with it. "In here," he said, "is a number. A hidden number. A secret number. The number of a crime. Shall we exchange, Mr. Blenheim? Shelter for a number?"

"Neither begging nor stealing, eh?" Blenheim said. "But a bargain. So all life reduces itself to the banal." The sightless eyes again passed over Vandaleur and the android. "Perhaps the All-Mighty is not God but a merchant. Come home with me."

On the top floor of Blenheim's house we shared a room—two beds, two closets, two washstands, one bathroom. Vandaleur bruised my forehead again and sent me out to find work, and while the android worked, I consulted with Blenheim and read him the papers from the portfolio, one by one. All reet! All reet!

Vandaleur told him so much and no more. He was a student, I said, attempting a thesis on the murdering android. In these papers which he had collected were the facts that would explain the crimes of which Blenheim had heard nothing.

There must be a correlation, a number, a statistic, something which would account for my derangement, I explained, and Blenheim was piqued by the mystery, the detective story, the human interest of number.

We examined the papers. As I read them aloud, he listed them and their contents in his blind, meticulous writing. And then I read his notes to him. He listed the papers by type, by type face, by fact, by fancy, by article, spelling, words, theme, advertising, pictures, subject, politics, prejudices. He analyzed. He studied. He meditated. And we lived together in that top floor, always a little cold, always a little terrified, always a little closer . . . brought together by our fear of it, our hatred between us. Like a wedge driven into a living tree and splitting the trunk, only to be forever incorporated into the scar tissue, we grew together. Vandaleur and the android. Be fleet be fleet!

And one afternoon Blenheim called Vandaleur into his study and displayed his notes. "I think I've found it," he said, "but I can't understand it."

Vandaleur's heart leaped.

"Here are the correlations," Blenheim continued. "In fifty papers there are accounts of the criminal android. What is there, outside the depredations, that is also in fifty papers?"

"I don't know, Mr. Blenheim."

"It was a rhetorical question. Here is the answer. The weather."

"What?"

"The weather." Blenheim nodded. "Each crime was committed on a day when the temperature was above 90 degrees Fahrenheit."

"But that's impossible," Vandaleur exclaimed. "It was cool on Lyra Alpha."

"We have no record of any crime committed on Lyra Alpha. There is no paper."

"No. That's right. I——" Vandaleur was confused. Suddenly he exclaimed. "No. You're right. The furnace room. It was hot there. Hot! Of course. My God, yes! That's the an-

swer. Dallas Brady's electric furnace . . . The rice deltas on Paragon. So jeet your seat. Yes. But why? Why? My God, why?"

I came into the house at that moment, and passing the study, saw Vandaleur and Blenheim. I entered, awaiting commands, my multiple aptitudes devoted to service.

"That's the android, eh?" Blenheim said after a long moment.

"Yes," Vandaleur answered, still confused by the discovery. "And that explains why it refused to attack you that night on the Strand. It wasn't hot enough to break the prime directive. Only in the heat . . . The heat, all reet!" He looked at the android. A lunatic command passed from man to android. I refused. It is forbidden to endanger life. Vandaleur gestured furiously, then seized Blenheim's shoulders and yanked him back out of his desk chair to the floor. Blenheim shouted once. Vandaleur leaped on him like a tiger, pinning him to the floor and sealing his mouth with one hand.

"Find a weapon," he called to the android.

"It is forbidden to endanger life."

"This is a fight for self-preservation. Bring me a weapon!" He held the squirming mathematician with all his weight. I went at once to a cupboard where I knew a revolver was kept. I checked it. It was loaded with five cartridges. I handed it to Vandaleur. I took it, rammed the barrel against Blenheim's head and pulled the trigger. He shuddered once.

We had three hours before the cook returned from her day off. We looted the house. We took Blenheim's money and jewels. We packed a bag with clothes. We took Blenheim's notes, destroyed the newspapers; and we left, carefully locking the door behind us. In Blenheim's study we left a pile of crumpled papers under a half inch of burning candle. And we soaked the rug around it with kerosene. No, I did all that. The android refused. I am forbidden to endanger life or property.

All reet!

They took the tubes to Leicester Square, changed trains and rode to the British Museum. There they got off and went to a small Georgian house just off Russell Square. A shingle in the window read: NAN WEBB, PSYCHOMETRIC CONSULTANT. Vandaleur had made a note of the address some weeks earlier. They went into the house. The android waited in the foyer with the bag. Vandaleur entered Nan Webb's office.

She was a tall woman with gray shingled hair, very fine English complexion and very bad English legs. Her features were blunt, her expression acute. She nodded to Vandaleur, finished a letter, sealed it and looked up.

"My name," I said, "is Vanderbilt. James Vanderbilt."

"Quite."

"I'm an exchange student at London University."

"Quite."

"I've been researching on the killing android, and I think I've discovered something very interesting. I'd like your advice on it. What is your fee?"

"What is your college at the university?"

"Why?"

"There is a discount for students."

"Merton College."

"That will be two pounds, please."

Vandaleur placed two pounds on the desk and added to the fee Blenheim's notes. "There is a correlation," he said, "between the crimes of the android and the weather. You will note that each crime was committed when the temperature rose above 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Is there a psychometric answer for this?"

Nan Webb nodded, studied the notes for a moment, put down the sheets of paper and said: "Synesthesia, obviously."

"What?"

"Synesthesia," she repeated. "When a sensation, Mr. Vanderbilt, is interpreted immediately in terms of a sensation from a different sense organ from the one stimulated, it is called synesthesia. For example: A sound stimulus gives rise to a

simultaneous sensation of definite color. Or color gives rise to a sensation of taste. Or a light stimulus gives rise to a sensation of sound. There can be confusion or short circuiting of any sensation of taste, smell, pain, pressure, temperature and so on. D'you understand?"

"I think so."

"Your research has uncovered the fact that the android most probably reacts to temperature stimulus above the 90-degree level synesthetically. Most probably there is an endocrine response. Probably a temperature linkage with the android adrenal surrogate. High temperature brings about a response of fear, anger, excitement and violent physical activity . . . all within the province of the adrenal gland."

"Yes. I see. Then if the android were to be kept in cold climates . . ."

"There would be neither stimulus nor response. There would be no crimes. Quite."

"I see. What is projection?"

"How do you mean?"

"Is there any danger of projection with regard to the owner of the android?"

"Very interesting. Projection is a throwing forward. It is the process of throwing out upon another the ideas or impulses that belong to oneself. The paranoid, for example, projects upon others his conflicts and disturbances in order to externalize them. He accuses, directly or by implication, other men of having the very sicknesses with which he is struggling himself."

"And the danger of projection?"

"It is the danger of believing what is implied. If you live with a psychotic who projects his sickness upon you, there is a danger of falling into his psychotic pattern and becoming virtually psychotic yourself. As, no doubt, is happening to you, Mr. Vandaleur."

Vandaleur leaped to his feet.

"You are an ass," Nan Webb went on crisply. She waved

the sheets of notes."This is no exchange student's writing. It's the unique cursive of the famous Blenheim. Every scholar in England knows this blind writing. There is no Merton College at London University. That was a miserable guess. Merton is one of the Oxford colleges. And you, Mr. Vandaleur, are so obviously infected by association with your deranged android . . . by projection, if you will . . . that I hesitate between calling the Metropolitan Police and the Hospital for the Criminally Insane."

I took the gun and shot her.

Reet!

"Antares II, Alpha Aurigae, Acrux IV, Pollux IX, Rigel Centaurus," Vandaleur said. "They're all cold. Cold as a witch's kiss. Mean temperatures of 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Never get hotter than 70. We're in business again. Watch that curve."

The multiple aptitude android swung the wheel with its accomplished hands. The car took the curve sweetly and sped on through the northern marshes, the reeds stretching for miles, brown and dry, under the cold English sky. The sun was sinking swiftly. Overhead, a lone flight of bustards flapped clumsily eastward. High above the flight, a lone helicopter drifted toward home and warmth.

"No more warmth for us," I said. "No more heat. We're safe when we're cold. We'll hole up in Scotland, make a little money, get across to Norway, build a bankroll and then ship out. We'll settle on Pollux. We're safe. We've licked it. We can live again."

There was a startling *bleep* from overhead, and then a ragged roar: "ATTENTION JAMES VANDALEUR AND ANDROID. ATTENTION JAMES VANDALEUR AND ANDROID!"

Vandaleur started and looked up. The lone helicopter was floating above them. From its belly came amplified commands: "YOU ARE SURROUNDED. THE ROAD IS BLOCKED.

YOU ARE TO STOP YOUR CAR AT ONCE AND SUBMIT TO ARREST. STOP AT ONCE!"

I looked at Vandaleur for orders.

"Keep driving," Vandaleur snapped.

The helicopter dropped lower: "ATTENTION ANDROID. YOU ARE IN CONTROL OF THE VEHICLE. YOU ARE TO STOP AT ONCE. THIS IS A STATE DIRECTIVE SUPERSEDING ALL PRIVATE COMMANDS."

"What the hell are you doing?" I shouted.

"A state directive supersedes all private commands," the android answered. "I must point out to you that——"

"Get the hell away from the wheel," Vandaleur ordered. I clubbed the android, yanked him sideways and squirmed over him to the wheel. The car veered off the road in that moment and went churning through the frozen mud and dry reeds. Vandaleur regained control and continued westward through the marshes toward a parallel highway five miles distant.

"We'll beat their God damned block," he grunted.

The car pounded and surged. The helicopter dropped even lower. A searchlight blazed from the belly of the plane.

"ATTENTION JAMES VANDALEUR AND ANDROID. SUBMIT TO ARREST. THIS IS A STATE DIRECTIVE SUPERSEDING ALL PRIVATE COMMANDS."

"He can't submit," Vandaleur shouted wildly. "There's no one to submit to. He can't and I won't."

"Christ!" I muttered. "We'll beat them yet. We'll beat the block. We'll beat the heat. We'll——"

"I must point out to you," I said, "that I am required by my prime directive to obey state directives which supersede all private commands. I must submit to arrest."

"Who says it's a state directive?" Vandaleur said. "Them? Up in that plane? They've got to show credentials. They've

got to prove it's state authority before you submit. How d'you know they're not crooks trying to trick us?"

Holding the wheel with one arm, he reached into his side pocket to make sure the gun was still in place. The car skidded. The tires squealed on frost and reeds. The wheel was wrenched from his grasp and the car yawed up a small hillock and overturned. The motor roared and the wheels screamed. Vandaleur crawled out and dragged the android with him. For the moment we were outside the circle of light boring down from the helicopter. We blundered off into the marsh, into the blackness, into concealment . . . Vandaleur running with a pounding heart, hauling the android along.

The helicopter circled and soared over the wrecked car, searchlight peering, loudspeaker braying. On the highway we had left, lights appeared as the pursuing and blocking parties gathered and followed radio directions from the plane. Vandaleur and the android continued deeper and deeper into the marsh, working their way towards the parallel road and safety. It was night by now. The sky was a black matte. Not a star showed. The temperature was dropping. A southeast night wind knifed us to the bone.

Far behind there was a dull concussion. Vandaleur turned, gasping. The car's fuel had exploded. A geyser of flame shot up like a lurid fountain. It subsided into a low crater of burning reeds. Whipped by the wind, the distant hem of flame fanned up into a wall, ten feet high.The wall began marching down on us, crackling fiercely. Above it, a pall of oily smoke surged forward. Behind it, Vandaleur could make out the figures of men . . . a mass of beaters searching the marsh.

"Christ!" I cried and searched desperately for safety. He ran, dragging me with him, until their feet crunched through the surface ice of a pool. He trampled the ice furiously, then flung himself down in the numbing water, pulling the android with us.

The wall of flame approached. I could hear the crackle and feel the heat. He could see the searchers clearly. Vandaleur

reached into his side pocket for the gun. The pocket was torn. The gun was gone. He groaned and shook with cold and terror. The light from the marsh fire was blinding. Overhead, the helicopter floated helplessly to one side, unable to fly through the smoke and flames and aid the searchers who were beating far to the right of us.

"They'll miss us," Vandaleur whispered. "Keep quiet. That's an order. They'll miss us. We'll beat them. We'll beat the fire. We'll——"

Three distinct shots sounded less than a hundred feet from the fugitives. *Blam! Blam! Blam!* They came from the last three cartridges in my gun as the marsh fire reached it where it had dropped, and exploded the shells. The searchers turned toward the sound and began working directly toward us. Vandaleur cursed hysterically and tried to submerge even deeper to escape the intolerable heat of the fire. The android began to twitch.

The wall of flame surged up to them. Vandaleur took a deep breath and prepared to submerge until the flame passed over them. The android shuddered and burst into an ear-splitting scream.

"All reet! All reet!" it shouted. "Be fleet be fleet!"

"Damn you!" I shouted. I tried to drown it.

"Damn you!" I cursed him. I smashed his face.

The android battered Vandaleur, who fought it off until it exploded out of the mud and staggered upright. Before I could return to the attack, the live flames captured it hypnotically. It danced and capered in a lunatic rumba before the wall of fire. Its legs twisted. Its arms waved. The fingers writhed in a private rumba of their own. It shrieked and sang and ran in a crooked waltz before the embrace of the heat, a muddy monster silhouetted against the brilliant sparkling flare.

The searchers shouted. There were shots. The android spun around twice and then continued its horrid dance before the face of the flames. There was a rising gust of wind. The fire swept around the capering figure and enveloped it for a roaring

moment. Then the fire swept on, leaving behind it a sobbing mass of synthetic flesh oozing scarlet blood that would never coagulate.

The thermometer would have registered 1200° wondrously Fahrenheit.

Vandaleur didn't die. I got away. They missed him while they watched the android caper and die. But I don't know which of us he is these days. Projection, Wanda warned me. Projection, Nan Webb told him. If you live with a crazy man or a crazy machine long enough, I become crazy too. Reet!

But we know one truth. We know they were wrong. The new robot and Vandaleur know that because the new robot's started twitching too. Reet! Here on cold Pollux, the robot is twitching and singing. No heat, but my fingers writhe. No heat, but it's taken the little Talley girl off for a solitary walk. A cheap labor robot. A servo-mechanism . . . all I could afford . . . but it's twitching and humming and walking alone with the child somewhere and I can't find them. Christ! Vandaleur can't find me before it's too late. Cool and discreet, honey, in the dancing frost while the thermometer registers 10° fondly Fahrenheit.

C. M. KORNBLUTH

In THE SYNDIC *(Doubleday, 1953), that wonderfully entertaining novel of a future world ruled by a benevolent despotism of gangsters, C. M. Kornbluth gave the professional criminal, for the first time, his rightful place in science fiction. Now Mr. Kornbluth takes another criminal pro, younger and less exalted than the lords of the Syndicate but no less shrewdly practical, and confronts him, not with the science of the future, but with the witchcraft of today and all the ages past. Result: an uninhibited and uproarious story in the best tradition of madly logical fantasy.*

I Never Ast No Favors

DEAR MR. MARINO:

I hesitate to take pen in hand and write you because I guess you do not remember me except maybe as a punk kid you did a good turn, and I know you must be a busy man running your undertaking parlor as well as the Third Ward and your barber shop. I never ast no favors of nobody but this is a special case which I hope you will agree when I explain.

To refresh your memory as the mouthpiece says in court, my name is Anthony Cornaro only maybe you remember me better as Tough Tony, which is what they call me back home in the Ward. I am not the Tough Tony from Water Street who is about 55 and doing a sixer up the river, I am the Tough Tony who is going on seventeen from Brecker Street and who you got probation for last week after I slash that nosy cop that comes flatfooting into the grocery store where some friends and I are just looking around not knowing it is after hours and that the grocery man has went home. That is the Tough Tony that I am. I guess you remember me now so I can go ahead.

With the probation, not that I am complaining, the trouble starts. The mouthpiece says he has known this lad for years

and he comes from a very fine churchgoing family and he has been led astray by bad companions. So all right, the judge says three years probation, but he goes on to say *if*. If this, if that, enviromment, bad influences, congestered city streets, our vital dairy industry denuded—such a word from a judge! —of labor . . .

Before I know what has happened, I am signing a paper, my Mama is putting her mark on it and I am on my way to Chiunga County to milk cows.

I figure the judge does not know I am a personal friend of yours and I do not want to embarrass you by mentioning your name in open court, I figure I will get a chance later to straighten things out. Also, to tell you the truth, I am too struck with horror to talk.

On the ride upstate I am handcuffed to the juvenile court officer so I cannot make a break for it, but at last I get time to think and I realize that it is not as bad as it looks. I am supposed to work for a dame named Mrs. Parry and get chow, clothes and Prevailering Wages. I figure it takes maybe a month for her to break me in on the cow racket or even longer if I play dumb. During the month I get a few bucks, a set of threads and take it easy and by then I figure you will have everything straightened out and I can get back to my regular occupation, only more careful this time. Experience is the best teacher, Mr. Marino, as I am sure you know.

Well, we arrive at this town Chiunga Forks and I swear to God I never saw such a creepy place. You wouldn't believe it. The main drag is all of four blocks long and the stores and houses are from wood. I expect to see Gary Cooper stalking down the street with a scowl on his puss and his hands on his guns looking for the bad guys. Four hours from the Third Ward in a beat-up '48 police department Buick—you wouldn't believe it.

We park in front of a hash house, characters in rubber boots gawk at us, the court officer takes off the cuffs and gabs with the driver but does not lose sight of me. While we are waiting

for this Mrs. Parry to keep the date I study the bank building across the street and develop some ideas which will interest you, Mr. Marino, but which I will not go into right now.

All of a sudden there is a hassle on the sidewalk.

A big woman with gray hair and a built like Tony Galento is kicking a little guy who looks like T.B. Louis the Book, who I guess you know, but not so muscular and wearing overalls. She is kicking him right in the keister, five-six times. Each time I shudder, and so maybe does the bank building across the street.

"Shoot my dawg, will you!" she yells at the character. "I said I'd kick your butt from here to Scranton when I caught up with you, Dud Wingle!"

"Leave me be!" he squawks, trying to pry her hands off his shoulders. "He was chasin' deer! He was chasin' deer!"

Thud—thud—thud. "I don't keer if he was chasin' deer, panthers or butterflies." *Thud.* "He was my dawg and you shot him!" *Thud.* She was drawing quite a crowd. The characters in rubber boots are forgetting all about us to stare at her and him.

Up comes a flatfoot who I later learn is the entire manpower of Chiunga Forks' lousiest; he says to the big woman "Now Ella" a few times and she finally stops booting the little character and lets him go. "What do you want, Henry?" she growls at the flatfoot and he asks weakly: "Silver Bell dropped her calf yet?"

The little character is limping away rubbing himself. The big broad watches him regretfully and says to the flatfoot: "Yesterday, Henry. Now if you'll excuse me I have to look for my new hired boy from the city. I guess that's him over there."

She strolls over to us and yanks open the Buick's door, almost taking it off the hinges. "I'm Mrs. Ella Parry," she says to me, sticking out her hand. "You must be the Cornaro boy the Probation Association people wired me about."

I shake hands and say, "Yes, ma'am."

The officer turns me over grinning like a skunk eating beans.

I figure Mrs. Parry lives in one of the wood houses in Chiunga Forks, but no. We climb into a this-year Willys truck and take off for the hills. I do not have much to say to this lady wrestler but wish I had somebody smuggle me a rod to kind of even things a little between her and me. With that built she could break me in half by accident. I try to get in good with her by offering to customize her truck. "I could strip off the bumper guards and put on a couple of fog lights, maybe new fender skirts with a little trim to them," I say, "and it wouldn't cost you a dime. Even out here there has got to be some parts place where a person can heist what he needs."

"Quiet, Bub," she says all of a sudden, and shields her eyes peering down a side road where a car is standing in front of a shack. "I swear," she says, "that looks like Dud Wingle's Ford in front of Miz' Sigafoos' place." She keeps her neck twisting around to study it until it is out of sight. And she looks worried.

I figure it is not a good time to talk and anyway maybe she has notions about customizing and does not approve of it.

"What," she says, "would Dud Wingle want with Miz' Sigafoos?"

"I don't know, ma'am," I say. "Wasn't he the gentleman you was kicking from here to Scranton?"

"Shucks, Bub, that was just a figger of speech. If I'd of wanted to kick him from here to Scranton I'd of *done* it. Dud and Jim and Ab and Sime think they got a right to shoot your dog if he chases the deer. I'm a peaceable woman or I'd have the law on them for shootin' Grip. But maybe I did kind of lose my temper." She looked worrieder yet.

"Is something wrong, ma'am?" I ask. You never can tell, but a lot of old dames talk to me like I was their uncle; to tell you the truth this is my biggest problem in a cat house. It must be because I am a kind of thoughtful guy and it shows.

Mrs. Parry is no exception. She says to me: "You don't know the folks up here yet, Bub, so you don't know about Miz' Sigafoos. I'm old English stock so I don't hold with their

foolishness, but——" And here she looked *real* worried. "Miz' Sigafoos is what they call a hex doctor."

"What's that, ma'am?"

"Just a lot of foolishness. Don't you pay any attention," she says, and then she has to concentrate on the driving. We are turning off the two-lane state highway and going up, up, up, into the hills, off a blacktop road, off a gravel road, off a dirt road. No people. No houses. Fences and cows or maybe horses, I can't tell for sure. Finally we are at her place, which is from wood and in two buildings. I start automatically for the building that is clean, new-painted, big and expensive.

"Hold on, Bub," she says. "No need to head for the barn first thing. Let's get you settled in the house first and then there'll be a plenty of work for you."

I do a double take and see that the big, clean, expensive building is the barn. The little, cheap, run-down place is the house. I say to myself: "Tough Tony, you're gonna pray tonight that Mr. Marino don't forget to tell the judge you're a personal friend of his and get you out of this."

But that night I do not pray. I am too tired. After throwing sacks of scratch feed and laying mash around, I run the baling machine and I turn the oats in the loft and I pump water until my back is aching jello and then I go hiking out to the woodlot and chop down trees and cut them up with a chain saw. It is surprising how fast I learn and how willing I am when I remember what Mrs. Parry did to Dud Wingle.

I barely get to sleep it seems like when Mrs. Parry is yanking the covers off me laughing and I see through the window that the sky is getting a little light. "Time to rise, Bub," she bawls. "Breakfast on the table." She strides to the window and flexes her muscles, breathing deep. "It's going to be a fine day. I can tell when an animal's sick to death and I can tell when it's going to be fine all day. Rise and shine, Bub. We have a lot of work ahead. I was kind of easy on you yesterday seeing you was new here, so we got a bit behindhand."

I eye the bulging muscles and say "Yes, ma'am."

She serves a good breakfast, I have to admit. Usually I just have some coffee around eleven when I wake up and maybe a meat-ball sandwich around four, but the country air gives you an appetite like I always heard. Maybe I didn't tell you there was just the two of us. Her husband kicked off a couple years ago. She gave one of her boys half the farm because she says she don't believe in letting them hang around without a chance to make some money and get married until you die. The other boy, nineteen, got drafted two months ago and since then she is running the place on her own hook because for some reason or other it is hard to get people to work on a farm. She says she does not understand this and I do not enlighten her.

First thing after breakfast she tells me to take four crates from lumber in the toolshed, go to the duckpond and put the four Muscovy ducks in the crates so she can take them to town and sell them. She has been meaning to sell the Muscovy ducks for some time since the word has been getting around that she was pro-communist for having such a breed of ducks when there were plenty of good American ducks she could of raised. "Though," she says, "in my opinion the Walterses ought to sell off their Peking ducks too because the Chinese are just as bad as the Roossians."

I make the crates which is easy and I go to the duckpond. There are four ducks there but they are not swimming; they have sunk. I go and tell Mrs. Parry and she looks at me like I was crazy.

"Yeah," I tell her. "Sunk. Down at the bottom of the pond, drownded. I guess maybe during the night they forgot to keep treading water or something."

She didn't say a word. She just strides down the path to the duckpond and looks into it and sees the four ducks. They are big, horrible things with kind of red Jimmy Valentine masks over their eyes, and they are lying at the bottom of the pond. She wades in, still without a word, and fishes them out. She gets a big shiv out of her apron pocket, slits the ducks open,

yanks out their lungs and slits them open. Water dribbles out.

"Drownded," she mutters. "If there was snapping turtles to drag them under. . . . but there ain't."

I do not understand what the fuss is about and ast her if she can't sell them anyway. She says no, it wouldn't be honest, and I should get a shovel and bury them. Then there is an awful bellering from the cow barn. "Agnes of Lincolnshire!" Mrs. Parry squawks and dashes for the barn. "She's dropping her calf ahead of time!"

I run along beside her. "Should I call the cops?" I pant. "They always get to the place before the ambulance and you don't have to pay them nothing. My married sister had three kids delivered by the cops——"

But it seems it's different with cows and anyway they have a different kind of flatfoot out here that didn't go to Police Academy. Mrs. Parry finally looks up from the calf and says "I think I saved it. I *know* I saved it. I can tell when an animal's dying. Bub, go to the phone and call Miz' Croley and ask her if she can possibly spare Brenda to come over and do the milkin' tonight and tomorrow morning. I dassn't leave Agnes and the calf; they need nursing."

I stagger out of the cowbarn, throw up two-three times and go to the phone in the house. I seen them phones with fly-wheels in the movies so I know how to work it. Mrs. Croley cusses and moans and then says all right she'll send Brenda over in the Ford and please to tell Mrs. Parry not to keep her no longer than she has to because she has a herd of her own that needs milking.

I tell Mrs. Parry in the barn and Mrs. Parry snaps that Mrs. Croley has a living husband and a draft-proof farmhand and she swore she din't know what things were coming to when a neighbor wouldn't help another neighbor out.

I ast casually: "Who is this Brenda, ma'am?"

"Miz' Croley's daughter. Good for nothing."

I don't ast no more questions but I sure begin to wait with interest for a Ford to round the bend of the road.

It does while I am bucking up logs with the chainsaw. Brenda is a blondie about my age, a little too big for her dress—an effect which I always go for, whether in the Third Ward or Chiunga County. I don't have a chance to talk to her until lunch, and then all she does is giggle. But who wants conversation? I make a mental note that she will have the room next to mine and then a truck comes snorting up the driveway. Something inside the truck is snorting louder than the truck.

Mrs. Parry throws up her hands. "Land, I forgot! Belshazzar the Magnificent for Princess Leilani!" She gulps coffee and dashes out.

"Brenda," I say, "what was that all about?"

She giggles and this time blushes. I throw down my napkin and go to the window. The truck is being backed to a field with a big board fence around it. Mrs. Parry is going into the barn and is leading a cow into the field. The cow is mighty nervous and I begin to understand why. The truckdriver opens the tailgate and out comes a snorting bull.

I think: well, I been to a few stag shows but *this* I never seen before. Maybe a person can learn something in the country after all.

Belshazzar the Magnificent sees Princess Leilani. He snorts like Charles Boyer. Princess Leilani cowers away from him like Bette Davis. Belshazzar the Magnificent paws the ground. Princess Leilani trembles. And then Belshazzar the Magnificent yawns and starts eating grass.

Princess Leilani looks up, startled and says: "Huh?" No, on second thought it is not Princess Leilani who says "Huh?" It is Brenda, at the other kitchen window. She sees me watching her, giggles, blushes and goes to the sink and starts doing dishes.

I guess this is a good sign, but I don't press my luck. I go outside, where Mrs. Parry is cussing out the truckdriver.

"Some bull!"she yells at him. "What am I supposed to do now? How long is Leilani going to stay in season? What if I can't line up another stud for her? Do you realize what it's

going to cost me in veal and milk checks——" Yatata, yatata, yatata, while the truckdriver keeps trying to butt in with excuses and Belshazzar the Magnificent eats grass and sometimes gives Princess Leilani a brotherly lick on the nose, for by that time Princess Leilani has dropped the nervous act and edged over mooing plaintively.

Mrs. Parry yells: "See that? I don't hold with artificial insemination but you dang stockbreeders are driving us dairy farmers to it! Get your—your *steer* off my property before I throw him off! I got work to do even if he hasn't! Belshazzar the Magnificent—*hah!*"

She turns on me. "Don't just stand around gawking, Bub. When you get the stovewood split you can stack it in the woodshed." I scurry off and resume Operation Woodlot, but I take it a little easy which I can do because Mrs. Parry is in the cowbarn nursing Agnes of Lincolnshire and the preemie calf.

At supper Mrs. Parry says she thinks she better put a cot in the barn for herself and spend the night there with the invalids in case there is a sudden emergency. "And that don't mean," she adds, "that you children can be up half the night playing the radio just because the old lady ain't around. I want to see the house lights out by 8:30. Understand?"

"Yes ma'am," Brenda says.

"We won't play the radio, ma'am," I say. "And we'll put the lights out."

Brenda giggled.

What happens that night is a little embarrassing to write about. I hope, Mr. Marino, you won't go telling it around. I figure that being a licensed mortician like you are as well as boss of the Third Ward you are practically like a doctor and doctors don't go around shooting their mouths off about what their patients tell them. I figure what I have to tell you about what happened comes under the sacred relationship between a doctor and patient or a hood and his mouthpiece.

Anyway, this is what happens: nothing happens.

Like with Belshazzar the Magnificent.

I go into her room, I say yes, she says no, I say yes *please*, she says well okay. And then nothing happens. I never been so humiliated and I hope you will keep this confidential because it isn't the kind of thing you like to have get around. I am telling you about it only because I never ast no favors but this is a very special case and I want you to understand why.

The next morning at breakfast I am in a bad temper, Brenda has got the giggles and Mrs. Parry is stiff and tired from sleeping in the barn. We are a gruesome threesome, and then a car drives up and a kid of maybe thirty comes busting into the kitchen. He has been crying. His eyes are red and there are clean places on his face where the tears ran down. "Ma!" he whimpers at Mrs. Parry. "I got to talk to you! You got to talk to Bonita, she says I don't love her no more and she's going to leave me!"

"Hush up, George," she snaps at him. "Come into the parlor." They go into the parlor and Brenda whistles: "Whoo-ee! Wait'll I tell Maw about *this!*"

"Who is he?" I ask.

"Miz' Parry's boy George. She gave him the south half of the farm and built him a house on it. Bonita's his wife. She's a stuck-up girl from Ware County and she wears falsies and dyes her hair and—" Brenda looks around, lowers her voice and whispers "—and *she sends her worshing to the laundry in town.*"

"God in Heaven," I say. "Have the cops heard about this?"

"Oh, it's *legal*, but you just shouldn't *do* it."

"I see. I misunderstood, I guess. Back in the Third Ward it's a worse rap than mopery with intent to gawk. The judges are ruthless with it."

Her eyes go round. "Is that a fact?"

"Sure. Tell your mother about it."

Mrs. Parry came back in with her son and said to us: "Clear out, you kids. I want to make a phone call."

"I'll start the milkin'," Brenda said.

"And I'll framble the portistan while it's still cool and barkney," I say.

"Sure," Mrs. Parry says, cranking the phone. "Go and do that, Bub." She is preoccupied.

I go through the kitchen door, take one sidestep, flatten against the house and listen. Reception is pretty good.

"Bonita?" Mrs. Parry says into the phone. "Is that you, Bonita? Listen, Bonita, George is here and he asked me to call you and tell you he's sorry. I ain't exactly going to say that. I'm going to say that you're acting like a blame fool. . . . No, no, no. Don't talk about it. This is a party line. Just listen; I know what happened. George told me; after all, I'm his mother. Just listen to an older woman with more experience. So it happened. That don't mean he doesn't love you, child! It's happened to me. I guess it's happened to every woman. You mustn't take it *personally*. You're just sufferin' from a case of newlywed nerves. After you've been married two years or so you'll see things like this in better focus. Maybe George was tired. Maybe he got one of these flu germs that's goin' around. . . . No, I didn't say he was sick. No, he seems all right—maybe looks a *little* feverish. . . . Well, now, I don't know whether you really want to talk to him or not, you being so upset and all. If he *is* sick it'd just upset him—oh, all right." She chuckles away from the phone and says: "She wants to talk to you, George. Don't be too eager, boy."

I slink away from the kitchen door thinking: Ah-*hah!*" I am thinking so hard that Mrs. Parry bungles into me when she walks out of the kitchen sooner than I expect.

She grabs me with one of those pipe-vise hands and snaps: "You young devil, were you listening to me on the phone?"

Usually it is the smart thing to deny everything and ast for your mouthpiece, but up here they got no mouthpieces. For once I tell the truth and cop a plea. "Yes, Mrs. Parry. I'm so *ashamed* of myself you can't imagine. I always been like that. It's a psy-cho-logical twist I got for listening. I can't seem to

control it. Maybe I read too many bad comic books. But honest I won't breath a word about how George couldn't——" Here I have the sense to shut up, but too late.

She drills me with a look and the pipe vise tightens on my arm. "Couldn't *what, Bub?*"

"Like Belshazzar the Magnificent," I say weakly.

"Yep," she says. "I thought that's what you were going to say. Now tell me, Bub—how'd you know? And don't tell me you guessed from what I said. I been using party lines for thirty years. The way I was talkin' to Bonita, it could've been anything from George hitting her with a brick to comin' home drunk. You picked a mighty long shot, you picked it right and I want to know how you did it."

She would of made a great D.A. I mumble: "The same thing happened to me last night. Would you mind lettin' go of my arm, Mrs. Parry? Before it drops off?"

She lets go with a start. "I'm sorry, Bub." She walked slowly to the barn and I walk slowly beside her because I think she expects it.

"Maybe," I say, "it's something in the water."

She shakes her head. "You don't know bulls, Bub. And what about the ducks that sank and Agnes dropping her calf before her time?" She begins to breathe hard through her nostrils. "It's hexin', that's what it is!"

"What's hexin', ma'am?"

"Heathen doings by that old Miz' Sigafoos. She's been warned and warned plenty to stick to her doctoring. I hold nothing against her for curing the croup or maybe selling a young man love potion if he's goin' down to Scranton to sell his crop and play around a little. But she's not satisfied with that, I guess. Dud Wingle must of gone to her with a twenty dollar bill to witch my farm!"

I do not know what to make of this. My mama of course has told me about *la vecchia religione,* but I never know they believe in stuff like that over here. "Can you go to the cops, ma'am?" I ast.

She snorts like Belshazzar the Magnificent. "Cops! A fat lot old Henry Bricker would know about witchin'. No, Bub, I guess I'll handle this myself. I ain't the five-times-great-granddaughter of Pru Posthlewaite for nothin'!"

"Who was Pru—what you said?"

"Hanged in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1680 for witchcraft. Her coven name was Little Gadfly, but I guess she wasn't so little. The first two ropes broke—but we got no time to stand around talkin'. I got to find my Ma's trunk in the attic. You go get the black rooster from the chicken run. I wonder where there's some chalk?" And she walks off to the house, mumbling. I walk to the chicken run thinking she has flipped.

The black rooster is a tricky character, very fast on his feet and also I am new at the chicken racket. It takes me half an hour to stalk him down, during which time incidentally the Ford leaves with Brenda in it and George drives away in his car. See you later, Brenda, I think to myself and maybe you will be surprised.

I go to the kitchen door with the rooster screaming in my arms and Mrs. Parry says: "Come on in with him and set him anywhere." I do, Mrs. Parry scatters some cornflakes on the floor and the rooster calms down right away and stalks around picking it up. Mrs. Parry is sweaty and dust-covered and there are some dirty old papers rolled up on the kitchen table.

She starts fooling around on the floor with one of the papers and a hunk of carpenter's chalk and just to be doing something I look at the rest of them. Honest to God, you never saw such lousy spelling and handwriting. *Tayke the Duste off ane Olde Ymmage Quhich Ye Myngel*—like that.

I shake my head and think: it's the cow racket. No normal human can take this life. She has flipped and I don't blame her, but it will be a horrible thing if she becomes homicidal. I look around for a poker or something and start to edge away. I am thinking of a dash from the door to the Willys and then

scorching into town to come back with the men in the little white coats.

She looks up at me and says: "Don't go away, Bub. This is woman's work, but I need somebody to hold the sword and palm and you're the onliest one around." She grins. "I guess you never saw anything like *this* in the city, hey?"

"No, ma'am," I say, and notice that my voice is very faint.

"Well, don't let it skeer you. There's some people it'd skeer, but the Probation Association people say they call you Tough Tony, so I guess you won't take fright."

"No, ma'am."

"Now what do we do for a sword? I guess this bread knife'll —no; the ham slicer. It looks *more* like a sword. Hold it in your left hand and get a couple of them gilded bulrushes from the vase in the parlor. Mind you wipe your feet before you tread on the carpet! And then come back. Make it fast."

She starts to copy some stuff that looks like Yiddish writing onto the floor and I go into the parlor. I am about to tiptoe to the front door when she yells: "Bub! That you?"

Maybe I could beat her in a race for the car, maybe not. I shrug. At least I have a knife—and know how to use it. I bring her the gilded things from the vase. Ugh! While I am out she has cut the head off the rooster and is sprinkling its blood over a big chalk star and the writing on the floor. But the knife makes me feel more confident even though I begin to worry about how it will look if I have to do anything with it. I am figuring that maybe I can hamstring her if she takes off after me, and meanwhile I should humor her because maybe she will snap out of it.

"Bub," she says, "hold the sword and palms in front of you pointing up and don't step inside the chalk lines. Now, will you promise me not to tell anybody about the words I speak? The rest of this stuff don't matter; it's down in all the books and people have their minds made up that it don't work. But about the words, do you promise?"

"Yes, ma'am. Anything you say, ma'am."

So she starts talking and the promise was not necessary because it's in some foreign language and I don't talk foreign languages except sometimes a little Italian to my mama. I am beginning to yawn when I notice that we have company.

He is eight feet tall, he is green, he has teeth like Red Riding Hood's grandma.

I dive through the window, screaming.

When Mrs. Parry comes out she finds me in a pile of broken glass, on my knees, praying. She clamps two fingers on my ear and hoists me to my feet. "Stop that praying," she says. "He's complaining about it. Says it makes him itch. And you said you wouldn't be skeered! Now come inside where I can keep an eye on you and behave yourself. The idea! The very idea!"

To tell you the truth, I don't remember what happens after this so good. There is some talk between the green character and Mrs. Parry about her five-times-great-grandmother who it seems is doing nicely in a warm climate. There is an argument in which the green character gets shifty and says he doesn't know who is working for Miz' Sigafoos these days. Miz' Parry threatens to let me pray again and the green character gets sulky and says all right he'll send for him and rassle with him but he is sure he can lick him.

The next thing I recall is a grunt-and-groan exhibition between the green character and a smaller purple character who must of arrived when I was blacked out or something. This at least I know something about because I am a television fan. It is a very slow match, because when one of the characters for instance bends the other character's arm it just bends and does not break. But a good big character can lick a good little character every time and finally greenface has got his opponent tied into a bowknot.

"Be gone," Mrs. Parry says to the purple character, "and never more molest me or mine. Be gone, be gone, be gone."

He is gone, and I never do find out if he gets unknotted.

"Now fetch me Miz' Sigafoos."

Blip! An ugly little old woman is sharing the ring with the winner and new champeen. She spits at Mrs. Parry: "So you it was dot mine Teufel haff ge-schtolen!" Her English is terrible. A greenhorn.

"This ain't a social call, Miz' Sigafoos," Mrs. Parry says coldly. "I just want you to unwitch my farm and kinfolks. And if you're an honest woman you'll return his money to that sneakin', dog-murderin' shiftless squirt Dud Wingle."

"Yah," the old woman mumbles. She reaches up and feels the biceps of the green character. "Yah, I guess maybe dot I besser do. Who der Yunger iss?" She is looking at me. "For why the teeth on his mouth go clop-clop-clop? Und so white the face on his head iss! You besser should feed him, Ella."

"*Missus* Parry to you, Miz' Sigafoos, *if* you don't mind. Now the both of you be gone, be gone, be gone."

At last we are alone.

"Now," Mrs. Parry grunts, "maybe we can get back to farmin'. Such foolishness and me a busy woman." She looks at me closely and says: "I do believe the old fool was right. You're as white as a sheet." She feels my forehead. "Oh, shoot! You do have a temperature. You better get to bed. If you ain't better in the morning I'll call Doc Hines."

So I am in the bedroom writing this letter, Mr. Marino, and I hope you will help me out. Like I said I never ast no favors but this is special.

Mr. Marino, will you please, please go to the judge and tell him I have a change of heart and don't want no probation? Tell him I want to pay my debt to society. Tell him I want to go to jail for three years, and for them to come and get me right away.

Sincerely,

ANTHONY (TOUGH TONY) CORNARO

P.S. On my way to get a stamp for this I notice that I have some gray hairs which is very unusual for a person going on seventeen. Please tell the judge I wouldn't mind if they give

me solitary confinement and that maybe it would help me pay my debt to society.

In haste,
T.T.

Some Facts About Robots

I

Robots are a metal race
And wear, where we all wear a face,
A shined and steely carapace.

A robot has no built-in fears
But can be brought to greasy tears
By the stripping of his gears.

II

A robot does not drink or smoke,
A robot does not crack a joke.

A robot's work is never done.
A robot has no time for fun.

A robot is not made for laughter—
He's too busy looking after.

III

A robot, when he stops to think,
May not make a sound
Or else, depending on his model,
While his wheels go round
He may rattle, he may clink
But only rarely yodel!

LEONARD WOLF

ROBERT ABERNATHY

History, despite the pretensions of some historians, is hardly an exact science—and perhaps for that very reason, it furnishes an unusually fascinating basis for speculative science fiction, for the logical intuition of a good fiction writer may provide conclusions as valuable as those of the academic scientist. Here is a new and frighteningly convincing aftermath of a Russo-American war, developed with an acute understanding of the people of both countries. Most Russians in current fiction are merely fashionably villainous straw men, constructed in complete ignorance of Russian culture and mores—as were the Germans in fiction of a dozen years ago. (I am often amused to read stories of the 1940s reprinted now with the black-hearted Nazis revised as black-hearted Communists to fit the current style in villains.) But Robert Abernathy, who holds a Ph.D. from Harvard in Slavic, has endeavored to portray a Russian who, according to the lights of his own culture, is a hero—in conflict with a representative American . . . and with a third force which lurks in history as heir to both warring civilizations.

Heirs Apparent

WARILY crouching, Bogomazov moved forward up the gentle slope. Above his head the high steppe-grass, the *kovýl'*, nodded its plumes in the chilly wind. He shivered.

All at once the wind brought again the wood-smoke smell, and his nostrils flared like a hunting animal's. With sudden recklessness he rose to his full height and looked eagerly across the grasslands that sloped to the river.

Down yonder, hugging the riverbank among scanty trees, was a cluster of crudely and newly built thatched huts. Bogomazov's hunger-keen eyes were quick to note the corral that held a few head of cattle, the pens that must mean poultry, as well as the brown swatches of plowed fields. The wanderer

licked his lips, and his hand, almost of itself, unbuttoned the holster at his hip and loosened the pistol there.

But he controlled his urge to plunge ahead; he sank down to concealment in the grass again, and his tactician's glance swept over the scene, studying approaches, seeking human figures, signs of guards and readiness. He saw none, but still he did not move; only the habit of extreme caution had kept him alive this long and enabled him to travel a thousand miles across the chaos that had been Russia.

Presently two small figures emerged from one of the huts and went unhurriedly to the chicken pens, were busy there for a time, and returned. Bogomazov relaxed; it was almost certain now that he had not been seen. At last he obeyed his rumbling stomach and resumed his advance, though indirectly so as to take advantage of the terrain, stalking the village.

He was a strange, skulking figure—Nikolai Nikolayevich Bogomazov, onetime Colonel of the Red Army and Hero of the Soviet Union; now ragged and half naked, face concealed by a scraggly growth of beard, hair slashed awkwardly short across the forehead to prevent its falling into his eyes. His shoes had gone to pieces long ago and the rags he had wrapped around his feet in their place had worn through, leaving him barefoot; he did not know how to make shoes of bark, peasant-style. His army trousers flapped in shreds around his bony shanks. The torn khaki shirt he wore was of American manufacture, a trophy of the great offensive two years earlier that had carried the Russian armies halfway across Europe and through the Near East into Africa . . . those had been the great days: before the bitter realization that it would never be enough to defeat Western armies; after the destruction of the great cities and industries, to be sure, but before the really heavy bombardments had begun. . . .

Bogomazov wormed his way forward, mouth watering, thinking of chickens.

He was close enough to his objective to hear contented poultry noises, and was thinking of how best to deal with the

plaited reeds of the enclosure, when a voice behind him cried startledly, "*Oho!*"

The stalker instinctively rolled to one side, his pistol in his hand; then he saw that the man who had shouted was some yards away and backing nervously toward the nearby hovels—a stocky, shabby figure, broad face richly bearded; most important, he had no weapon. Bogomazov came to a quick decision; sheathing his gun, he got to his feet and called sharply, "Halt!"

The other froze at the tone of command, and stared sullenly at the armed scarecrow confronting him. Farther off a door banged and there were footsteps hurrying nearer. Bogomazov watched without a tremor as a half dozen other men and boys approached and stopped beside the first man, as if he stood on an invisible line. A couple of them carried rifles, but the lone interloper did not flinch. Not for the first time, he was gambling everything on a bluff. And these were merely peasants.

"What place is this?" he demanded in the same crisp voice of authority.

"Novoselye," one answered hesitantly. "The New Settlement."

"I can see as much. Who is responsible here?"

"Wait a minute," rumbled the big bearded man who had first spotted him. "How about telling us who you are and what you want?" He shuffled uneasily from one foot to another as the stranger's cold eyes raked him, but succeeded in maintaining a halfhearted air of defiance.

"My name doesn't matter for the present," said Bogomazov slowly. "What does matter is that I am a Communist."

He felt and saw the stiffening, the electric rise of tension, the furtive crawling look that came into the score of eyes upon him; and outwardly Bogomazov was cool, relaxed, but inwardly he was like a coiled spring. His hand hovered unobtrusively close to the pistol butt.

This was the die-cast. He knew personally of too many cases

of Communists beaten, assassinated, lynched by those who should have followed their orders, during the storm of madness and despair on the heels of the great disasters, the storm that still went on. . . . Bogomazov had been too clever to be caught, just as he had been clever enough to realize in time, when three months ago the total breakdown of the civil authority had commenced to envelop the military as well, that in the north where he then was the northern winter now setting in would finish what the bombardments had begun. A thousand miles of southward trek lay behind him—from the lands where the blizzards would soon sweep in from Asia to blanket the blackened relics of the Old and New Russias, where the river Moskvá was making a new marsh of the immense shallow depression that had been the site of Moscow, where scarcely a dead tree, let alone a building, stood on all the plain that had once been ruled by Great Novgorod and greater Leningrad.

The man with the beard said warily, "What do you want of us . . . Comrade?"

Bogomazov let out his breath in an inaudible sigh. He said curtly, "Are there any Communists among you?"

"No, Comrade."

"Then who is responsible?"

They looked at one another uneasily. The spokesman gulped and stammered, "The . . . the American is responsible."

Bogomazov's composure was sorely tested. He frowned searchingly at the speaker, "You said—*amerikanets?*"

"Da, tovarishch."

Bogomazov took a deep breath and two steps toward them. "All right. Take me to this American . . . at once!"

The peasants faltered briefly, then moved to obey. As Bogomazov strode up the straggling village street in their midst, he was very much aware that a man with a rifle walked on either side of him—like a guard of honor or a prisoner's escort. Bogomazov left his holster flap unbuttoned. From the

hovels some women and children peered out to watch as they passed; a whisper fluttered from hut to hut: "*Kommunist prishól. . . .*"

They stopped in front of a shed, built roughly like the other buildings, of hand-hewn boards. From inside came a rhythmic clanging of metal, and when Bogomazov stepped boldly through the open doorway he was met by a hot blast of air. A stone forge glowed brightly, and a man turned from it, shirtless and sweating, hammer still raised above an improvised anvil.

As the blacksmith straightened, mopping his forehead, Bogomazov saw at first glance that he was in truth an American or at least a Westerner; he had the typical—and hated—features, the long narrow face and jaw, the prominent nose like the beak of some predatory bird, the lanky loose-jointed build. The Russian word *amerikanets* means not only "American," but also, as a slang expression, "man who gets things done, go-getter"; and it had passed through Bogomazov's mind that these peasants might have applied the term as a fanciful sort of title to some energetic leader risen from among them—but, no: the man before him was really one of the enemy.

With a smooth motion Bogomazov drew and leveled his pistol. He said, "You are under arrest in the name of the Soviet Government."

The other stared at his unkempt menacing figure with a curious grimace, as if he were undecided whether to laugh or cry. The pistol moved in a short, commanding arc; the hammer fell from opened fingers, thudding dully on the earthen floor.

Bogomazov sensed rather than saw the painful uncertainty of the armed men in the doorway; he didn't turn his head. "Keep your hands in sight," he ordered. "Stand over there." The man obeyed carefully; evidently he understood Russian.

"Now," said the Communist, "explain. What kind of infiltration have you been carrying on here?"

The American blinked at him, still wearing that ambiguous expression. He said mildly, his speech fluent though heavily

accented, "At the moment when I was so rudely interrupted, I was trying to beat part of a gun mounting into a plowshare. We put in the fall wheat with the old-style wooden plows; a couple of iron shares will make the spring sowing a lot easier and more rewarding, and we may even be able to break some more land this fall."

"Stop evading! I asked you . . . Wait." Feeling intuitively that the psychological moment had come, Bogomazov gestured brusquely at the men in the doorway. "You may go. I will call when you are needed."

They shuffled their feet, fingered the rifles they held, and melted away.

The American smiled wryly. "You know how to handle these people, don't you? . . . But I wish you'd quit pointing that gun now. You aren't going to shoot me in any case until after you've questioned me, and I wouldn't advise you to then. I'm not a very good blacksmith, I admit, but I am the only person here who knows anything about farm management . . . unless you happen to be a stray *agronóm*."

The Russian lowered the pistol and caressed its barrel with his other hand, his face expressionless. "Go on," he said. "I begin to see. You are a specialist who has turned his knowledge to account to obtain a position of leadership."

The other sighed. "You might say that, or you might say I was drafted. The original nucleus of this community was two light machine guns—abandoned after all the ammunition was used up in brushes with the *razbóiniki*. This group was footloose then; I persuaded them to strike south, since when winter came they'd have broken up or starved, and look for unblighted land to farm. As for me, I used to work for the United States Department of Agriculture; what I know about tractor maintenance doesn't do much good just now, but some of the rest is still applicable. I realized pretty early—after I walked away by myself from a crash landing near Tula—that my chances of survival alone, as an alien, would be practically zero. . . . My name, incidentally, is Leroy Smith—Smith

means *kuznéts*, but I never thought I'd revert so far to type," he added with a glance at the smoldering forge.

"Go on, Smeet," said Bogomazov, still fondling the gun. "What have you accomplished?"

The American gave him a perplexed look. "Well . . . these people here aren't a very choice bunch. About half of them were factory hands—proletarians, you know—who've had to learn from the ground up. The rest were mostly low-grade collective farm workers—fair to mediocre at carrying out the foreman's orders, but lost when it comes to figuring out what to do next. That, of course, is where I come in." He eyed the Russian speculatively. "And you, as a lone survivor, must have talents that Novoselye can use. We ought to be able to make a deal."

"I," said Bogomazov flatly, "am a Communist."

Smith's eyes narrowed. "Oh, oh," he murmured under his breath. "I should have known it—the way he bulled in here, the way——"

"There will be no deal. As a specialist, you are useful. You will continue to be useful. You will remember that you are serving the Soviet State; any irregularity, any sabotage or wrecking activities—*I* will punish." He hefted the pistol.

The American said wearily, "Don't you realize that the Soviet State, the Communist Party, the war—all that's over and done with, *kapút*? And America too, I suppose—the last I heard our whole industrial triangle was a radioactive bonfire and Washington had been annexed to Chesapeake Bay. Here we're a handful of survivors trying to go on surviving."

"The war is not over. Did you think you could start a war and call it quits when you became nauseated with it?"

"We didn't start it."

In the light of the forge Bogomazov's eyes glittered with a color that matched the metal of the weapon he held. "You capitalists made your fundamental mistake through vulgar materialism. You thought you could destroy Communism by destroying the capital, the wealth and industry and military

power we had built up as a base in the Soviet Union. You didn't realize that our real capital was always—ourselves, the Communists. That's why we will inherit the earth, now that your war has shattered the old world!"

Smith watched him talk with a sort of dazed fascination, and then, the spell breaking, smiled faintly. "Before you go about inheriting the earth, it will be necessary to worry about lasting out the winter."

"Naturally!" snapped Bogomazov. He stepped back to the doorway, and called, "You there! Come on in." He singled out one of the armed peasants. "You will stand guard, to see that this foreigner does not escape or commit any acts of sabotage, such as damaging tools. You will not listen to anything he may say. So long as he behaves properly, you will leave him strictly alone, understood?"

The man nodded violently. "Yes, Comrade."

"I am going to inspect the settlement. You, Smeet—back to making plowshares, and they had better be good!"

Winter closed down inexorably. Icy winds blew from the steppe—not the terrible fanged winds of the northern tundras, but freezing all the same; and on still days the smoke from the huts rose far into the bright frosty air, betraying the village's location to any chance marauders.

There was no help for that, but there was plenty of work to be done. Almost every day the forge was busy, and on the outskirts of Novoselye hammers rang, where new houses were going up to relieve the settlement's crowding. It would have been good to have a stockade, too; but on the almost treeless plain it had become necessary to go dangerously far to find usable timber.

Bogomazov, making one of his frequent circuits of the village in company with Ivanov, his silent and caninely devoted fellow Communist who had strayed in a few weeks after him, halted to watch the construction. The American Smith was lending a hand on the job—at the moment, he had paused

to show a former urban clerk how to use a hammer without bending precious nails.

Bogomazov watched for a minute in silence, then called, "Smeet!"

The American looked round, straightened and came toward them without haste. "What is it now?"

"I have been looking for you. Some of the cattle are sick; no one seems to know if it is serious. Do you know anything about veterinary medicine?"

"I've done a little cow doctoring—I was brought up on a farm. I'll take a look at them right away."

"Good." Watching the other turn to go, Bogomazov felt an uneasy though familiar surprise at the extent to which he and the settlement had come to rely on this outlander. Time and again, in greater or lesser emergencies calling for special skills, the only one who knew what to do—or the only one who would volunteer to try—had been this inevitable Smith.

There was an explanation for that, of course: from Smith's references to his prewar life in America, Bogomazov gathered that he had worked at one time or another at a remarkable variety of "specialties," moving from place to place and from job to job, in the chaotic capitalistic labor market, in a manner which would never have been tolerated in the orderly Soviet economic system. . . . As a result, he seemed to have done a little of everything and to know more than a little about everything.

And Bogomazov was aware that, behind his back, the villagers referred to the foreigner as "Comrade Specialist"—improperly giving him the title of honor, *tovarishch*, though he was not even a Soviet citizen, let alone a Party member. . . .

That train of thought was a reminder, and Bogomazov called, "Wait! Another matter, when you have time . . . I am told that the stove in Citizen Vrachov's hut will not draw."

Smith turned, smiling. "That's all right. Vrachov's wife complained to me about it, and I've already fixed the flue."

Bogomazov stiffened. "She should not have gone to you. She should have reported the matter to me first."

The American's smile faded. "Oh . . . discipline, eh?"

"Discipline is essential," said Bogomazov flatly. Ivanov, at his elbow, nodded emphatic agreement.

"I suppose it is." Smith eyed them thoughtfully. "I've got to admit that you've accomplished some things I probably couldn't have done—like redistributing the housing space and cooking up a system of rationing to take the village through the winter—and making it stick."

"You could not have done those things because you are not a Communist," said Bogomazov with energy. "You are used to the 'impossibilities' of a dying society; but we are strong in the knowledge that history is on our side. There is nothing that a real Bolshevik cannot achieve!"

Ivanov nodded again.

"History," Smith said reflectively, "is notorious for changing sides. I wonder if even a Bolshevik . . . But in the case of Vrachov's wife's chimney, your discipline seems rather petty."

The Russian drew visibly into himself. "Enough!" he said sharply. "You are to see to the cattle."

Smith shrugged slightly and turned away. "O.K.," he said. "*Volya vasha*—you're the boss."

A half-grown boy bolted headlong down the village street, feet ringing on the frost-hard ground. "*Razbóiniki!*" he shrieked. "*Razbo-o-oiniki!*"

At the feared cry—"Robbers!"—the inhabitants poured out of their dwellings like bees from a threatened hive, some snatching up axes, hoes, even sticks of firewood. No guns—one of Bogomazov's first acts after he had restored the Soviet authority in Novoselye had been to round up all the firearms, a motley collection of Russian and other makes, and store them safely in a stout shed under the protection of the village's only working padlock.

The villagers began to huddle together, hugging the shelter

of their houses and staring anxiously eastward, at the farther banks of the frozen river. The boy who had given the alarm ran among them, pointing. Everyone saw the little black figures, men and horses, moving yonder, pacing up and down the snow-covered shore; and a concerted groan went up as one mounted man ventured testingly out onto the ice and, evidently, found it strong enough.

To make things worse, the penned cattle, upset by the tumult, began bawling. That sound would carry clearly across the river, and would whet the appetites of the *razbóiniki.* The Novoselyane shivered, remembering all the tales of villages overrun and burned, the inhabitants driven off or slaughtered, remembering too their own collisions with such troops of marauders—remnants of revolted army units, of mobs that had escaped the cities' ruin, of dispersed Asian tribes—armed riff-raff swept randomly together from Heaven knew where, *iz-zá granítsy,* from beyond the frontiers even. . . .

These *razbóiniki* were plainly numerous, and plainly, too, they were coming. Perhaps a hundred men, half of them mounted, were in sight, and on the skyline beyond the river the sharper-sighted glimpsed wagons, probably ox-drawn. The enemy were well organized, not merely casual looters. The Novoselyane gripped their improvised weapons—vaguely, frightenedly determined to show fight, but withal no more than sheep for the slaughter. A hulking young ex-factory worker mourned aloud, "*Bozhe moi,* if we only still had the machine guns. . . ."

Then Bogomazov came striding down the street, flinging commands right and left as he went, commands that sent the villagers scurrying into an approximation of a defense line. He swore bitterly, wrestling with the frozen padlock on the shed where the guns had been stored; he got it open, and, together with Ivanov, began to run up and down the line passing out rifles and strict orders not to use them until word was given.

The mounted *razbóiniki* were approaching at a walk, in an uneven skirmish line across the ice.

Smith stood watching, hands tucked for warmth—he owned no mittens—into the pockets of the tattered flight jacket he still clung to. As Bogomazov hurried past, cradling a sniper's rifle equipped with telescopic sights, Smith remarked, "I used to be a pretty fair shot——"

"Keep out of the way!" snapped the Communist. He dropped to all fours, crept out onto the open slope beyond the row of houses, and lay sighting carefully. Behind the line Ivanov scurried from point to point, repeating the orders: "Hold your fire, and when you do shoot, aim for the horses in front. They have fewer horses than men; and if an enemy can once be persuaded that the front line is too dangerous, he will shortly have no front line. . . ."

The hollow sound of the hooves came nearer, clear in the hush. Then Bogomazov's rifle cracked, and the lead horse reared, throwing its rider; the ice gave way beneath its hind feet, and it floundered. Guns began going off all along the line of houses as Bogomazov came wriggling back. The horsemen on the ice scattered, trotting and crouching low in the saddles, returning the fire. Bullets ricocheted screaming through the village, ripping splinters from walls and roofs.

Some of the *razbóiniki* were busied dragging their wounded or foundered comrades and their mounts back toward the farther shore, but off to the right a handful of horsemen broke into a reckless gallop across the groaning ice, making determinedly for the low bank above the village. Bogomazov, rifle slung, started in that direction, beckoning some of the defenders from the firing line and bellowing to the others: "Fire only at the ones still coming! Save your cartridges!"

The *razbóiniki* made the shore and bore down on Novoselye's flank, whooping, urging their unkempt ponies to a dead run. They were heading for the corral, hoping to smash the stockade around it and drive the cattle off; but when they were almost upon their objective bullets started snapping among them. One man spun from his saddle and went rolling along the frozen ground, and a horse sprawled headlong, pin-

ning its rider. The others' nerve broke, and they wheeled and fled.

Bogomazov walked out, pistol ready, to inspect the casualties. The man who had been hit was already dead. Bogomazov fired twice with cool precision, finishing first the gasping, lung-shot horse and then the rider who lay stunned beneath it.

He told his men, "They may attack repeatedly. We will establish watches."

But the *razbóiniki* had had enough. After an anxious hour of watching the movements on the far side of the river, the villagers became aware that the enemy, horse, foot, and wagons, had reassembled in marching order and was streaming away southward. The Novoselyane laughed, wept with relief, and embraced one another; someone did an impromptu clog dance in the street.

Bogomazov entered the sooty one-room dwelling which, because of his occupancy, was known as the *nachál'naya izbá*, the "primary hut." He breathed the warm close air gratefully, beginning to shed his mittens and padded coat. Then he stopped short as he saw Smith warming his hands by the stove, a rifle slung over his shoulder. "Where did you get that?"

The American grinned. "One of the proletariat developed combat fatigue about ten seconds after the shooting started, so I filled in."

Bogomazov hesitated imperceptibly, then thrust his hand out. "Give it to me."

Slowly Smith unslung the weapon and handed it over. Bogomazov unloaded it, stuffed the cartridges into his pocket, opened the door of the *izbá* and called to a passing boy, "Here. You are responsible for delivering this rifle to Comrade Ivanov."

The youth hugged the rifle to him, looking adoringly at Bogomazov. "Yes, sir, Comrade General!"

Bogomazov started to speak, checked himself, and closed the door.

"So you're putting the guns under lock and key again."

"Naturally. Ivanov is attending to that now."

The American raised an eyebrow quizzically. "In my country's Constitution there is, or used to be, a provision safeguarding the people's right to keep and bear arms."

"The Soviet Constitution contains no such provision."

"Today, though, we might have been overrun and massacred if the enemy had approached less openly, and hadn't been seen in time for you to break out the guns."

Bogomazov sank wearily onto a bench by the fire and began unwinding the rags that served him as leggings. He said heavily, "*Mister* Smeet, you are neither a Russian nor a Communist, and you do not understand these people as I do. You had better leave administration to me, and devote yourself to those matters which you are expert in. . . . How is your work with the radio?"

Smith shook his head impatiently. "Nothing there—I can't raise any signals, maybe because there aren't any. . . . But the question of the guns is a secondary one. The main thing is—what are we going to do now?"

The Russian eyed him wonderingly. "What do you mean?"

"I came here to speak to you because the attack today confirmed a suspicion that's been growing on me for some time, ever since the first bandits raided through here in November. . . . Did you notice the organization these *razbóiniki* seemed to have? They were fairly well disciplined; they attacked from and fell back on a mobile camp, with wagons no doubt carrying their women and children, and with driven cattle. The population of their whole camp must be two or three times that of Novoselye."

"So? We beat them off. You saw that they proceeded south; the winter is too much for them, whereas we will sit it out snugly in our houses, so long as order is maintained and rations are conserved."

"But they'll be back in the spring."

"Perhaps. If so, we will be stronger by then."

"How stronger? We've very little rifle ammunition left, and before the spring crop comes in there's going to be trouble with malnutrition."

"The marauders are subject to the same troubles. In Lipy, only fifty kilometers from here, there is a man who knows how to make gunpowder."

"I could make gunpowder, for that matter—but damned if I know where to find any sulfur. . . . You miss the point. The signs of organization we saw indicate that these people, wherever they came from originally, have succeeded in taking to a nomadic way of life—a permanently roving existence. They'll be on us again next spring, without 'perhaps.'"

Bogomazov shrugged impatiently. "So, there are dangers. I am not losing sight of them. You had better concentrate on trying to establish radio communication."

The American said hotly, "You're still blind to what this development means! You . . . Well, before this war some of our Western 'bourgeois' historians—naturally you wouldn't have read their writings—saw human history as a long struggle between two basically different ways of life, the two main streams of social evolution: Civilization and Nomadism. Civilization is a way of life based on agriculture—principally cereal crops—on fixed places of habitation, on comparatively stable social patterns whose highest form is the state. Nomadism, on the other hand, has as its economic foundation not fields, but herds; geographically, it rests not on settlements, villages, towns, cities, but on perpetual migration from pasture to pasture; socially, its typical higher form of organization is not the state, but the horde.

"Since written history began the boundary between Civilization and Nomadism has swayed back and forth as one or the other gained local advantage; but in general, during the historic period—really a very small part of the whole past of humanity—Civilization has been on the offensive. The last great onslaught from the nomad world was in the twelfth century—the Mongol conquests, which swept through this very

region and brought about the period that your historians call the Tartar Yoke. By the eighteenth century the counterattack of Civilization had been so successful that the historian Gibbon—another bourgeois you probably haven't read—could rejoice that 'cannon and fortifications' had made Europe forever secure against any more such invasions. It looked as if Nomadism was through, due to disappear altogether. . . . But Civilization went on to invent the means of destroying itself: weapons indefinitely effective against the fixed installations that civilized life depends on, but of little consequence to the rootless nomad.

"And now—where are your cannon, your fortifications, your coal mines and steel mills, your nitrogen-fixing and sulfuric-acid plants? When you discount these raiders as nuisances, you're still living in a world that just died a violent death. We no longer have the whole of Civilization backing us up; we're on our own!"

Bogomazov had listened with half-shut eyes, soaking up the fire's warmth. "Then you think Civilization is finished?"

"No! But I think that what's left of it will have to fall back and regroup. You and we, the Americans and Russians—we fought our war for the control of Civilization, and very nearly wrecked it in the process; but on both sides we were and are on the side of Civilization. That's what counts now. . . . What's our situation here? According to the scanty liaison we've achieved, there are a number of other settlements like this up and down the river, scattered seeds trying to take root again. From the east, toward the Caspian, there's no news at all, and westward, in the Ukraine, reports tell of nothing but wandering bands—the blights the planes spread interdicted agriculture throughout that region for some years to come.

"In spring the *razbóiniki* will be on us again—and perhaps in the meantime their fragmentary groups will have coalesced into bigger and more formidable hordes. With their rediscovered technique of nomadic life, they'll be expanding into the vacuum created by the internal collapse of the

civilized world, as the Huns and their kindred did when the Roman Empire fell. . . . I think we have no choice but to migrate west as soon as the spring crop is in. This country here can no longer be held for Civilization; for one thing it's too badly devastated, and for another it's all one huge plain, natural nomad country. The Eurasian plain extends through northern Europe, clear across Germany and France; we should move south to look for a more favorable geography. It might be possible to make a stand in the Crimea, but it's said the radioactivity is very bad there; either the Balkans or Italy, with their mountains, should probably be our ultimate objective."

Bogomazov sat up straight, looking hard at Smith. He frowned. "You are suggesting—that Russia be abandoned to the *razbóiniki*?"

"Exactly. That will be the result in any case: I'm suggesting that we save ourselves while we've got time."

The Communist's eyes narrowed, with a peculiar glitter; he was motionless and silent for a moment, then he barked with humorless laughter. "You want to lecture a Marxist on history! I know history. Do you know that this is the very region where took place the events told in the *Tale of Igor's Host;* the same region where Prince Dmitri Donskói overthrew the Golden Horde? And you tell me to retreat from a handful of bandits! Do you know——"

"I don't see what the bygone glories of Holy Russia have to do either with Marxism or with preserving Civilization," Smith interrupted dryly.

The other rose to his feet, rocking on them like an undersized but infuriated bear, and glared hotly at the American's lanky figure. He shouted, "Will you be quiet, before I——"

The door slammed open, letting in a cold blast, and in it stood Ivanov breathing hard. He gasped, "Comrade Bogomazov! There are two rifles missing!"

In a flash Bogomazov was himself again, reaching for his coat. "Two? I'll investigate, and whoever is trying to hide——"

"Beg pardon, Comrade Bogomazov, but it's worse than that. Vasya and Mishka-the-Frog—that is, Citizens Rudin and Bagryanov—are gone with the rifles."

"The young fools . . ." Bogomazov plunged through the doorway, still struggling into his coat. Smith followed more slowly; when he caught up, the Communist was in the center of a knot of villagers, furiously interrogating a shawl-wrapped old woman who was bitterly weeping.

"Where did they go? Which way?" demanded Bogomazov.

The old woman, mother of one of the missing youths, only sniffled repeatedly: "*Ushlí v razbóiniki* . . . they went to the robbers. . . ."

The Communist wheeled from her in disgust, fists clenching uselessly at his sides. Smith said conversationally, "You'll never catch them now. There you see the effect of another weapon in Nomadism's arsenal."

"What in the devil's name are you talking about?"

"Psychological warfare. Those young fellows, finding guns in their hands and adventure in their hearts, deserted Civilization and its dreary chores for a more romantic-looking life."

Bogomazov grunted angrily, "Ideological nonsense! Russians have always run off to join the robbers. It's in their nature."

"Exactly. As boys in my country used to head West in hopes of becoming cowboys. I wonder what's happening in the American West now. . . . Men have always tended to rebel against civilized restraints and hanker after the nomad's free, picturesque existence; and when the restraints are loosened, they may bolt."

"We can do without that pair. And you——" Bogomazov eyed the American stonily and spoke with deliberate emphasis. "You'll not repeat these notions of yours to anyone else—understood?" Without awaiting any response, he turned on his heel and stalked away toward the *nachál'naya izbá*.

Smith gazed somberly after him, knowing that further argu-

ment would be useless. The decision was made—to stand and fight it out here.

Spring came with the thunderous breakup of the river ice, with the sluicing of thawed water that made the prairie a trackless wilderness of mud for a time, with the pushing of new green everywhere on the vast rolling plains and, less densely, in the fields that last fall had been so painfully broken and seeded.

Spring came with foreboding, that somehow waxed apace with the hope that returning green life wakens in all living. Smith had kept his ideas to himself; but the Novoselyane whispered among themselves. Those who had been city dwellers had nothing but a formless and unfocused fear of the great windy spaces, the silences, the night noises of birds and water creatures along the marshy river brim; but the peasants had their immemorial stories, raised up from the depths of a tradition as deep as race memory, given new and frightening meanings. Over their heads had come and gone serfdom, emancipation, serfdom again under the name of collectivization, and finally the apocalyptic swallowing up of the world of cities that they had never quite understood or trusted . . . and they remembered other things.

They knew that in the old days the greening swells beyond the river had been the edge of the world, the Tartar steppe, out of which the khans had ridden to see the Russian princes grovel and bring tribute before the horse-tail standards. The grandiose half-finished works of the Fifth Five-Year Plan were strewn wreckage there now, and it came to their mind that perhaps it was the Tartar steppe again. They remembered the ancient sorrows of the Slavs, the woes that are told in the Russian Primary Chronicle. They spoke darkly of the Horde of Mamai, which in Russian speech has passed into proverbs; and of the *obry*, whose name now means "ogres," but who historically were the nomad Avars, that took to herding human cattle even into the heart of Europe. . . .

When the Communists were not watching them, they studied signs in the flight of migrating birds and the cries of night fowl. Somehow all the portents were evil.

There were more tangible reasons for alarm. News filtered in of settlements downriver raided and laid waste by wandering bands, whose numbers and ferocity no doubt grew mightily in the telling. Bogomazov succeeded in suppressing or minimizing most of these reports, but not all, nor could trailing smoke smudges in the southern sky one bright afternoon be concealed. . . .

Bogomazov sensed the slow rise of dark superstitious fear around him, and he moved about the village, the faithful Ivanov trotting at his heels, scolding, coaxing, exhorting, all to scant avail; to combat the villagers' fears was like wrestling with an amorphous thing in a nightmare. Once upon a time a local administrator could have reached for the telephone and conjured up an impressive caravan of Party officials in shiny automobiles, with uniforms, medals and manners which would leave the yokels for many weeks incapable of saying anything but "Yes, Comrade." Or he might have pointed to airplanes droning across the sky as visible signs of the omnipotence of the Soviet State. But now there was no telephone, and all that flew was the migrant birds, passing northward day after day as if fleeing from some terror in the south.

"We are on our own now," thought Bogomazov, then scowled as he remembered that the American had said it.

The end came suddenly.

Smith had gone out with half a dozen peasants to inspect the growing wheat. All at once they looked up and saw, across the narrow width of a field, a little group of horsemen, no more than their own number, quietly sitting their shaggy ponies, watching. How they had come up so silently and unseen was a mystery; it was as if the world had changed to that fairy-tale plenum of possibilities in which armed bands spring up from seed sown in the earth.

These watchers carried a bizarre mixture of modern and primitive armament; some had rifles, but cavalry sabers dangled against their thighs, and some bore spears whose hammered iron points flashed in the sun.

The two parties were motionless, confronting one another for a minute or two like strangers from different worlds. Then the interlopers wheeled about without haste and trotted away over a rise.

"Come on!" said Smith quietly, and set out at a run for the village.

Bogomazov, face impassive, heard the news that the danger was again upon them. He produced his key and opened the padlocked shed door—and stood frozen in dismay, for the shed was empty. Someone had employed the winter's leisure to tunnel under a side wall and remove all the guns.

"Who did this?" shouted the Communist at the villagers assembling in the square.

"Not I, Comrade . . ."

"It wasn't I, Comrade . . ."

Uniformly, the peasant faces reflected the transparent guilt of naughty children.

"Very well!" said Bogomazov bitterly. "You're all in it. You've stolen the guns and hidden them, in the thatch, under the floor, no matter where. But now, bring them out—do you hear?"

They stirred uneasily, but did not move to obey.

"Apparently," said a sardonic voice, "the Soviet Constitution has been amended."

"You! . . . Were *you* behind this thievery?"

"Certainly not," said Smith. "They don't trust me too far either—they have a hazy notion that I'm one of your kind, one of the rulers they hate but haven't learned to do without."

He swung around and said, without raising his voice, to the men nearest: "You've taken the guns for your own protection —if you intend to use them that way, now's the time. The main body of the *razbóiniki* won't be far behind the scouting

party we saw. Do you propose to defend yourselves, the houses you've built and the fields you've plowed?"

They murmured among themselves, and began to drift off by twos and threes. Presently men were emerging from all the huts, awkwardly carrying the missing rifles.

It was all of a taut hour before they had sight again of the enemy, but for a good part of that hour they heard the mournful creaking of wagons in the steppe, out of view beyond the higher ground. The sound was disembodied, sourceless, seeming to come from nowhere and everywhere.

The men of Novoselye clustered in uneasy groups, waiting, fingering their weapons unsteadily. Bogomazov took charge, ordering them here and there, lashing the village into a posture of defense; they obeyed him, but halfheartedly, with the look of dumb driven cattle on their faces.

One moment there was no sign of the foe save for the creaking of unseen wheels. The next, a dozen mounted figures were briefly silhouetted along the skyline, dipped down the green wave of the grassy slope toward the fields, and were followed by others and yet others, till—to eyes wavering in beginning panic—the whole hillside seemed sliding down in an avalanche of men and horses.

"Steady!" snapped Bogomazov. "Hold your fire——"

Abruptly one man let his rifle fall and turned, sobbing, to flee; it was Ivanov, the other Communist. Bogomazov intercepted him in two long strides and felled him with a full-armed blow, the pistol weighting his hand.

"Get up, get back to your post!" he spat into the dazed and bloody face.

But the villagers had already begun to fall back down the street, in a concerted tide of fear that threatened momentarily to become a total rout.

Smith, looming conspicuous by his height among them, shouted in a carrying voice, "*Don't drop your guns!* We'll make a stand in the square!" The American materialized at Bogomazov's side and wrenched urgently at his arm, drag-

ging him, dazed with fury and disappointment, after the retreating mob. "Come on! If we can hold the men together for a few minutes, maybe we can still rally them."

The *razbóiniki* were jogging across the planted ground, trampling ruthlessly over the new wheat. From the street's other end rose a cry, "Here they come!" and almost simultaneously someone screamed and pointed across the river, where a third troop had come into view on the opposite bank, as if posted to cut off the last possible escape.

As the invaders, with jingling bridles and clattering hooves, swept from two sides into Novoselye, its able-bodied inhabitants huddled in the square; those who still clutched their weapons and those without wore the same look of hopeless waiting for an expected blow.

The *razbóiniki* closed in cautiously. Their leader, a squat leathery-looking man with a wide Kalmyk face, rode near; he reined in and looked down expressionlessly—at the Novoselyane. He said loudly, in stumbling Russian, "We—not want kill you. You give up—we burn village, go. Be peace." He repeated, "Peace!" watching for their response with almost a benevolent air, the while he tightened the strap of his slung rifle—it was his most prized possession, a German rifle that could hit targets at a thousand yards, and he had no intention of wasting his few remaining cartridges in close fighting. An old saber hung loose in its sheath at his side.

Smith pushed forward and spoke slowly and distinctly: "We too desire peace, between your people and ours. Why should we fight and waste lives, when so few are left after the great war? You are wanderers, we farm the land—only a little of the land, so there is room for both of us."

He watched the stolid Asiatic face keenly for any hint of response. Did the *razbóinik* leader realize that the villagers wouldn't fight, that—so far as this outpost was concerned—the resistance of Civilization was at an end?

"Village—bad," the Kalmyk declared, with unhelpful gestures. "Build houses, plow land—then, *boom!* No good . . ."

He gave up, and half turned in the saddle, beckoning to a young man with Slavic features. The latter advanced a couple of paces, and said glibly in Russian:

"The *vozhd'* means that it is dangerous to live in towns. If people live in towns, sooner or later the American bombers come, many are killed and others sickened with burns and bowels turning to water; the death blows even across the steppes and kills animals and men. . . . We cannot allow you to live in such danger. So we will burn this town, and in return for the favor we do you we will take only half the cattle, and such ammunition as you may have that will fit the guns we possess; for the rest, you may keep your arms and movable property, and go freely where you like. Whoever may wish to join us is welcome."

"Your terms are too hard," said Smith steadily. "And you——"

He was interrupted. Bogomazov, pale with determination, thrust him aside and shouted in a voice of command, "That man is a traitor to the motherland! Citizens, follow me!"

The pistol in his hand roared, but in the instant as he aimed the young spokesman had thrown himself flat over his horse's neck. Simultaneously the Kalmyk leader leaned far out of the saddle, and his saber descended like a silent flash of lightning.

The villagers on one side, the raiders on the other, stared unmoving, unmoved, at the fallen man. Smith bent over him, almost under the nervously dancing feet of the Kalmyk's pony.

Bogomazov made a great effort to rise, and failed. His eyes looked unfocusedly up into the American's face; his expression was one of incredulity.

He strove to speak, choking on blood. Smith leaned close, and thought he understood the dying man's last words, uttered with that look of dazed wonder: "*Even a Bolshevik . . .*"

The nomad spokesman rode forward again, red in the face, and shouted fiercely, "Are there any more dissenters?"

Smith stood up and faced them. The game was lost and the enemy knew it now, but he still had to try the last card

he possessed. He said tensely, "You are mistaken. The American bombers aren't coming any more."

"How can you know?"

"Because I myself am an American."

There was a dead hush, in which Smith heard clearly the noise of a carbine's hammer being drawn back. The Kalmyk's slanted eyes rested inscrutably upon him. Then the man grinned under his straggling mustache, and said something, a rapid string of Asiatic syllables.

"The *vozhd'* says: 'That may or may not be true. To him you seem to be a man much like other men.' "

"But——" Smith began.

"*But* we're taking no chances. We burn the village in half an hour; you have that long to assemble your goods. Those who wish to move on with us will signify by gathering in the field yonder. *Kryshka*—that's all!"

Smith let his hands fall to his sides. Some of the villagers had already begun to drift toward the indicated assembly point.

Some way out in the steppe there was a *kurgán*, an ancient grass-grown burial mound of some forgotten people. Civilizations, wars and disasters had passed it by and it was the same. It was the highest point for many miles. From it Smith watched the glowing embers of the New Settlement.

All around was the plain, immense and darkening in the spring twilight. Thousands of miles, months of footsore march, it must be to reach any place where there would be a doubtful security and a chance to begin anew. Time and space—once man had conquered them, but now man was a rare animal again in a world where time and space mocked him. Smith wondered: Would they be conquered again in his own lifetime, or that of his grandchildren? Bogomazov had been lucky in a way; his training had enabled him to disbelieve what he knew to be true, so that he had never been forced to recognize

the meaning of what had happened—or had he, there at the end?

In the west the horizon was empty, or at least his eyes could no longer make out against the sunset the black specks of the westward-marching horde. About half of the uprooted villagers had gone with it—with few exceptions, those who had come originally from the cities, the factories; the peasants remained. They were encamped now about the ancient mound.

Behind Smith a voice asked plaintively, "Comrade American—what will we do? Some of us think we should go on south, toward . . ."

"Don't bother me now!" Smith said harshly; then, as the man drew back abashed: "Tomorrow . . . we'll see, tomorrow."

The retreating feet were soundless on the grassy slope. Down by the river the last sparks were dying. Somewhere far off in the steppe shuddered a mournful cry that Smith did not know—perhaps it was the howl of a wolf. In the west the light faded, and night fell with the darkness sweeping on illimitable wings out of Asia.

ARTHUR PORGES

Mr. Porges makes a point that other chroniclers of gods and men seem to have overlooked; i.e., the favors of even a bargain basement little deity can be of an intrinsic value far greater than that specified by their mundane price tag.

$1.98

THAT morning Will Howard was taking a Sunday stroll through the woods, a pleasure which lately had been shared and intensified by Rita Henry. Not even the bright sun, the bracing air, the unique song of a canyon wren, could lighten Will's dark thoughts. Right now she was out riding with Harley Thompson at an exclusive country club. Will couldn't blame her. Harley was six feet two, a former Princeton tackle; ruggedly handsome, full of pleasant small talk; the young-executive-with-a-big-future. And he, Will Howard, a skinny, tongue-tied fellow——

At that moment he felt something tug feebly at one trouser cuff, and looked down to see a tiny field mouse pawing frantically at the cloth. Gaping, Will studied the palpitating animal, completely baffled by such strange behavior on the part of so timid a creature. Then the springy, leaping form of a weasel, implacable, fearless even of man, appeared on the trail.

Quickly Will scooped the terrified rodent into one palm. The weasel stopped, making a nasty, chikkering sound, eyes red in the triangular mask of ferocity that was its face. For a heartbeat it seemed about to attack its giant opponent, but as Will stepped forward, shouting, the beast, chattering with rage, undulated off the path.

"You poor little devil," Will addressed the bright-eyed bit of fur in his hand. A crooked smile touched his lips. "You

didn't have a chance—just like me and Thompson!" Stooping, he deposited it gently in the underbrush. Then he stared, his jaw dropping. In place of the mouse, there appeared suddenly a chubby, Buddha-like being, some two inches tall. Actually, as measurement would have revealed, it stood precisely one and ninety-eight hundredths inches.

In a voice which although faint was surprisingly resonant, the figure said: "Accept, O kindly mortal, the grateful thanks of Eep, the God. How can I reward you for saving me from that rapacious monster?"

Will gulped, but being an assiduous reader of Dunsany and Collier, he recovered promptly. "You—you're a god!" he stammered.

"I am indeed a god," the being replied complacently. "Once every hundred years, as a punishment for cheating in chess, I become a mouse briefly—but no doubt you've read similar accounts to the point of excessive boredom. Suffice it to say, you intervened just in time. Now I'm safe for another century—unless, of course, I succumb to temptation again and change a pawn to a bishop. It's hard to resist," he confided, "and helps one's end game immensely."

Will thought of Harley Thompson, the heel that walked like a man. The fellow who laughed at fantasy, who ribbed him for reading the *Magazine of Not-Yet but Could-Be*. Well he knew that behind Thompson's personable exterior was a ruthless, self-seeking, egotistical brute. Rita could never be happy with a man like that. Here was a chance to gain his first advantage over Harley. With the help of a grateful god, much could be achieved. That Dunsany knew the score, all right. Maybe three wishes—but that was tricky. Better let the god himself choose. . . .

"You mentioned a—a reward," he said diffidently.

"I certainly did," the god assured him, swinging on a dandelion stem and kicking minute bare feet luxuriously. "But, alas, only a small one. I am, as you see, a very small god."

"Oh," Will said, rather crestfallen. Then brightening: "May

I suggest that a *small* fortune—?" Truly the presence of an immortal was sharpening his wits.

"Of course. But it would have to be exceedingly small. I couldn't go above $1.98."

"Is that all?" Will's voice was heavy with disappointment.

"I'm afraid it is. We minor gods are always pinched for funds. Perhaps a different sort of gift——"

"Say," Will interrupted. "How about a diamond? After all, one the size of a walnut is actually a small object, and——"

"I'm sorry," the god said regretfully. "It would have to be tiny even for a diamond. One worth, in fact, $1.98."

"Curse it!" Will groaned. "There must be something small——"

"There should be," the little god agreed good-naturedly. "Anything I can do, up to $1.98, just ask me."

"Maybe a small earthquake," Will suggested, without much enthusiasm. "I could predict it in advance. Then perhaps Rita——"

"A small earthquake, yes," Eep replied. "I could manage that. But it would be the merest temblor. Doing, I remind you, damage only to the amount of $1.98."

Will sighed. "You sound like a bargain basement," he protested.

"Of course," the god mused aloud, as if sincerely seeking a solution, "by taking the money in a different currency—say lira—it would *seem* like more; but the value would actually be the same."

"I give up," Will said. Then, in a more kindly voice, as Eep looked embarrassed, "Don't feel too bad. I know you'd like to help. It's not your fault that money's so tight." Glumly he added: "Maybe you'll think of something yet. I'm selling now, or trying to—I'm not much of a salesman. Once the client sold *me* his office furniture. But if you could arrange a good sale——"

"It would bring in only $1.98."

"That wouldn't be easy," Will told him, smiling wryly.

"Right now I'm handling diesel locomotives, office buildings and abandoned mines. And I'm vice-president in charge of dry oil wells."

"Any luck so far?" the little god demanded, kicking a grasshopper, which soared off indignantly.

"I almost sold an abandoned copper mine to a wealthy Californian for an air-raid shelter, but Thompson nosed me out—again. He showed him how one gallery in another mine could be made into the longest—and safest—bar in the world. It killed my sale; the man bought Thompson's mine for $67,000. That infernal Harley!" he exclaimed. "I wouldn't mind his getting the supervisor's job instead of me; I'm no good at giving orders, anyhow. Or his stealing my best customers. Even his lousy practical jokes. But when it comes to Rita—! Just when she was beginning to know I'm alive," he added bitterly.

"Rita?" the god queried.

"Rita Henry—she works in our office. A wonderful girl. So sweet, so—alive, and with the most marvelous greenish eyes——"

"I see," Eep said, thumbing his nose at a hovering dragonfly.

"That's why I could use a little help. So do what you can, although it can't help much with a ceiling of——"

"—$1.98," the god completed his sentence firmly. "I shall spend the afternoon and evening here contemplating the place where my navel would be if I were not supernatural. Trust the Great (although small) God Eep. Farewell." He walked into the grass.

Much too depressed for any amusement, Will spent the evening at home, and at eleven went gloomily to bed, convinced that a mere $1.98 worth of assistance, even from a god, was unlikely to solve his problem.

In spite of such forebodings, he was tired enough from nervous strain to fall asleep at once, only to be awakened half an hour later by a timid rapping at the apartment door.

Blearily, a robe over his pajamas, he answered it, to find Rita standing on the threshold. She gave him a warm smile that was bright with promise.

"Rita!" he gasped. "Wha—?"

One finger on her lips, she slipped in, closing the door softly behind her. Then she was in his arms, her lips urgent, her body melting.

"Rita," Will murmured, "at last . . ."

She gazed up at him. Was there just a hint of puzzlement, of bewilderment in those green eyes? "Something just seemed to force me . . . I had to come. . . ." She took his hand and led him to the bedroom. There, in the warm darkness, he heard the whispery rustle of silk. "I had to come," Rita said again. "We're right for each other . . . I know. . . ."

The bed creaked and, on reaching out one yearning hand, Will touched skin like sun-warmed satin.

The next morning, when she picked up the wispy panties from the floor where they had been tossed in flattering haste, a scrap of paper dropped from the black nylon.

Wondering, Will picked it up. It was a newspaper clipping. Someone had written in the margin in a tiny, flowing script: "A gratuity from the grateful (up to $1.98) God Eep."

The clipping itself, a mere filler, read: "At present prices, the value of the chemical compounds which make up the human body is only $1.98."

POUL ANDERSON

"Chessplayers don't like fantasy," says the boy-genius Timothy Paul, in Wilmar Shiras' classic In Hiding, *"and nobody else likes chess." Well, this thesis has been pretty thoroughly disproved by the enthusiasm of both chessplayers and fantasy readers for several stories in F&SF; but I'm still in sympathy with Timothy's other contention, that "in* THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS, *it wasn't a very good chess game, and you couldn't see the relation of the moves to the story." Even as a devout Carrollian, I have felt with Timothy that The Chess-Game Story still needed to be written; and now Poul Anderson, bless him, has done it, combining a first-rate game, a touch of science fiction and his own incomparable romantic sweep into a tragic epic in which the chessboard becomes transmuted into Matthew Arnold's "darkling plain, swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight."*

The Immortal Game

THE first trumpet sounded far and clear and brazen cold, and Rogard the Bishop stirred to wakefulness with it. Lifting his eyes, he looked through the suddenly rustling, murmuring line of soldiers, out across the broad plain of Cinnabar and the frontier, and over to the realm of LEUKAS.

Away there, across the somehow unreal red-and-black distances of the steppe, he saw sunlight flash on armor and caught the remote wild flutter of lifted banners. *So it is war,* he thought. *So we must fight again.*

Again? He pulled his mind from the frightening dimness of that word. Had they ever fought before?

On his left, Sir Ocher laughed aloud and clanged down the vizard on his gay young face. It gave him a strange, inhuman look, he was suddenly a featureless thing of shining metal and nodding plumes, and the steel echoed in his voice: "Ha, a

fight! Praise God, Bishop, for I had begun to fear I would rust here forever."

Slowly, Rogard's mind brought forth wonder. "Were you sitting and thinking—before now?" he asked.

"Why——" Sudden puzzlement in the reckless tones: "I think I was. . . . Was I?" Fear turning into defiance: "Who cares? I've got some LEUKANS to kill!" Ocher reared in his horse till the great metallic wings thundered.

On Rogard's right, Flambard the King stood, tall in crown and robes. He lifted an arm to shade his eyes against the blazing sunlight. "They are sending DIOMES, the royal guardsman, first," he murmured. "A good man." The coolness of his tone was not matched by the other hand, its nervous plucking at his beard.

Rogard turned back, facing over the lines of Cinnabar to the frontier. DIOMES, the LEUKAN King's own soldier, was running. The long spear flashed in his hand, his shield and helmet threw back the relentless light in a furious dazzle, and Rogard thought he could hear the clashing of iron. Then that noise was drowned in the trumpets and drums and yells from the ranks of Cinnabar, and he had only his eyes.

DIOMES leaped two squares before coming to a halt on the frontier. He stopped then, stamping and thrusting against the Barrier which suddenly held him, and cried challenge. A muttering rose among the cuirassed soldiers of Cinnabar, and spears lifted before the flowing banners.

King Flambard's voice was shrill as he leaned forward and touched his own guardsman with his scepter. "Go, Carlon! Go to stop him!"

"Aye, sire." Carlon's stocky form bowed, and then he wheeled about and ran, holding his spear aloft, until he reached the frontier. Now he and DIOMES stood face to face, snarling at each other across the Barrier, and for a sick moment Rogard wondered what those two had done, once in an evil and forgotten year, that there should be such hate between them.

"Let me go, sire!" Ocher's voice rang eerily from the slit-eyed mask of his helmet. The winged horse stamped on the hard red ground, and the long lance swept a flashing arc. "Let me go next."

"No, no, Sir Ocher." It was a woman's voice. "Not yet. There'll be enough for you and me to do, later in this day."

Looking beyond Flambard, the Bishop saw his Queen, Evyan the Fair, and there was something within him which stumbled and broke into fire. Very tall and lovely was the gray-eyed Queen of Cinnabar, where she stood in armor and looked out at the growing battle. Her sun-browned young face was coifed in steel, but one rebellious lock blew forth in the wind, and she brushed at it with a gauntleted hand while the other drew her sword snaking from its sheath. "Now may God strengthen our arms," she said, and her voice was low and sweet. Rogard drew his cope tighter about him and turned his mitered head away with a sigh. But there was a bitter envy in him for Columbard, the Queen's Bishop of Cinnabar.

Drums thumped from the LEUKAN ranks, and another soldier ran forth. Rogard sucked his breath hissingly in, for this man came till he stood on DIOMES' right. And the newcomer's face was sharp and pale with fear. There was no Barrier between him and Carlon.

"To his death," muttered Flambard between his teeth. "They sent that fellow to his death."

Carlon snarled and advanced on the LEUKAN. He had little choice—if he waited, he would be slain, and his King had not commanded him to wait. He leaped, his spear gleamed, and the LEUKAN soldier toppled and lay emptily sprawled in the black square.

"First blood!" cried Evyan, lifting her sword and hurling sunbeams from it. "First blood for us!"

Aye, so, thought Rogard bleakly, *but King* MIKILLATI *had a reason for sacrificing that man. Maybe we should have let Carlon die. Carlon the bold, Carlon the strong, Carlon the lover of laughter. Maybe we should have let him die.*

And now the Barrier was down for Bishop ASATOR of LEUKAS, and he came gliding down the red squares, high and cold in his glistening white robes, until he stood on the frontier. Rogard thought he could see ASATOR's eyes as they swept over Cinnabar. The LEUKAN Bishop was poised to rush in with his great mace should Flambard, for safety, seek to change with Earl Ferric as the Law permitted.

Law?

There was no time to wonder what the Law was, or why it must be obeyed, or what had gone before this moment of battle. Queen Evyan had turned and shouted to the soldier Raddic, guardsman of her own Knight Sir Cupran: "Go! Halt him!" And Raddic cast her his own look of love, and ran, ponderous in his mail, up to the frontier. There he and ASATOR stood, no Barrier between them if either used a flanking move.

Good! Oh, good, my Queen! thought Rogard wildly. For even if ASATOR did not withdraw, but slew Raddic, he would be in Raddic's square, and his threat would be against a wall of spears. *He will retreat, he will retreat——*

Iron roared as ASATOR's mace crashed through helm and skull and felled Raddic the guardsman.

Evyan screamed, once only. "And I sent him! I sent him!" Then she began to run.

"Lady!" Rogard hurled himself against the Barrier. He could not move, he was chained here in his square, locked and barred by a Law he did not understand, while his lady ran toward death. "O Evyan, Evyan!"

Straight as a flying javelin ran the Queen of Cinnabar. Turning, straining after her, Rogard saw her leap the frontier and come to a halt by the Barrier which marked the left-hand bound of the kingdoms, beyond which lay only dimness to the frightful edge of the world. There she wheeled to face the dismayed ranks of LEUKAS, and her cry drifted back like the shriek of a stooping hawk: "MIKILLATI! Defend yourself!"

The thunder-crack of cheering from Cinnabar drowned all answer, but Rogard saw, at the very limits of his sight, how

hastily King MIKILLATI stepped from the line of her attack, into the stronghold of Bishop ASATOR. Now, thought Rogard fiercely, now the white-robed ruler could never seek shelter from one of his Earls. Evyan had stolen his greatest shield.

"Hola, my Queen!" With a sob of laughter, Ocher struck spurs into his horse. Wings threshed, blowing Rogard's cope about him, as the Knight hurtled over the head of his own guardsman and came to rest two squares in front of the Bishop. Rogard fought down his own anger; he had wanted to be the one to follow Evyan. But Ocher was a better choice.

Oh, much better! Rogard gasped as his flittering eyes took in the broad battlefield. In the next leap, Ocher could cut down DIOMES, and then between them he and Evyan could trap MIKILLATI!

Briefly, that puzzlement nagged at the Bishop. Why should men die to catch someone else's King? What was there in the Law that said Kings should strive for mastery of the world and——

"Guard yourself, Queen!" Sir MERKON, King's Knight of LEUKAS, sprang in a move like Ocher's. Rogard's breath rattled in his throat with bitterness, and he thought there must be tears in Evyan's bright eyes. Slowly, then, the Queen withdrew two squares along the edge, until she stood in front of Earl Ferric's guardsman. It was still a good place to attack from, but not what the other had been.

BOAN, guardsman of the LEUKAN Queen DOLORA, moved one square forward, so that he protected great DIOMES from Ocher. Ocher snarled and sprang in front of Evyan, so that he stood between her and the frontier: clearing the way for her, and throwing his own protection over Carlon.

MERKON jumped likewise, landing to face Ocher with the frontier between them. Rogard clenched his mace and vision blurred for him; the LEUKANS were closing in on Evyan.

"Ulfar!" cried the King's Bishop. "Ulfar, can you help her?"

The stout old yeoman who was guardsman of the Queen's Bishop nodded wordlessly and ran one square forward. His

spear menaced Bishop ASATOR, who growled at him—no Barrier between those two now!

MERKON of LEUKAS made another soaring leap, landing three squares in front of Rogard. "Guard yourself!" the voice belled from his faceless helmet. "Guard yourself, O Queen!"

No time now to let Ulfar slay ASATOR. Evyan's great eyes looked wildly about her; then, with swift decision, she stepped between MERKON and Ocher. Oh, a lovely move! Out of the fury in his breast, Rogard laughed.

The guardsman of the LEUKAN King's Knight clanked two squares ahead, lifting his spear against Ocher. It must have taken boldness thus to stand before Evyan herself; but the Queen of Cinnabar saw that if she cut him down, the Queen of LEUKAS could slay her. "Get free, Ocher!" she cried. "Get away!" Ocher cursed and leaped from danger, landing in front of Rogard's guardsman.

The King's Bishop bit his lip and tried to halt the trembling in his limbs. How the sun blazed! Its light was a cataract of dry white fire over the barren red and black squares. It hung immobile, enormous in the vague sky, and men gasped in their armor. The noise of bugles and iron, hoofs and wings and stamping feet, was loud under the small wind that blew across the world. There had never been anything but this meaningless war, there would never be aught else, and when Rogard tried to think beyond the moment when the fight had begun, or the moment when it would end, there was only an abyss of darkness.

Earl RAFAEON of LEUKAS took one ponderous step toward his King, a towering figure of iron readying for combat. Evyan whooped. "Ulfar!" she yelled. "Ulfar, your chance!"

Columbard's guardsman laughed aloud. Raising his spear, he stepped over into the square held by ASATOR. The white-robed Bishop lifted his mace, futile and feeble, and then he rolled in the dust at Ulfar's feet. The men of Cinnabar howled and clanged sword on shield.

Rogard held aloof from triumph. ASATOR, he thought grimly,

had been expendable anyway. King MIKILLATI had something else in mind.

It was like a blow when he saw Earl RAFAEON's guardsman run forward two squares and shout to Evyan to guard herself. Raging, the Queen of Cinnabar withdrew a square to her rearward. Rogard saw sickly how unprotected King Flambard was now, the soldiers scattered over the field and the hosts of LEUKAS marshaling. But Queen DOLORA, he thought with a wild clutching hope, Queen DOLORA, her tall cold beauty was just as open to a strong attack.

The soldier who had driven Evyan back took a leap across the frontier. "Guard yourself, O Queen!" he cried again. He was a small, hard-bitten, unkempt warrior in dusty helm and corselet. Evyan cursed, a bouncing soldierly oath, and moved one square forward to put a Barrier between her and him. He grinned impudently in his beard.

It is ill for us, it is a bootless and evil day. Rogard tried once more to get out of his square and go to Evyan's aid, but his will would not carry him. The Barrier held, invisible and uncrossable, and the Law held, the cruel and senseless Law which said a man must stand by and watch his lady be slain, and he railed at the bitterness of it and lapsed into a gray waiting.

Trumpets lifted brazen throats, drums boomed, and Queen DOLORA of LEUKAS stalked forth into battle. She came high and white and icily fair, her face chiseled and immobile in its haughtiness under the crowned helmet, and stood two squares in front of her husband, looming over Carlon. Behind her, her own Bishop SORKAS poised in his stronghold, hefting his mace in armored hands. Carlon of Cinnabar spat at DOLORA's feet, and she looked at him from cool blue eyes and then looked away. The hot dry wind did not ruffle her long pale hair; she was like a statue, standing there and waiting.

"Ocher," said Evyan softly, "out of my way."

"I like not retreat, my lady," he answered in a thin tone.

"Nor I," said Evyan. "But I must have an escape route open. We will fight again."

Slowly, Ocher withdrew, back to his own home. Evyan chuckled once, and a wry grin twisted her young face.

Rogard was looking at her so tautly that he did not see what was happening until a great shout of iron slammed his head around. Then he saw Bishop SORKAS, standing in Carlon's square with a bloodied mace in his hands, and Carlon lay dead at his feet.

Carlon, your hands are empty, life has slipped from them and there is an unending darkness risen in you who loved the world. Goodnight, my Carlon, goodnight.

"Madame——" Bishop SORKAS spoke quietly, bowing a little, and there was a smile on his crafty face. "I regret, madame, that—ah——"

"Yes. I must leave you." Evyan shook her head, as if she had been struck, and moved a square backwards and sideways. Then, turning, she threw the glance of an eagle down the black squares to LEUKAS' Earl ARACLES. He looked away nervously, as if he would crouch behind the three soldiers who warded him. Evyan drew a deep breath sobbing into her lungs.

Sir THEUTAS, DOLORA's Knight, sprang from his stronghold, to place himself between Evyan and the Earl. Rogard wondered dully if he meant to kill Ulfar the soldier; he could do it now. Ulfar looked at the Knight who sat crouched, and hefted his spear and waited for his own weird.

"Rogard!"

The Bishop leaped, and for a moment there was fire-streaked darkness before his eyes.

"Rogard, to me! To me, and help sweep them from the world!"

Evyan's voice.

She stood in her scarred and dinted armor, holding her sword aloft, and on that smitten field she was laughing with a new-born hope. Rogard could not shout his reply. There were no words. But he raised his mace and ran.

The black squares slid beneath his feet, footfalls pounding, jarring his teeth, muscles stretching with a resurgent glory

and all the world singing. At the frontier, he stopped, knowing it was Evyan's will though he could not have said how he knew. Then he faced about, and with clearing eyes looked back over that field of iron and ruin. Save for one soldier and a knight, Cinnabar was now cleared of LEUKAN forces, Evyan was safe, a counterblow was readying like the first whistle of hurricane. Before him were the proud banners of LEUKAS—now to throw them into the dust! Now to ride with Evyan into the home of MIKILLATI!

"Go to it, sir," rumbled Ulfar, standing on the Bishop's right and looking boldly at the white Knight who could slay him. "Give 'em hell from us."

Wings beat in the sky, and THEUTAS soared down to land on Rogard's left. In the hot light, the blued metal of his armor was like running water. His horse snorted, curveting and flapping its wings; he sat it easily, the lance swaying in his grasp, the blank helmet turned to Flambard. One more such leap, reckoned Rogard wildly, and he would be able to assail the King of Cinnabar. Or—no—a single spring from here and he would spit Evyan on his lance.

And there is a Barrier between us!

"Watch yourself, Queen!" The arrogant LEUKAN voice boomed hollow out of the steel mask.

"Indeed I will, Sir Knight!" There was only laughter in Evyan's tone. Lightly, then, she sped up the row of black squares. She brushed by Rogard, smiling at him as she ran, and he tried to smile back but his face was stiffened. Evyan, Evyan, she was plunging alone into her enemy's homeland!

Iron belled and clamored. The white guardsman in her path toppled and sank at her feet. One fist lifted strengthlessly, and a dying shrillness was in the dust: "Curse you, curse you, MIKILLATI, curse you for a stupid fool, leaving me here to be slain—no, no, no——"

Evyan bestrode the body and laughed again in the very face of Earl ARACLES. He cowered back, licking his lips—he could not move against her, but she could annihilate him in

one more step. Beside Rogard, Ulfar whooped, and the trumpets of Cinnabar howled in the rear.

Now the great attack was launched! Rogard cast a fleeting glance at Bishop SORKAS. The lean white-coped form was gliding forth, mace swinging loose in one hand, and there was a little sleepy smile on the pale face. No dismay—? SORKAS halted, facing Rogard, and smiled a little wider, skinning his teeth without humor. "You can kill me if you wish," he said softly. "But do you?"

For a moment Rogard wavered. To smash that head—!

"Rogard! Rogard, to me!"

Evyan's cry jerked the King's Bishop around. He saw now what her plan was, and it dazzled him so that he forgot all else. LEUKAS *is ours!*

Swiftly he ran. DIOMES and BOAN howled at him as he went between them, brushing impotent spears against the Barriers. He passed Queen DOLORA, and her lovely face was as if cast in steel, and her eyes followed him as he charged over the plain of LEUKAS. Then there was no time for thinking, Earl RAFAEON loomed before him, and he jumped the last boundary into the enemy's heartland.

The Earl lifted a meaningless ax. The Law read death for him, and Rogard brushed aside the feeble stroke. The blow of his mace shocked in his own body, slamming his jaws together. RAFAEON crumpled, falling slowly, his armor loud as he struck the ground. Briefly, his fingers clawed at the iron-hard black earth, and then he lay still.

They have slain Raddic and Carlon—we have three guardsmen, a Bishop, and an Earl—— Now we need only be butchers! Evyan, Evyan, warrior Queen, this is your victory!

DIOMES of LEUKAS roared and jumped across the frontier. Futile, futile, he was doomed to darkness. Evyan's lithe form moved up against ARACLES, her sword flamed and the Earl crashed at her feet. Her voice was another leaping brand: "Defend yourself, King!"

Turning, Rogard grew aware that MIKILLATI himself had

been right beside him. There was a Barrier between the two men—but MIKILLATI had to retreat from Evyan, and he took one step forward and sideways. Peering into his face, Rogard felt a sudden coldness. There was no defeat there, it was craft and knowledge and an unbending steel will—*what was* LEUKAS *planning?*

Evyan tossed her head, and the wind fluttered the lock of hair like a rebel banner. "We have them, Rogard!" she cried.

Far and faint, through the noise and confusion of battle, Cinnabar's bugles sounded the command of her King. Peering into the haze, Rogard saw that Flambard was taking precautions. Sir THEUTAS was still a menace, where he stood beside SORKAS. Sir Cupran of Cinnabar flew heavily over to land in front of the Queen's Earl's guardsman, covering the route THEUTAS must follow to endanger Flambard.

Wise, but—Rogard looked again at MIKILLATI's chill white face, and it was as if a breath of cold blew through him. Suddenly he wondered why they fought. For victory, yes, for mastery over the world—but when the battle had been won, what then?

He couldn't think past that moment. His mind recoiled in horror he could not name. In that instant he knew icily that this was not the first war in the world, there had been others before, and there would be others again. *Victory is death.*

But Evyan, glorious Evyan, she could not die. She would reign over all the world and—

Steel blazed in Cinnabar. MERKON of LEUKAS came surging forth, one tigerish leap which brought him down on Ocher's guardsman. The soldier screamed, once, as he fell under the trampling, tearing hoofs, but it was lost in the shout of the LEUKAN Knight: "Defend yourself, Flambard! Defend yourself!"

Rogard gasped. It was like a blow in the belly. He had stood triumphant over the world, and now all in one swoop it was brought toppling about him. THEUTAS shook his lance, SORKAS his mace, DIOMES raised a bull's bellow—somehow, incredibly

somehow, the warriors of LEUKAS had entered Cinnabar and were thundering at the King's own citadel.

"No, no——" Looking down the long empty row of squares, Rogard saw that Evyan was weeping. He wanted to run to her, hold her close and shield her against the falling world, but the Barriers were around him. He could not stir from his square, he could only watch.

Flambard cursed lividly and retreated into his Queen's home. His men gave a shout and clashed their arms—there was still a chance!

No, not while the Law bound men, thought Rogard, not while the Barriers held. Victory was ashen, and victory and defeat alike were darkness.

Beyond her thinly smiling husband, Queen DOLORA swept forward. Evyan cried out as the tall white woman halted before Rogard's terrified guardsman, turned to face Flambard where he crouched, and called to him: "Defend yourself, King!"

"No—no—you fool!" Rogard reached out, trying to break the Barrier, clawing at MIKILLATI. "Can't you see, none of us can win, it's death for us all if the war ends. Call her back!"

MIKILLATI ignored him. He seemed to be waiting.

And Ocher of Cinnabar raised a huge shout of laughter. It belled over the plain, dancing joyous mirth, and men lifted weary heads and turned to the young Knight where he sat in his own stronghold, for there was youth and triumph and glory in his laughing. Swiftly, then, a blur of steel, he sprang, and his winged horse rushed out of the sky on DOLORA herself. She turned to meet him, lifting her sword, and he knocked it from her hand and stabbed with his own lance. Slowly, too haughty to scream, the white Queen sank under his horse's hoofs.

And MIKILLATI smiled.

"I see," nodded the visitor. "Individual computers, each controlling its own robot piece by a tight beam, and all the com-

puters on a given side linked to form a sort of group-mind constrained to obey the rules of chess and make the best possible moves. Very nice. And it's a pretty cute notion of yours, making the robots look like medieval armies." His glance studied the tiny figures where they moved on the oversized board under one glaring floodlight.

"Oh, that's pure frippery," said the scientist. "This is really a serious research project in multiple computer-linkages. By letting them play game after game, I'm getting some valuable data."

"It's a lovely setup," said the visitor admiringly. "Do you realize that in this particular contest the two sides are reproducing one of the great classic games?"

"Why, no. Is that a fact?"

"Yes. It was a match between Anderssen and Kieseritsky, back in—I forget the year, but it was quite some time ago. Chess books often refer to it as the Immortal Game. . . . So your computers must share many of the properties of a human brain."

"Well, they're complex things, all right," admitted the scientist. "Not all their characteristics are known yet. Sometimes my chessmen surprise even me."

"Hm." The visitor stooped over the board. "Notice how they're jumping around inside their squares, waving their arms, batting at each other with their weapons?" He paused, then murmured slowly: "I wonder—I wonder if your computers may not have consciousness. If they might not have—minds."

"Don't get fantastic," snorted the scientist.

"But how do you know?" persisted the visitor. "Look, your feedback arrangement is closely analogous to a human nervous system. How do you know that your individual computers, even if they are constrained by the group linkage, don't have individual personalities? How do you know that their electronic senses don't interpret the game as, oh, as an interplay of free will and necessity; how do you know they don't receive

the data of the moves as their own equivalent of blood, sweat and tears?" He shuddered a little.

"Nonsense," grunted the scientist. "They're only robots. Now—— Hey! Look there! Look at that move!"

Bishop SORKAS took one step ahead, into the black square adjoining Flambard's. He bowed and smiled. "The war is ended," he said.

Slowly, very slowly, Flambard looked about him. SORKAS, MERKON, THEUTAS, they were crouched to leap on him wherever he turned; his own men raged helpless against the Barriers; there was no place for him to go.

He bowed his head. "I surrender," he whispered.

Rogard looked across the red and black to Evyan. Their eyes met, and they stretched out their arms to each other.

"Checkmate," said the scientist. "That game's over."

He crossed the room to the switchboard and turned off the computers.

RAY BRADBURY

Here is the newest and one of the most vividly touching of Ray Bradbury's poetic legends of alien planets—and as a surprise, its setting is not Mars but Venus. Like Mr. Bradbury's Mars (and even, for that matter, his Terra), this Venus is not an astronomy-textbook planet mensurable by instruments and conforming to mechanistic laws, but a mirror (like that greatest Looking-Glass of them all) leading to a world of wonder . . . and reflecting more of ourselves than we can see unaided.

All Summer in a Day

"READY?"

"Ready."

"Now?"

"Soon."

"Do the scientists really know? Will it happen today, will it?"

"Look, look; see for yourself!"

The children pressed to each other like so many roses, so many weeds, intermixed, peering out for a look at the hidden sun.

It rained.

It had been raining for seven years; thousands upon thousands of days compounded and filled from one end to the other with rain, with the drum and gush of water, with the sweet crystal fall of showers and the concussion of storms so heavy they were tidal waves come over the islands. A thousand forests had been crushed under the rain and grown up a thousand times to be crushed again. And this was the way life was forever on the planet Venus, and this was the schoolroom of the children of the rocket men and women who had come to a raining world to set up civilization and live out their lives.

"It's stopping, it's stopping!"

"Yes, yes!"

Margot stood apart from them, from these children who could never remember a time when there wasn't rain and rain and rain. They were all nine years old, and if there had been a day, seven years ago, when the sun came out for an hour and showed its face to the stunned world, they could not recall. Sometimes, at night, she heard them stir, in remembrance, and she knew they were dreaming and remembering gold or a yellow crayon or a coin large enough to buy the world with. She knew that they thought they remembered a warmness, like a blushing in the face, in the body, in the arms and legs and trembling hands. But then they always awoke to the tatting drum, the endless shaking down of clear bead necklaces upon the roof, the walk, the gardens, the forest, and their dreams were gone.

All day yesterday they had read in class, about the sun. About how like a lemon it was, and how hot. And they had written small stories or essays or poems about it:

> I think the sun is a flower,
> That blooms for just one hour.

That was Margot's poem, read in a quiet voice in the still classroom while the rain was falling outside.

"Aw, you didn't write that!" protested one of the boys.

"I did," said Margot. "I *did*."

"William!" said the teacher.

But that was yesterday. Now, the rain was slackening, and the children were crushed to the great thick windows.

"Where's teacher?"

"She'll be back."

"She'd better hurry, we'll miss it!"

They turned on themselves, like a feverish wheel, all tumbling spokes.

Margot stood alone. She was a very frail girl who looked as if she had been lost in the rain for years and the rain had

washed out the blue from her eyes and the red from her mouth and the yellow from her hair. She was an old photograph dusted from an album, whitened away, and if she spoke at all her voice would be a ghost. Now she stood, separate, staring at the rain and the loud wet world beyond the huge glass.

"What're *you* looking at?" said William.

Margot said nothing.

"Speak when you're spoken to." He gave her a shove. But she did not move; rather, she let herself be moved only by him and nothing else.

They edged away from her, they would not look at her. She felt them go away. And this was because she would play no games with them in the echoing tunnels of the underground city. If they tagged her and ran, she stood blinking after them and did not follow. When the class sang songs about happiness and life and games, her lips barely moved. Only when they sang about the sun and the summer did her lips move, as she watched the drenched windows.

And then, of course, the biggest crime of all was that she had come here only five years ago from Earth, and she remembered the sun and the way the sun was and the sky was, when she was four, in Ohio. And they, they had been on Venus all their lives, and they had been only two years old when last the sun came out, and had long since forgotten the color and heat of it and the way that it really was. But Margot remembered.

"It's like a penny," she said, once, eyes closed.

"No, it's not!" the children cried.

"It's like a fire," she said, "in the stove."

"You're lying, you don't remember!" cried the children.

But she remembered and stood quietly apart from all of them, and watched the patterning windows. And once, a month ago, she had refused to shower in the school shower rooms, had clutched her hands to her ears and over her head, screaming the water mustn't touch her head. So after that, dimly, dimly, she sensed it, she was different and they knew her difference and kept away.

There was talk that her father and mother were taking her back to Earth next year; it seemed vital to her that they do so, though it would mean the loss of thousands of dollars to her family. And so the children hated her for all these reasons, of big and little consequence. They hated her pale snow face, her waiting silence, her thinness and her possible future.

"Get away!" The boy gave her another push. "What're you waiting for?"

Then, for the first time, she turned and looked at him. And what she was waiting for was in her eyes.

"Well, don't wait around here!" cried the boy, savagely. "You won't see nothing!"

Her lips moved.

"Nothing!" he cried. "It was all a joke, wasn't it?" He turned to the other children. "Nothing's happening today. *Is* it?"

They all blinked at him and then, understanding, laughed and shook their heads. "Nothing, nothing!"

"Oh, but," Margot whispered, her eyes helpless. "But, this is the day, the scientists predict, they say, they *know*, the sun . . ."

"All a joke!" said the boy, and seized her roughly. "Hey, everyone, let's put her in a closet before teacher comes!"

"No," said Margot, falling back.

They surged about her, caught her up and bore her, protesting, and then pleading, and then crying, back into a tunnel, a room, a closet, where they slammed and locked the door. They stood looking at the door and saw it tremble from her beating and throwing herself against it. They heard her muffled cries. Then, smiling, they turned and went out and back down the tunnel, just as the teacher arrived.

"Ready, children?" She glanced at her watch.

"Yes!" said everyone.

"Are we all here?"

"Yes!"

The rain slackened still more.

They crowded to the huge door.

The rain stopped.

It was as if, in the midst of a film concerning an avalanche, a tornado, a hurricane, a volcanic eruption, something had, first, gone wrong with the sound apparatus, thus muffling and finally cutting off all noise, all of the blasts and repercussions and thunders, and then, secondly, ripped the film from the projector and inserted in its place a peaceful tropical slide which did not move or tremor. The world ground to a standstill. The silence was so immense and unbelievable that you felt that your ears had been stuffed or you had lost your hearing altogether. The children put their hands to their ears. They stood apart. The door slid back and the smell of the silent, waiting world came in to them.

The sun came out.

It was the color of flaming bronze and it was very large. And the sky around it was a blazing blue tile color. And the jungle burned with sunlight as the children, released from their spell, rushed out, yelling, into the summertime.

"Now, don't go too far," called the teacher after them. "You've only one hour, you know. You wouldn't want to get caught out!"

But they were running and turning their faces up to the sky and feeling the sun on their cheeks like a warm iron; they were taking off their jackets and letting the sun burn their arms.

"Oh, it's better than the sun lamps, isn't it?"

"Much, much better!"

They stopped running and stood in the great jungle that covered Venus, that grew and never stopped growing, tumultuously, even as you watched it. It was a nest of octopuses, clustering up great arms of flesh-like weed, wavering, flowering in this brief spring. It was the color of rubber and ash, this jungle, from the many years without sun. It was the color of stones and white cheeses and ink.

The children lay out, laughing, on the jungle mattress, and

heard it sigh and squeak under them, resilient and alive. They ran among the trees, they slipped and fell, they pushed each other, they played hide-and-seek and tag, but most of all they squinted at the sun until tears ran down their faces, they put their hands up at that yellowness and that amazing blueness and they breathed of the fresh fresh air and listened and listened to the silence which suspended them in a blessed sea of no sound and no motion. They looked at everything and savored everything. Then, wildly, like animals escaped from their caves, they ran and ran in shouting circles. They ran for an hour and did not stop running.

And then——

In the midst of their running, one of the girls wailed.

Everyone stopped.

The girl, standing in the open, held out her hand.

"Oh, look, look," she said, trembling.

They came slowly to look at her opened palm.

In the center of it, cupped and huge, was a single raindrop.

She began to cry, looking at it.

They glanced quickly at the sky.

"Oh. Oh."

A few cold drops fell on their noses and their cheeks and their mouths. The sun faded behind a stir of mist. A wind blew cool around them. They turned and started to walk back toward the underground house, their hands at their sides, their smiles vanishing away.

A boom of thunder startled them and like leaves before a new hurricane, they tumbled upon each other and ran. Lightning struck ten miles away, five miles away, a mile, a half mile. The sky darkened into midnight in a flash.

They stood in the doorway of the underground for a moment until it was raining hard. Then they closed the door and heard the gigantic sound of the rain falling in tons and avalanches everywhere and forever.

"Will it be seven more years?"

"Yes. Seven."

Then one of them gave a little cry.

"Margot!"

"What?"

"She's still in the closet where we locked her."

"Margot."

They stood as if someone had driven them, like so many stakes, into the floor. They looked at each other and then looked away. They glanced out at the world that was raining now and raining and raining steadily. They could not meet each other's glances. Their faces were solemn and pale. They looked at their hands and feet, their faces down.

"Margot."

One of the girls said, "Well . . . ?"

No one moved.

"Go on," whispered the girl.

They walked slowly down the hall in the sound of cold rain. They turned through the doorway to the room, in the sound of the storm and thunder, lightning on their faces, blue and terrible. They walked over to the closet door slowly and stood by it.

Behind the closet door was only silence.

They unlocked the door, even more slowly, and let Margot out.

ROBERT SHECKLEY

Few science-fantasy writers have sprung so rapidly into the front rank as Robert Sheckley. It seems only yesterday that Sheckley was a promising but unpublished writer whom we were hopefully encouraging; and in fact it is less than three years ago that he made his first sale. Since then he has appeared regularly in almost every magazine of imaginative fiction, in many anthologies, and in a number of major slicks; and most recently he has received the accolade of the publication of a distinguished collection of his short stories (UNTOUCHED BY HUMAN HANDS) *by Ballantine. The reasons for this sudden rise you can find exemplified in this story —simple, human, humorous, fantastically logical and completely surprising.*

The Accountant

MR. DEE was seated in the big armchair, his belt loosened, the evening papers strewn around his knees. Peacefully he smoked his pipe, and considered how wonderful the world was. Today he had sold two amulets and a philter; his wife was bustling around the kitchen, preparing a delicious meal; and his pipe was drawing well. With a sigh of contentment, Mr. Dee yawned and stretched.

Morton, his nine-year-old son, hurried across the living room, laden down with books.

"How'd school go today?" Mr. Dee called.

"O.K." the boy said, slowing down, but still moving toward his room.

"What have you got there?" Mr. Dee asked, gesturing at his son's tall pile of books.

"Just some more accounting stuff," Morton said, not looking at his father. He hurried into his room.

Mr. Dee shook his head. Somewhere, the lad had picked

up the notion that he wanted to be an accountant. An accountant! True, Morton was quick with figures; but he would have to forget this nonsense. Bigger things were in store for him.

The doorbell rang.

Mr. Dee tightened his belt, hastily stuffed in his shirt and opened the front door. There stood Miss Greeb, his son's fourth-grade teacher.

"Come in, Miss Greeb," said Dee. "Can I offer you something?"

"I have no time," said Miss Greeb. She stood in the doorway, her arms akimbo. With her gray, tangled hair, her thin, long-nosed face and red runny eyes, she looked exactly like a witch. And this was as it should be, for Miss Greeb *was* a witch.

"I've come to speak to you about your son," she said.

At this moment Mrs. Dee huried out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron.

"I hope he hasn't been naughty," Mrs. Dee said anxiously.

Miss Greeb sniffed ominously. "Today I gave the yearly tests. Your son failed miserably."

"Oh dear," Mrs. Dee said. "It's spring. Perhaps——"

"Spring has nothing to do with it," said Miss Greeb. "Last week I assigned the Greater Spells of Cordus, section one. You know how easy *they* are. He didn't learn a single one."

"Hm," said Mr. Dee succinctly.

"In Biology, he doesn't have the slightest notion which are the basic conjuring herbs. Not the slightest."

"This is unthinkable," said Mr. Dee.

Miss Greeb laughed sourly. "Moreover, he has forgotten all the Secret Alphabet which he learned in third grade. He has forgotten the Protective Formula, forgotten the names of the 99 lesser imps of the Third Circle, forgotten what little he knew of the Geography of Greater Hell. And what's more, he doesn't want to learn."

Mr. and Mrs. Dee looked at each other silently. This was

very serious indeed. A certain amount of boyish inattentiveness was allowable; encouraged, even, for it showed spirit. But a child *had* to learn the basics, if he ever hoped to become a full-fledged wizard.

"I can tell you right here and now," said Miss Greeb, "if this were the old days, I'd flunk him without another thought. But there are so few of us left."

Mr. Dee nodded sadly. Witchcraft had been steadily declining over the centuries. The old families died out, or were snatched by demoniac forces, or became scientists. And the fickle public showed no interest whatsoever in the charms and enchantments of ancient days.

Now, only a scattered handful possessed the Old Lore, guarding it, teaching it in places like Miss Greeb's private school for the children of wizards. It was a heritage, a sacred trust.

"It's this accounting nonsense," said Miss Greeb. "I don't know where he got the notion." She stared accusingly at Dee. "And I don't know why it wasn't nipped in the bud."

Mr. Dee felt his cheeks grow hot.

"But I do know this. As long as Morton has *that* on his mind, he can't give his attention to Thaumaturgy."

Mr. Dee looked away from the witch's red eyes. It was his fault. He should never have brought home that toy adding machine. And when he first saw Morton playing at double entry bookkeeping, he should have burned the ledger.

But how could he know it would grow into an obsession?

Mrs. Dee smoothed out her apron, and said, "Miss Greeb, you know you have our complete confidence. What would you suggest?"

"All I can do I have done," said Miss Greeb. "The only remaining thing is to call up Boarbas, the Demon of Children. And that, naturally, is up to you."

"Oh, I don't think it's that serious yet," Mr. Dee said quickly. "Calling up Boarbas is a serious measure."

"As I said, that's up to you," Miss Greeb said. "Call Boar-

bas or not, as you see fit. As things stand now, your son will never be a wizard." She turned and started to leave.

"Won't you stay for a cup of tea?" Mrs. Dee asked hastily.

"No, I must attend a Witches' Coven in Cincinnati," said Miss Greeb, and vanished in a puff of orange smoke.

Mr. Dee fanned the smoke with his hands and closed the door. "Phew," he said. "You'd think she'd use a perfumed brand."

"She's old-fashioned," Mrs. Dee murmured.

They stood beside the door in silence. Mr. Dee was just beginning to feel the shock. It was hard to believe that his son, his own flesh and blood, didn't want to carry on the family tradition. It couldn't be true!

"After dinner," Dee said, finally, "I'll have a man-to-man talk with him. I'm sure we won't need any demoniac intervention."

"Good," Mrs. Dee said. "I'm sure you can make the boy understand." She smiled, and Dee caught a glimpse of the old witch-light flickering behind her eyes.

"My roast!" Mrs. Dee gasped suddenly, the witch-light dying. She hurried back to her kitchen.

Dinner was a quiet meal. Morton knew that Miss Greeb had been there, and he ate in guilty silence, glancing occasionally at his father. Mr. Dee sliced and served the roast, frowning deeply. Mrs. Dee didn't even attempt any small talk.

After bolting his dessert, the boy hurried to his room.

"Now we'll see," Mr. Dee said to his wife. He finished the last of his coffee, wiped his mouth and stood up. "I am going to reason with him now. Where is my Amulet of Persuasion?"

Mrs. Dee thought deeply for a moment. Then she walked across the room to the bookcase. "Here it is," she said, lifting it from the pages of a brightly jacketed novel. "I was using it as a marker."

Mr. Dee slipped the amulet into his pocket, took a deep breath, and entered his son's room.

Morton was seated at his desk. In front of him was a notebook, scribbled with figures and tiny, precise notations. On his desk were six carefully sharpened pencils, a soap eraser, an abacus and a toy adding machine. His books hung precariously over the edge of the desk; there was *Money*, by Rimraamer, *Bank Accounting Practice*, by Johnson and Calhoun, *Ellman's Studies for the CPA*, and a dozen others.

Mr. Dee pushed aside a mound of clothes and made room for himself on the bed. "How's it going, son?" he asked, in his kindest voice.

"Fine, Dad," Morton answered eagerly. "I'm up to chapter four in *Basic Accounting*, and I answered all the questions——"

"Son," Dee broke in, speaking very softly, "how about your regular homework?"

Morton looked uncomfortable and scuffed his feet on the floor.

"You know, not many boys have a chance to become wizards in this day and age."

"Yes sir, I know." Morton looked away abruptly. In a high, nervous voice he said, "But, Dad, I want to be an accountant. I really do. Dad?"

Mr. Dee shook his head. "Morton, there's always been a wizard in our family. For eighteen hundred years, the Dees have been famous in supernatural circles."

Morton continued to look out the window and scuff his feet.

"You wouldn't want to disappoint me, would you, son?" Dee smiled sadly. "You know, anyone can be an *accountant*. But only a chosen few can master the Black Arts."

Morton turned away from the window. He picked up a pencil, inspected the point, and began to turn it slowly in his fingers.

"How about it, boy? Won't you work harder for Miss Greeb?"

Morton shook his head. "I want to be an accountant."

Mr. Dee contained his sudden rush of anger with difficulty. What was wrong with the Amulet of Persuasion? Could the

spell have run down? He should have recharged it. Nevertheless, he went on.

"Morton," he said in a husky voice, "I'm only a Third Degree Adept, you know. My parents were very poor. They couldn't send me to The University."

"I know," the boy said in a whisper.

"I want you to have all the things I never had. Morton, you can be a First Degree Adept." He shook his head wistfully. "It'll be difficult. But your mother and I have a little put away, and we'll scrape the rest together somehow."

Morton was biting his lip and turning the pencil rapidly in his fingers.

"How about it, son? You know, as a First Degree Adept, you won't have to work in a store. You can be a Direct Agent of The Black One. A Direct Agent! What do you say, boy?"

For a moment, Dee thought his son was moved. Morton's lips were parted, and there was a suspicious brightness in his eyes. But then the boy glanced at his accounting books, his little abacus, his toy adding machine.

"I'm going to be an accountant," he said.

"We'll see!" Mr. Dee shouted, all patience gone. "You will *not* be an accountant, young man. You will be a wizard. It was good enough for the rest of your family, and by all that's damnable, it'll be good enough for you. You haven't heard the last of this, young man." And he stormed out of the room.

Immediately, Morton returned to his accounting books.

Mr. and Mrs. Dee sat together on the couch, not talking. Mrs. Dee was busily knotting a wind-cord, but her mind wasn't on it. Mr. Dee stared moodily at a worn spot on the living room rug.

Finally, Dee said, "I've spoiled him. Boarbas is the only solution."

"Oh, no," Mrs. Dee said hastily. "He's so young."

"Do you want your son to be an accountant?" Mr. Dee asked

bitterly. "Do you want him to grow up scribbling with figures instead of doing The Black One's important work?"

"Of course not," said Mrs. Dee. "But Boarbas——"

"I know. I feel like a murderer already."

They thought for a few moments. Then Mrs. Dee said, "Perhaps his grandfather can do something. He was always fond of the boy."

"Perhaps he can," Mr. Dee said thoughtfully. "But I don't know if we should disturb him. After all, the old gentleman has been dead for three years."

"I know," Mrs. Dee said, undoing an incorrect knot in the wind-cord. "But it's either that or Boarbas."

Mr. Dee agreed. Unsettling as it would be to Morton's grandfather, Boarbas was infinitely worse. Immediately, Dee made preparations for calling up his dead father.

He gathered together the henbane, the ground unicorn's horn, the hemlock, together with a morsel of dragon's tooth. These he placed on the rug.

"Where's my wand?" he asked his wife.

"I put it in the bag with your golfsticks," she told him.

Mr. Dee got his wand and waved it over the ingredients. He muttered the three words of The Unbinding, and called out his father's name.

Immediately a wisp of smoke arose from the rug.

"Hello, Grandpa Dee," Mrs. Dee said.

"Dad, I'm sorry to disturb you," Mr. Dee said. "But my son—your grandson—refuses to become a wizard. He wants to be an—accountant."

The wisp of smoke trembled, then straightened out and described a character of the Old Language.

"Yes," Mr. Dee said. "We tried persuasion. The boy is adamant."

Again the smoke trembled, and formed another character.

"I suppose that's best," Mr. Dee said. "If you frighten him out of his wits once and for all, he'll forget this accounting nonsense. It's cruel—but it's better than Boarbas."

The wisp of smoke nodded, and streamed toward the boy's room. Mr. and Mrs. Dee sat down on the couch.

The door of Morton's room was slammed open, as though by a gigantic wind. Morton looked up, frowned, and returned to his books.

The wisp of smoke turned into a winged lion with the tail of a shark. It roared hideously, crouched, snarled, and gathered itself for a spring.

Morton glanced at it, raised both eyebrows, and proceeded to jot down a column of figures.

The lion changed into a three-headed lizard, its flanks reeking horribly of blood. Breathing gusts of fire, the lizard advanced on the boy.

Morton finished adding the column of figures, checked the result on his abacus, and looked at the lizard.

With a screech, the lizard changed into a giant gibbering bat. It fluttered around the boy's head, moaning and gibbering.

Morton grinned, and turned back to his books.

Mr. Dee was unable to stand it any longer. "Damn it," he shouted, "aren't you scared?"

"Why should I be?" Morton asked. "It's only Grandpa."

Upon the word, the bat dissolved into a plume of smoke. It nodded sadly to Mr. Dee, bowed to Mrs. Dee, and vanished.

"Goodbye, Grandpa," Morton called. He got up and closed his door.

"That does it," Mr. Dee said. "The boy is too cocksure of himself. We must call up Boarbas."

"No!" his wife said.

"What, then?"

"I just don't know any more," Mrs. Dee said, on the verge of tears. "You *know* what Boarbas does to children. They're never the same afterwards."

Mr. Dee's face was hard as granite. "I know. It can't be helped."

"He's so young!" Mrs. Dee wailed. "It—it will be traumatic!"

"If so, we will use all the resources of modern psychology to heal him," Mr. Dee said soothingly. "He will have the best psychoanalysts money can buy. But the boy must be a wizard!"

"Go ahead then," Mrs. Dee said, crying openly. "But please don't ask me to assist you."

How like a woman, Dee thought. Always turning into jelly at the moment when firmness was indicated. With a heavy heart, he made the preparations for calling up Boarbas, Demon of Children.

First came the intricate sketching of the pentagon, and the twelve-pointed star within it, and the endless spiral within that. Then came the herbs and essences; expensive items, but absolutely necessary for the conjuring. Then came the inscribing of the Protective Spell, so that Boarbas might not break loose and destroy them all. Then came the three drops of hippogriff blood——

"Where is my hippogriff blood?" Mr. Dee asked, rummaging through the living-room cabinet.

"In the kitchen, in the aspirin bottle," Mrs. Dee said, wiping her eyes.

Dee found it, and then all was in readiness. He lighted the black candles and chanted the Unlocking Spell.

The room was suddenly very warm, and there remained only the Naming of the Name.

"Morton," Mr. Dee called. "Come here."

Morton opened the door and stepped out, holding one of his accounting books tightly, looking very young and defenseless.

"Morton, I am about to call up the Demon of Children. Don't make me do it, Morton."

The boy turned pale and shrank back against the door. But stubbornly he shook his head.

"Very well," Mr. Dee said. "BOARBAS!"

There was an ear-splitting clap of thunder and a wave of

heat, and Boarbas appeared, as tall as the ceiling, chuckling evilly.

"Ah!" cried Boarbas, in a voice that shook the room. "A little boy."

Morton gaped, his jaw open and eyes bulging.

"A naughty little boy," Boarbas said, and laughed. The demon marched forward, shaking the house with every stride.

"Send him away!" Mrs. Dee cried.

"I can't," Dee said, his voice breaking. "I can't do anything until he's finished."

The demon's great horned hands reached for Morton; but quickly the boy opened the accounting book. "Save me!" he screamed.

In that instant, a tall, terribly thin old man appeared, covered with worn pen points and ledger sheets, his eyes two empty zeroes.

"*Zico Pico Reel!*" chanted Boarbas, turning to grapple with the newcomer. But the thin old man laughed, and said, "A contract of a corporation which is *ultra vires* is not voidable only, but utterly void."

At these words, Boarbas was flung back, breaking a chair as he fell. He scrambled to his feet, his skin glowing red-hot with rage, and intoned the Demoniac Master-Spell: "VRAT, HAT, HO!"

But the thin old man shielded Morton with his body, and cried the words of Dissolution. "Expiration, Repeal, Occurrence, Surrender, Abandonment and Death!"

Boarbas squeaked in agony. Hastily he backed away, fumbling in the air until he found The Opening. He jumped through this, and was gone.

The tall, thin old man turned to Mr. and Mrs. Dee, cowering in a corner of the living room, and said, "Know that I am The Accountant. And Know, Moreover, that this Child has signed a Compact with Me, to enter My Apprenticeship and be My Servant. And in return for Services Rendered, I, THE ACCOUNTANT, am teaching him the Damnation of Souls, by means of

ensnaring them in a cursed web of Figures, Forms, Torts and Reprisals. And behold, this is My Mark upon him!"

The Accountant held up Morton's right hand, and showed the ink smudge on the third finger.

He turned to Morton, and in a softer voice said, "Tomorrow, lad, we will consider some aspects of Income Tax Evasion as a Path to Damnation."

"Yes *sir*," Morton said eagerly.

And with another sharp look at the Dees, The Accountant vanished.

For long seconds there was silence. Then Dee turned to his wife.

"Well," Dee said, "if the boy wants to be an accountant *that* badly, I'm sure I'm not going to stand in his way."

Epitaph Near Moonport

He got off in mid-passage, did Sandy MacPhee.
He'd be damned if he'd pay for a fall that was free.

SHERWOOD SPRINGER

J. FRANCIS McCOMAS

When science fiction turns to the past rather than the future, the theme of beginnings*—of how things came to pass for the first time —is an especially fascinating one. Perhaps the most memorable such story is Cleve Cartmill's* The Link (Astounding, *August, 1942; reprinted in the Healy-McComas* ADVENTURES IN TIME AND SPACE), *telling of the first man to realize that he was a* man. *More recently F&SF has brought you stories of the first man who consciously uttered a word (by John P. McKnight) and of the first man who learned to season food (by me); now McComas takes up another "first" which has been surprisingly neglected to date and introduces us to the delightful company of Sleepy Hawk, a tribal leader who knew how to fight and how to laugh and how to coin words . . . and how fighting could be replaced by something new and vital and demanding fresh word-making.*

Brave New Word

THE travelers to the hot country arrived today, carrying many things, so tonight there will be dancing and all the hearts of The People will be good. As ever, when the travelers return, I remember how the thing began with Sleepy Hawk, that great doer of deeds, that laugher, that maker of words.

Most of The People think the matter had its beginning later; but I, whose oldest father had the story from the mouth of Sleepy Hawk himself, think otherwise. The true beginning was when Long Ax, that angry man, had his new ax handle break in his hand the very first time he swung the weapon. Long Ax had chosen the wood with care and knowledge, made it straight with his knife, and then, in the chosen way, fixed it to the great stone ax his oldest father had given him.

Then, at the very first trial swing at one of the big trees that grew by the river where The People were camped, the handle had splintered, the great stone head had bounced from the

tree to the river water and Long Ax, a splinter driven into his thumb, danced about, shouting with pain and anger.

Since all this was a very bad sign, the rest of the young men looked very solemn. All, that is, except Sleepy Hawk, who fell on his back and laughed. He laughed so loud and so long that the other four thought he might never stop, but choke himself to death there by the river.

"Why do you laugh?" cried Long Ax. "Now I must make another handle! We can't start until I do!"

"Yes," asked Hungry Dog, who was fat and liked to sit in Long Ax's shadow, "why do you laugh?"

Sleepy Hawk stopped choking himself and said, "I'm sorry. But you looked so—so—" he looked in his head for a word, could not find one and said, "so—laugh-making! One moment you were swinging your great ax, the next moment you were dancing about, a little boy with a splinter in your hand! And the fine new handle for your ax was nothing but wood for the fire!"

At Sleepy Hawk's words, even Mountain Bear, the quiet man, laughed softly deep in his throat.

The face of Long Ax colored the angry red and he said, "How would you like to stay here and laugh while the others follow *me* on our hunt?"

Sleepy Hawk sat up then and looked at the other. His face did look something like that of a hawk that sleeps, with his sharp curved nose and his half-closed eyes. But it was the face of a hawk just waiting to wake and pounce.

"How would you like to try to make me?" he said very softly.

Long Ax was still red with anger but he looked away from Sleepy Hawk, toward the river.

"You have a knife and I have nothing," he growled.

With a move so fast it could barely be seen Sleepy Hawk jumped to his feet, took the knife from his belt and tossed it away.

"Now, I have no knife."

"Enough!" cried Mountain Bear, who was a quiet man but strong like his name animal. "Save your blows for our enemies! Long Ax, I have a stick for a spear, dry and tough. You may have it for your ax. Sleepy Hawk, take up your knife. You know we would not go on a fight or a hunt without you to lead us."

So there was peace but later, while waiting for Long Ax to bind together haft and head of his weapon, Mountain Bear said to Sleepy Hawk, "I cannot understand you. Always you laugh. And there is nothing to smile about in life."

"Yes, there is! Each thing of life, even the worst thing, has a part of it that will make you laugh, if only you will see it."

"Ha! I suppose you laugh even when you are with a woman!"

"Sometimes. If it is the proper woman and her heart is like mine."

But, as I said, most of The People think the matter had its beginning later, there on the ledge of the mountain of the Mud Dwellers, halfway down the great cliff, when the five young men came face to face with six of the little Mud Dwellers and there was no going back for any man.

For, after much thought, the band had decided to go toward the sun and into the mountain of the Mud Dwellers, rather than to the cold mountains and the Dwellers-in-Caves. The young men of The People wanted women. Those Dwellers-in-Caves, who made such queer markings on the walls of their homes, were strong and not easy to surprise. Too, their women were fierce, not kind and pleasing like those of the Mud Dwellers.

So they made a long journey, over a strange country. First, the river had dried into a hot land. After that, they seemed to be in the time of the long sun, come before they had thought, and the skins of animals they wore were hot on their backs. Sleepy Hawk wound into a tight roll his skin of a big cat and wrapped it around his waist. After a while, the others did the same.

Sleepy Hawk looked at them, running slowly along, the water pouring off their bodies, and said, "It is cooler by the side of our river."

Even Long Ax grinned at this although his tongue was swollen in his mouth.

The heat of the long sun fell on them and what little water they found made their hearts sick and their minds weak. So the young men went a day and a night without drinking.

Then, when they felt they could run no longer, they saw before them that great mountain rising straight up from the ground to the sky which held in its heart the little caves of the little men that The People called the Mud Dwellers. They stopped and looked up at the mountain.

"Oo-ee!" cried Hungry Dog. "That will be a hard run!"

But Sleepy Hawk found a trickle of water and they drank it without having their bellies cry out against them.

So the five young men of The People climbed the mountain that day and found its top was broad and flat. They moved carefully across the ground, ducking from tree to tree. Once, they found a pile of rocks that had, in the long ago, been a Mud Dwellers' home, before the wars of The People had driven them down inside the mountain, where the little men thought they might live more safely.

"These do not look like rocks," said Mountain Bear, stopping to look at them.

"They are not rocks," said Sleepy Hawk. "I have heard that the Mud Dwellers mix dried grass with mud, shape this into blocks and let the heat of the sun make the blocks hard. They build their caves with these hard blocks."

"That is a foolish waste of time," said Mountain Bear.

"And we waste time," said Sleepy Hawk. "We must reach the edge of their home place before dark."

So, just before the hiding of the sun, the young hunters came to where the top of the mountain suddenly ended. They crouched down and looked over the edge. There was a great cut, going deep to the heart of the mountain; and down, far

down at the bottom of the cut, they could see, moving like bugs on a raw hide, a few of the Mud Dwellers.

"We'll rest here until the first morning light," Sleepy Hawk told them.

"Then climb down as far as we can?" asked Mountain Bear.

Sleepy Hawk nodded.

"Then we should watch another day, I think," said Long Ax.

Sleepy Hawk nodded again.

"We'll have to be quick," said Short Spear.

"Take women only," grunted Long Ax. "Weapons too, if there are any."

"And food!" added Hungry Dog.

"No food!" cried all the others.

"They do not eat," Cat-in-the-Mud told Hungry Dog. "Their food is taken from the ground and it is dirty."

Sleepy Hawk smiled a little at this, but said nothing.

Yet it did not work out as they planned. The five young men waked at the first light and slowly, quietly, they climbed down the steep side of the cut in the mountain. But as they crawled around a high rock to a narrow ledge, six men of the Mud Dwellers came up onto the ledge from the down trail. All stopped suddenly and stared at each other.

Then each side took a step forward, raised their weapons, then stopped again, weapons half lifted in their hands.

"Well," Long Ax growled deep in his throat, "why do we wait?"

"For the same reason they do!" Sleepy Hawk's voice was sharp.

He waved his hand and they all looked quickly about them. There was the long, narrow ledge, with the mountain going straight up from one side and, from the other, straight down in a heart-choking drop. And at each end of the ledge stood a little group of men, angry, uncertain, the length of three steps of a tall man between them.

"Who can win a fight in such a place?" asked Sleepy Hawk.

"We can!" growled Long Ax. "They are but little men!"

"But they are six and we are five, so all is equal."

"Throw spears and after them!" cried Long Ax.

Cat-in-the-Mud and Hungry Dog raised their weapons. As they did so, three of the Mud Dwellers lifted their arms.

"Stop!" cried Sleepy Hawk. Over his shoulder he said to Long Ax, "I am chief here. Now look, all of you. They throw, we throw. None can miss. If any men are left after the throwing, they fight. Perhaps one of all here lives.Then what? If that one is of The People, can he, wounded, alone, ever hope to return to our river? No!"

"You are right," said Mountain Bear.

"They will call for help," warned Cat-in-the-Mud.

"Soon enough to fight then," said Sleepy Hawk. "There is little room for more on this ground."

"True enough," said Mountain Bear.

"Now, quiet, all of you," ordered Sleepy Hawk, "and let me think."

He watched the Mud Dwellers. They were strange little men. Around their waists they wore belts of dried skin, but in these belts were set little pieces of colored stone. They wore smaller belts around their heads, to keep their long hair from falling over their eyes, and these belts, too, had the pieces of stone in them.

Sleepy Hawk liked these colored stones very much. But he did not think he would get any from the Mud Dwellers, who, though small, stood their ground as bravely as did The People, frowning, with knives and spears ready for the fight.

"Look at their spears," Sleepy Hawk said.

"They have two handles!" There was wonder in Cat-in-the-Mud's voice.

"Yes. One goes back from the hand, then joins the other, which goes forward to the head of the spear."

"I don't understand," Mountain Bear said softly.

"Neither do I." Sleepy Hawk frowned. "Two handles . . . I would like a closer look at those strange spears."

"Enough of this women's chatter!" screamed Long Ax. "Let us fight like men!"

Sleepy Hawk shrugged.

"If the rest of you feel that we should get ourselves killed," he said quietly, "and leave our bones here for Mud Dwellers to hang in their caves, why—let Long Ax begin the fight."

None moved.

Long Ax called out again but still no man of the other four moved and Long Ax closed his mouth tightly.

For a time there was silence on the ledge. Sleepy Hawk watched the Mud Dwellers; he had a wish to talk with them, to learn what they might be thinking. Now, like many of The People, Sleepy Hawk had a woman from the Mud Dwellers in his family, and from her had learned a few of their love words, the words that a mother says to a child that pleases her. But that was all. When The People caught a Mud Dweller woman it was her duty to learn their talk, not theirs to learn her noises.

So there was nothing he could say to them. He watched. They, too, stood as did The People, their leader a little in front of them, staring at his enemies, his men behind him, looking about nervously, their knives and strange two-handled spears ready for blood.

It seemed then to Sleepy Hawk that the two groups of men looked like two deer caught in the trap sands of a river. A deer so caught by the water hiding below the quiet-looking sands cannot step forward, nor can it move backward. So it was with the men. Their legs were caught on the rock. They dared not move either up or down. All of them, The People and Mud Dwellers, could only stand still and wait for what would happen.

And thinking of the men trapped like silly deer, Sleepy Hawk laughed aloud.

"Why do you laugh?" snarled Hungry Dog. Fright was in his voice.

Sleepy Hawk was choking again, as he always did when laughing swelled in his throat.

"This is—this is all very——" He choked and his breath flew out between his lips and he made a word.

"What was that?" cried Mountain Bear. "What did you say?"

"I said, *funny*."

"What does *funny* mean?"

"It is a word I have made and it means laugh-making. All this—we and they standing here, of us all none daring to go a step forward or back—it is very laugh-making . . . very *funny*!"

"We have a crazy man for a chief," growled Long Ax. "Or a fool. It takes little to make a fool laugh——"

But Sleepy Hawk was not listening. He was watching the leader of the Mud Dwellers and he was so startled by what that one was doing that he gave no ear to Long Ax's words. For the Mud Dweller was smiling. At first, it was a little smile, on the mouth only, but then, as Sleepy Hawk started to laugh again, the Mud Dweller's smile shone in his eyes, he opened his mouth and laughed as loudly as Sleepy Hawk ever did.

The two of them stood and laughed with each other while their followers looked at them uneasily and Long Ax muttered words of anger that he knew Sleepy Hawk could not hear.

Then, perhaps because his heart was warmed by his laughing, or because he was a great thinker as the later days of his life proved, Sleepy Hawk did a very strange thing. First he put his knife back in his belt, so that his left hand held nothing. Then he dropped his spear from his right hand. Mountain Bear cried out at this, but Sleepy Hawk did not listen. He stepped forward one step and raised his right hand, so that the chief of the Mud Dwellers could see that it was empty.

The Mud Dweller's smile was now on his lips only. He looked very hard at Sleepy Hawk, then he slowly nodded his head. Then he moved his hands slowly so that the two handles of his spear came apart. In one hand, he held a spear with a

sharp stone head. In the other, just a simple, harmless stick with a hook at one end. He dropped these to the ground and stepped toward Sleepy Hawk, his right hand raised.

The two of them came close together. Sleepy Hawk said a Mud Dweller word that they all knew, one that a mother uses when her child makes her smile at his play. The Mud Dweller's smile became smaller; the young men saw that he did not like the use of that word between men. So Sleepy Hawk pointed at the young men of The People, then at the Mud Dwellers, making fearful frowns to show each of them angry at the other. Then he pointed to himself and laughed. He pointed to the Mud Dweller and laughed. He swept his arm around the air, pointing at both sides and laughing.

Then, slowly and clearly, Sleepy Hawk said his new word.

The chief of the Mud Dwellers nodded and said it after him.

"*Fun—nee!*" he said.

Sleepy Hawk held out his empty right hand and the Mud Dweller slowly reached out and touched Sleepy Hawk's hand with his.

"Very funny," answered Sleepy Hawk, grinning. Then, hoping the Mud Dweller might know the tongue of The People, he said, "I am Sleepy Hawk."

But the Mud Dweller did not understand. He said some words, in the high bird voice of the Mud Dwellers. Nor did Sleepy Hawk understand the Mud Dweller's words, so the two men just stood there, their right hands touching, smiling.

"Do any of you know any of the Mud Dwellers' words among men?" asked Sleepy Hawk.

The young men shook their heads.

"Never mind. Put down your weapons."

"Is that wise?" asked Mountain Bear.

"It is. Put them down."

So all the young men except Long Ax lowered their spears and put their knives and axes in their belts.

"Long Ax! I command you——" Sleepy Hawk began, but the chief of the Mud Dwellers turned his head and said a few words to his followers and they, slowly, took apart their two-handled spears and set them on the ground and those that had knives in their hands put these back in their belts. So Long Ax, too, let his weapon rest on the ground.

While their men stood, not at peace, but not ready for war, the two chiefs made talk with their hands; and after a while Sleepy Hawk nodded many times and turned to his followers and said, "Now we may go. With no spears in our backs. I have his promise."

"What is that worth!" cried Long Ax. "I do not turn my back on an enemy."

"Stay here, then," answered Sleepy Hawk. He himself waved at the Mud Dweller, turned and took a step back toward the upward trail.

Then he stopped, so suddenly that Mountain Bear, who was behind him, bumped into Sleepy Hawk.

"What is the matter with you?" cried Mountain Bear.

"Let us stay a little longer. I want one of those spears."

Sleepy Hawk looked again at the Mud Dweller, smiled, and very slowly, took the knife from his belt. The Mud Dweller frowned, but made no move when he saw that Sleepy Hawk held the knife by its blade and offered it to him.

"One does not give presents to an enemy," said Hungry Dog.

"This is no present. Watch and see."

The Mud Dweller took Sleepy Hawk's knife and looked at it. It was a good knife, with a blade of sharp flint and a handle made of the polished horn of old humpback. It was easy to see that the Mud Dweller wanted the knife.

Then Sleepy Hawk pointed to the little head-belt with its polished stones. Then he pointed to himself, then to the knife, and finally, to the Mud Dweller.

The Mud Dweller reached behind his head and took off the belt. Its bright-colored stones sparkled in the sun's light. The

Mud Dweller handed it to Sleepy Hawk, who fastened it around his head. The Mud Dweller weighed the knife in his hand, nodded twice, and put the knife in the belt around his waist.

"Ha!" said Mountain Bear. "I thought you wanted a spear."

"Be quiet! I shall get one."

"How?"

"You shall see."

Once more Sleepy Hawk made as if to go. And once more he stopped and turned back to the Mud Dweller. That little man watched with sharp eyes. Sleepy Hawk took his rolled-up skin of a mountain cat from around his waist, shook it out so that the Mud Dweller could see, and spread it on the ground.

The Mud Dweller felt of the skin and his fingers saw how soft it was, having been well cured by Sleepy Hawk's oldest mother. Sleepy Hawk looked up at the sun, covered his eyes, and shivered. The Mud Dweller watched closely. Sleepy Hawk uncovered his eyes but still shivered. Then he reached for the skin and wrapped it around him. As soon as it covered him all over, he stopped shaking and smiled.

The chief of the Mud Dwellers nodded to show he understood that when the time of little sun came, the skin would keep him warm and dry.

He reached toward Sleepy Hawk for the skin of the big cat.

"Careful!" Mountain Bear called softly.

Sleepy Hawk let the skin fall to the ground. The Mud Dweller reached for it again, but Sleepy Hawk raised his hand, shook his head just a little, and walked over to where the two parts of the chief's spear lay on the ground. A Mud Dweller started for Sleepy Hawk, but his chief called out and the man was quiet. Sleepy Hawk picked up the two parts of the weapon but did not take them away. Instead he carried them back to the chief of the Mud Dwellers.

Sleepy Hawk made slow, careful signs. He lifted in his hand the spear that was no spear, but just a harmless stick. He shook

it, held each end of it in turn, very close to his eyes, then, shaking his head, he let that stick fall to the ground. Next, Sleepy Hawk looked at the spear that was a proper spear, felt its sharp point with his thumb and nodded. After that, he picked up the other stick and held both parts out toward the Mud Dweller.

The Mud Dweller shook his head.

Sleepy Hawk stirred the cat's skin with his toe.

The Mud Dweller frowned just a little, then nodded. He moved his hand to show that Sleepy Hawk could have the two spears and reached down for the skin. But Sleepy Hawk shook his head and held out the stick part that was not a spear at all.

The Mud Dweller smiled, took both parts from Sleepy Hawk's hands. He looked around him, then moved to the rim of the ledge and stood there, looking upward.

"Now we shall see how a man throws that spear," Sleepy Hawk said softly.

"Surely he will not throw it *up* the mountain," said Mountain Bear.

But that is what the little man did. The Mud Dweller put the pieces together and raised his arm back to throw. One of the shafts went back from his hand. The queer hook at its end held the haft of the true spear. Then the Mud Dweller threw and, as the stick in his hand made his arm twice as long as any man's, so was his throw twice as strong and the spear flew up the mountain, farther than the farthest spear ever thrown by any of The People. It landed beside the trail down which the young men had come and stood there, its point deep in the ground.

"Oo—ee!" whistled Mountain Bear.

"A stick that throws!" cried Sleepy Hawk.

"The stick throws the spear!" said Cat-in-the-Mud. He grinned sourly at Long Ax. "Their weapons are better than ours. Sleepy Hawk is a very wise chief."

And Hungry Dog nodded and moved away from Long Ax.

Then the chief of the Mud Dwellers took up Sleepy Hawk's spear and showed him how to fit it on the throwing stick. He seemed to think of something new, then, for he pointed to his own spear sticking in the ground high up the mountain. He made a sign to keep Sleepy Hawk's spear, then pointed at Sleepy Hawk and to the spear up by the trail.

"A wise man," Sleepy Hawk said to Mountain Bear. "He wants to keep my spear and I will take his as we pass by it."

"Wait!" cried Mountain Bear. "I want one of those spear-throwers!"

And he unwrapped his bear's skin from where it was wound around his middle and walked over to one of the Mud Dwellers. After him came the rest of the young men of The People, even the angry Long Ax, and The People and the Mud Dwellers stood beside each other, smiling and talking, even though there was no understanding of what was said.

And all of them laughed when a little, fat Mud Dweller offered Hungry Dog some small, round brown things and made signs that Hungry Dog should eat them. Which Hungry Dog did, of course.

"Good!" he cried with his mouth full, as a man should not. "Eat them! They're good!"

"Now, Hungry Dog," said Sleepy Hawk, "give them some dried meat."

Hungry Dog looked unhappy at this but he took some dried flesh of deer and offered it to the Mud Dwellers. After chewing a little bit, they smiled and rubbed their middles to show that the dried meat was good to their insides.

Now the sun was straight up in the sky. The giving and receiving was finished and the men stood about, tired, hot, but peaceful. Sleepy Hawk made signs to the Mud Dweller chief, pointing up the mountain. That man nodded, but he looked sad. Then Sleepy Hawk looked up at the sun, waved his hand across the sky, pointed down at the ledge, held up his fingers many times. The Mud Dweller smiled.

Sleepy Hawk thought a long time, looking hard at the Mud

Dweller, then he said a word. Mountain Bear, who was standing by, had never heard this word before.

Sleepy Hawk pointed to the Mud Dwellers and the young men of The People, at the skins and the weapons, and at the belts with the colored stones.

He said the word again.

The Mud Dweller said the word after Sleepy Hawk.

Sleepy Hawk and the Mud Dweller said the word together.

Then the young men of The People waved to the Mud Dwellers and started the climb back to the top of the mountain.

When they reached the flat top of the mountain and rested a while, Sleepy Hawk laughed softly and said to Mountain Bear, "You know, I have another, better knife at home. And my cat's skin was old. I shall hunt for another one." He laughed again. "But I have never had a stick that throws spears farther than can a man's arms. And when I seek a wife, I shall give her father some of the colored stones. Even the chief of all our chiefs should then be willing to give me his oldest daughter—the beautiful one."

Mountain Bear hefted the throwing stick. "We are coming back?"

"Yes. I want more throwing sticks. I want many belts with their stones of many colors. Yes, in three hands of suns I will return to . . ."

"To what?" asked Mountain Bear. "I heard you make a word."

"Yes. I made a word to tell of giving one thing to get another. I taught it to that chief of the Mud Dwellers. So, from now on, unless some fool like Long Ax makes trouble, the Mud Dweller and I will not fight. We will *trade*."

And that is why we go peacefully to the land of Mud Dwellers and bring back many things without war. And that is why the youngest young son of Sleepy Hawk, who is like the

old man was, is planning to go up the mountains where the Dwellers-in-Caves are. He thinks they will trade us the strange colors they put on the walls of their caves and other things for our throwing sticks and skins and bright stones.

AVRAM DAVIDSON

Avram Davidson, scholar and critic, has the most beautiful beard that has ever visited this office, and one of the most attractively wide-ranging minds, full of fascinating lore on arcane and unlikely subjects. For his first fiction in book form, he takes his theme from an offtrail branch of folklore, the baffling rime-games sung by little girls, with distinctive and delightful results.

My Boy Friend's Name Is Jello

FASHION, nothing but fashion. Virus X having in the medical zodiac its course half i-run, the physician (I refuse to say "doctor" and, indeed, am tempted to use the more correct "apothecary")—the physician, I say, tells me I have Virus Y. No doubt in the Navy it would still be called Catarrhal Fever. They say that hardly anyone had appendicitis until Edward VII came down with it a few weeks before his coronation, and thus made it fashionable. He (the medical man) is dosing me with injections of some stuff that comes in vials. A few centuries ago he would have used herbal clysters. . . . Where did I read that old remedy for the quinsy ("putrescent sore throat," says my dictionary)? *Take seven weeds from seven meads and seven nails from seven steeds.* Oh dear, how my mind runs on. I must be feverish. An ague, no doubt.

Well, rather an ague than a pox. A pox is something one wishes on editors . . . strange breed, editors. The females all have names like Lulu Ammabelle Smith or Minnie Lundquist Bloom, and the males have little horns growing out of their brows. They must all be Quakers, I suppose, for their letters invariably begin, "Dear Richard Roe" or "Dear John Doe," as if the word *mister* were a Vanity . . . when they write at all, that is; and meanwhile Goodwife Moos calls weekly for the

rent. If I ever have a son (than which nothing is more unlikely) who shows the slightest inclination of becoming a writer, I shall instantly prentice him to a fishmonger or a Master Chimney Sweep. Don't write about Sex, the editors say, and don't write about Religion, or about History. If, however, you *do* write about History, be sure to add Religion and Sex. If one sends in a story about a celibate atheist, however, do you think they'll buy it?

In front of the house two little girls are playing one of those clap-handie games. Right hand, left hand, cross hands on bosom, left hand, right hand . . . it makes one dizzy to watch. And singing the while:

> My *boy* friend's *name* is *Jel*lo,
> He *comes* from *Cin*cin*ello*,
> With a *pim*ple on his *nose*
> And *three* fat toes;
> And *that's* the *way* my *sto*ry goes!

There is a pleasing surrealist quality to this which intrigues me. In general I find little girls enchanting. What a shame they grow up to be *big* girls and make our lives as miserable as we allow them, and ofttimes more. Silly, nasty-minded critics, trying to make poor Dodgson a monster of abnormality, simply because he loved Alice and was capable of following her into Wonderland. I suppose they would have preferred him to have taken a country curacy and become another Pastor Quiverful. A perfectly normal and perfectly horrible existence, and one which would have left us all still on *this* side of the looking-glass.

Whatever was in those vials doesn't seem to be helping me. I suppose old Dover's famous Powders hadn't the slightest fatal effect on the germs, bacteria, or virus (viri?), but at least they gave one a good old sweat (ipecac) and a mild, non-habit-forming jag (opium). But they're old-fashioned now, and so there we go again, round and round, one's train of thought like a Japanese waltzing mouse. I used to know a Japanese

who—now, stop that. Distract yourself. Talk to the little girls. . .

Well, that was a pleasant interlude. We discussed (quite gravely, for I never condescend to children) the inconveniences of being sick, the unpleasantness of the heat; we agreed that a good rain would cool things off. Then their attention began to falter, and I lay back again. Miss Thurl may be in soon. Mrs. Moos (perfect name, she lacks only the antlers) said, whilst bringing in the bowl of slops which the medicine man allows me for victuals, said, My Sister Is Coming Along Later And She's Going To Fix You Up Some Nice Flowers. Miss Thurl, I do believe, spends most of her time fixing flowers. Weekends she joins a confraternity of overgrown campfire girls and boys who go on hiking trips, comes back sunburned and sweating and carrying specimen samples of plant and lesser animal life. However, I must say for Miss Thurl that she is quiet. Her brother-in-law, the bull-Moos, would be in here all the time if I suffered it. He puts stupid quotations in other people's mouths. He will talk about the weather and I will not utter a word, then he will say, Well, It's Like You Say, It's Not The Heat But The Humidity.

Thinking of which, I notice a drop in the heat, and I see it is raining. That should cool things off. How pleasant. A pity that it is washing away the marks of the little girls' last game. They played this one on the sidewalk, with chalked-out patterns and bits of stone and broken glass. They chanted and hopped back and forth across the chalkmarks and shoved the bits of stone and glass—or were they potsherds—"potsie" from potsherd, perhaps? I shall write a monograph, should I ever desire a Ph.D. I will compare the chalkmarks with Toltec emblems and masons' marks and the signs which Hindoo holy men smear on themselves with wood ashes and perfumed cow dung. All this passes for erudition.

I feel terrible, despite the cool rain. Perhaps without it, I should feel worse.

Miss Thurl was just here. A huge bowl of blossoms, arranged

on the table across the room. Intricately arranged, I should say; but she put some extra touches to it, humming to herself. Something ever so faintly reminiscent about that tune, and vaguely disturbing. Then she made one of her rare remarks. She said that I needed a wife to take care of me. My blood ran cold. An icy sweat (to quote Catullus, that wretched Priapist), bedewed my limbs. I moaned. Miss Thurl at once departed, murmuring something about a cup of tea. If I weren't so weak I'd knot my bedsheets together and escape. But I am terribly feeble.

It's unmanly to weep. . . .

Back she came, literally poured the tea down my throat. A curious taste it had. Sassafras? Bergamot? Mandrake root? It is impossible to say how old Miss Thurl is. She wears her hair parted in the center and looped back. Ageless . . . ageless . . .

I thank whatever gods may be that Mr. Ahyellow came in just then. The other boarder (upstairs), a greengrocer, decent fellow, a bit short-tempered. He wished me soon well. He complained he had his own troubles, foot troubles . . . I scarcely listened, just chattered, hoping the Thurl would get her hence. . . . Toes . . . something about his toes. Swollen, three of them, quite painful. A bell tinkled in my brain. I asked him how he spelt his name. A-j-e-l-l-o. Curious, I never thought of that. Now, I wonder what he could have done to offend the little girls? Chased them from in front of his store, perhaps. There is a distinct reddish spot on his nose. By tomorrow he will have an American Beauty of a pimple.

Fortunately he and Miss Thurl went out together. I must think this through. I must remain cool. Aroint thee, thou mist of fever. This much is obvious: There are sorcerers about. Sorceresses, I mean. The little ones made rain. And they laid a minor curse on poor Ajello. The elder one has struck me in the very vitals, however. If I had a cow it would doubtless be dry by this time. Should I struggle? Should I submit? Who knows what lies behind those moss-colored eyes, what thoughts

inside the skull covered by those heavy tresses? Life with Mrs. and Mr. Moos is—even by itself—too frightful to contemplate. Why doesn't she lay her traps for Ajello? Why should I be selected as the milk-white victim for the Hymeneal sacrifice? Useless to question. Few men have escaped once the female cast the runes upon them. And the allopath has nothing in his little black bag, either, which can cure.

Blessed association of words! Allopath—Homeopath—*homoios*, the like, the same, *pathos*, feeling, suffering—*similia similibus curantur*——

The little girls are playing beneath my window once more, clapping hands and singing. Something about a boy friend named Tony, who eats macaroni, has a great big knife and a pretty little wife, and will always lead a happy life . . . that must be the butcher opposite; he's always kind to the children. . . . Strength, strength! The work of a moment to get two coins from my wallet and throw them down. What little girl could resist picking up a dime which fell in front of her? "*Cross my palm with silver, pretty gentleman!*"—eh? And now to tell them my tale . . .

I feel better already. I don't think I'll see Miss Thurl again for a while. She opened the door, the front door, and when the children had sung the new verse she slammed the door shut quite viciously.

It's too bad about Ajello, but every man for himself.

Listen to them singing away, bless their little hearts! I love little girls. Such sweet, innocent voices.

> My *boy* friend will *soon* be *heal*thy.
> He *shall* be *very wealth*y.
> No *wo*man shall *harry*
> Or *seek* to *marry*;
> *Two* and *two* is *four*, and *one* to *carry!*

It will be pleasant to be wealthy, I hope. I must ask Ajello where Cincinello is.

RICHARD MATHESON

Richard Matheson is the realist of science-fantasy, who has managed to impart a curiously convincing, drawn-from-life quality to the most varied beings, from the mutant monster in his classic first story, Born of Man and Woman *(F&SF, Summer, 1950), to the new breed of vampires in his powerful s.f. novel,* I AM LEGEND *(Gold Medal, 1954). Now he turns realist in another sense, creating no terrors of the imagination but projecting into the future a real and many-valued problem of today—and one to which, as this poignant and perceptive story reveals, even the enlightened future may find no simple answer.*

The Test

THE night before the test, Les helped his father study in the dining room. Jim and Tommy were asleep upstairs and, in the living room, Terry was sewing, her face expressionless as the needle moved with a swiftly rhythmic piercing and drawing.

Tom Parker sat very straight, his lean, vein-ribbed hands clasped together on the table top, his pale blue eyes looking intently at his son's lips as though it might help him to understand better.

He was eighty and this was his fourth test.

"All right," Les said, reading from the sample test Doctor Trask had gotten them. "Repeat the following sequences of numbers."

"Sequence of numbers," Tom murmured, trying to assimilate the words as they came. But words were not quickly assimilated any more; they seemed to lie upon the tissues of his brain like insects on a sluggish carnivore. He said the words in his mind again—*sequence of . . . sequence of numbers*—there he had it. He looked at his son and waited.

"Well?" he said, impatiently, after a moment's silence.

"Dad, I've already given you the first one," Les told him.

"Well . . ." His father grasped for the proper words. "Kindly give me the—the . . . do me the kindness of . . ."

Les exhaled wearily. "Eight-five-eleven-six," he said.

The old lips stirred, the old machinery of Tom's mind began turning slowly.

"Eight . . . f—ive . . ." The pale eyes blinked slowly. "Elevensix," Tom finished in a breath, then straightened himself proudly.

Yes, good, he thought—very good. They wouldn't fool him tomorrow; he'd beat their murderous law. His lips pressed together and his hands clasped tightly on the white tablecloth.

"What?" he said then, refocusing his eyes as Les said something. "Speak up," he said, irritably. "Speak *up*."

"I gave you another sequence," Les said quietly. "Here I'll read it again."

Tom leaned forward a little, ears straining.

"Nine-two-sixteen-seven-three," Les said.

Tom cleared his throat with effort. "Speak slower," he told his son. He hadn't quite gotten that. How did they expect anyone to retain such a ridiculously long string of numbers?

"What, *what?*" he asked angrily as Les read the numbers again.

"Dad, the examiner will be reading the questions faster than *I'm* reading them. You—"

"I'm quite aware of that," Tom interrupted stiffly, "quite aware. Let me remind you . . . however, this is . . . not a test. It's study, it's for *study*. Foolish to go rushing through everything. *Foolish*. I have to learn this—this . . . this *test*," he finished, angry at his son and angry at the way desired words hid themselves from his mind.

Les shrugged and looked down at the test again. "Nine-two-sixteen-seven-three," he read slowly.

"Nine-two-six-seven——"

"Six*teen*-seven, Dad."

"I said that."

"You said six, Dad."

"Don't you suppose I know what I said!"

Les closed his eyes a moment. "All right, Dad," he said.

"Well, are you going to read it again or not?" Tom asked him sharply.

Les read the numbers off again and, as he listened to his father stumble through the sequence, he glanced into the living room at Terry.

She was sitting there, features motionless, sewing. She'd turned off the radio and he knew she could hear the old man faltering with the numbers.

All right, Les heard himself saying in his mind as if he spoke to her. All right, I know he's old and useless. Do you want me to tell him that to his face and drive a knife into his back? You know and I know that he won't pass the test. Allow me, at least, this brief hypocrisy. Tomorrow the sentence will be passed. Don't make me pass it tonight and break the old man's heart.

"That's correct, I believe," Les heard the dignified voice of his father say and he refocused his eyes on the gaunt, seamed face.

"Yes, that's right," he said hastily.

He felt like a traitor when a slight smile trembled at the corners of his father's mouth. I'm cheating him, he thought.

"Let's go on to something else," he heard his father say and he looked down quickly at the sheet. What would be easy for him? he thought, despising himself for thinking it.

"Well, come on, Leslie," his father said in a restrained voice. "We have no time to waste."

Tom looked at his son thumbing through the pages and his hands closed into fists. Tomorrow, his life was in the balance and his son just browsed through the test paper as if nothing important were going to happen tomorrow.

"Come on, come on," he said peevishly.

Les picked up a pencil that had string attached to it and

drew a half-inch circle on a piece of blank paper. He held out the pencil to his father.

"Suspend the pencil point over the circle for three minutes," he said, suddenly afraid he'd picked the wrong question. He'd seen his father's hands trembling at meal times or fumbling with the buttons and zippers of his clothes.

Swallowing nervously, Les picked up the stop watch, started it, and nodded to his father.

Tom took a quivering breath as he leaned over the paper and tried to hold the slightly swaying pencil above the circle. Les saw him lean on his elbow, something he wouldn't be allowed to do on the test; but he said nothing.

He sat there looking at his father. Whatever color there had been was leaving the old man's face and Les could see clearly the tiny red lines of broken vessels under the skin of his cheeks. He looked at the dry skin, creased and brownish, dappled with liver spots. Eighty years old, he thought—what does a man feel when he's eighty years old?

He looked in at Terry again. For a moment, her gaze shifted and they were looking at each other, neither of them smiling or making any sign. Then Terry looked back to her sewing.

"I believe that's three minutes," Tom said in a taut voice.

Les looked down at the stop watch. "A minute and a half, Dad," he said, wondering if he should have lied again.

"Well, keep your eyes on the watch then," his father said, perturbedly, the pencil penduluming completely out of the circle. "This is supposed to be a test, not a—a—a *party*."

Les kept his eyes on the wavering pencil point, feeling a sense of utter futility at the realization that this was only pretense, that nothing they did could save his father's life.

At least, he thought, the examinations weren't given by the sons and daughters who had voted the law into being. At least he wouldn't have to stamp the black INADEQUATE on his father's test and thus pronounce the sentence.

The pencil wavered over the circle edge again and was re-

turned as Tom moved his arm slightly on the table, a motion that would automatically disqualify him on that question.

"That watch is slow!" Tom said in a sudden fury.

Les caught his breath and looked down at the watch. Two and a half minutes. "Three minutes," he said, pushing in the plunger.

Tom slapped down the pencil irritably. "*There,*" he said. "Fool test anyway." His voice grew morose. "Don't prove a thing. Not a thing."

"You want to do some money questions, Dad?"

"Are they the next questions in the test?" Tom asked, looking over suspiciously to check for himself.

"Yes," Les lied, knowing that his father's eyes were too weak to see even though Tom always refused to admit he needed glasses. "Oh, wait a second, there's one before that," he added, thinking it would be easier for his father. "They ask you to tell time."

"That's a foolish question," Tom muttered. "What do they——"

He reached across the table irritably and picked up the watch and glanced down at its face. "Ten-fifteen," he said, scornfully.

Before Les could think to stop himself, he said, "But it's eleven-fifteen, Dad."

His father looked, for a moment, as though his face had been slapped. Then he picked up the watch again and stared down at it, lips twitching, and Les had the horrible premonition that Tom was going to insist it really was ten-fifteen.

"Well, that's what I meant," Tom said abruptly. "Slipped out wrong. Course it's eleven-fifteen, any fool can see that. Eleven-fifteen. Watch is no good. Numbers too close. Ought to throw it away. Now——"

Tom reached into his vest pocket and pulled out his own gold watch. "Here's a *watch,*" he said, proudly. "Been telling perfect time for . . . sixty years! That's a watch. Not like *this.*"

He tossed Les's watch down contemptuously and it flipped over on its face and the crystal broke.

"Look at that," Tom said quickly, to cover the jolting of embarrassment. "Watch can't take anything."

He avoided Les's eyes by looking down at his own watch. His mouth tightened as he opened the back and looked at Mary's picture; Mary when she was in her thirties, golden-haired and lovely.

Thank God, she didn't have to take these tests, he thought —at least she was spared that. Tom had never thought he could believe that Mary's accidental death at fifty-seven was fortunate but that was before the tests.

He closed the watch and put it away.

"You just leave that watch with me, tonight," he said grumpily. "I'll see you get a decent . . . uh, *crystal* tomorrow."

"That's all right, Dad. It's just an old watch."

"That's *all* right," Tom said. "That's all right. You just leave it with me I'll get you a decent . . . crystal. Get you one that won't break, one that won't break. You just leave it with me."

Tom did the money questions then, questions like *How many quarters in a five-dollar bill?* and *If I took thirty-six cents from your dollar, how much change would you have left?*

They were written questions and Les sat there timing his father. It was quiet in the house, warm. Everything seemed very normal and ordinary with the two of them sitting there and Terry sewing in the living room.

That was the horror.

Life went on as usual. No one spoke of dying. The government sent out letters and the tests were given and those who failed were requested to appear at the government center for their injections. The law operated, the death rate was steady, the population problem was contained—all officially, impersonally, without a cry or a sensation.

But it was still loved people who were being killed.

"Never mind hanging over that watch," his father said, "I

can do these questions without you . . . hanging over that watch."

"Dad, the examiners will be looking at their watches."

"The examiners are the examiners," Tom snapped. "You're not an examiner."

"Dad, I'm trying to help y——"

"Well, help me then, *help* me. Don't sit there hanging over that watch."

"This is your test, Dad, not mine," Les started, a flush of anger creeping up his cheeks. "If——"

"My test, yes, my test!" his father suddenly raged. "You all saw to that, didn't you? All saw to it that—that——"

Words failed again, angry thoughts piling up in his brain.

"You don't have to yell, Dad."

"I'm not yelling!"

"Dad, the boys are sleeping!" Terry suddenly broke in.

"I don't care if—!" Tom broke off suddenly and leaned back in the chair, the pencil falling unnoticed from his fingers and rolling across the tablecloth. He sat shivering, his thin chest rising and falling in jerks, his hands twitching uncontrollably on his lap.

"Do you want to go on, Dad?" Les asked, restraining his nervous anger.

"I don't ask much," Tom mumbled to himself. "Don't ask much in life."

"Dad, shall we go *on?*"

His father stiffened. "*If you can spare the time,*" he said with slow, indignant pride. "*If you can spare the time.*"

Les looked at the test paper, his fingers gripping the stapled sheets rigidly. Psychological questions? No, he couldn't ask them. How did you ask your eighty-year-old father his views on sex?—your flint-surfaced father to whom the most innocuous remark was "obscene."

"Well?" his father asked in a rising voice.

"There doesn't seem to be any more," Les said. "We've been at it almost four hours now."

"What about all those pages you just skipped?"

"Most of those are for the . . . the physical, Dad."

He saw his father's lips press together and was afraid Tom was going to say something about that again. But all his father said was, "A fine friend. Fine friend."

"Dad, you——"

Les's voice broke off. There was no point in talking about it any more. Tom knew perfectly well that Doctor Trask couldn't make out a bill of health for this test the way he'd done for the three tests previous.

Les knew how frightened and insulted the old man was because he'd have to take off his clothes and be exposed to doctors who would probe and tap and ask offensive questions. He knew how afraid Tom was of the fact that when he redressed, he'd be watched from a peephole and someone would mark on a chart how well he dressed himself. He knew how it frightened his father to know that, when he ate in the government cafeteria at the midpoint of the day-long examination, eyes would be watching him again to see if he dropped a fork or a spoon or knocked over a glass of water or dribbled gravy on his shirt.

"They'll ask you to sign your name and address," Les said, wanting his father to forget about the physical and knowing how proud Tom was of his handwriting.

Pretending that he grudged it, the old man picked up the pencil and wrote. I'll fool them, he thought as the pencil moved across the page with strong, sure motions.

Mr. Thomas Parker, he wrote, *2719 Brighton Street, Blairtown, New York.*

"And the date," Les said.

The old man wrote, *January 17, 2003,* and something cold moved in the old man's vitals.

Tomorrow was the test.

They lay beside each other, neither of them sleeping. They had barely spoken while undressing and when Les had leaned

over to kiss her good night she'd murmured something he didn't hear.

Now he turned over on his side with a heavy sigh and faced her. In the darkness, she opened her eyes and looked over at him.

"Asleep?" she asked softly.

"No."

He said no more. He waited for her to start.

But she didn't start and, after a few moments, he said, "Well, I guess this is . . . it." He finished weakly because he didn't like the words; they sounded ridiculously melodramatic.

Terry didn't say anything right away. Then, as if thinking aloud, she said, "Do you think there's any chance that——"

Les tightened at the words because he knew what she was going to say.

"No," he said. "He'll never pass."

He heard Terry swallowing. Don't say it, he thought, pleadingly. Don't tell me I've been saying the same thing for fifteen years. I know it. I said it because I thought it was true.

Suddenly, he wished he'd signed the *Request for Removal* years before. They needed desperately to be free of Tom, for the good of their children and themselves. But how did you put that need into words without feeling like a murderer? You couldn't say: I hope the old man fails, I hope they kill him. Yet anything else you said was only a hypocritical substitute for those words because that was exactly how you felt.

Medical terms, he thought—charts about declining crops and lowered standard of living and hunger ratio and degrading health level—they'd used all those as arguments to support passage of the law. Well, they were lies—obvious, groundless lies. The law had been passed because people wanted to be left alone, because they wanted to live their own lives.

"Les, what if he passes?" Terry said.

He felt his hands tightening on the mattress.

"Les?"

"I don't know, honey," he said.

Her voice was firm in the darkness. It was a voice at the end of patience. "You have to know," it said.

He moved his head restlessly on the pillow. "Honey, don't push it," he begged. "Please."

"Les, if he passes that test it means five more years. *Five more years*, Les. Have you thought what that means?"

"Honey, he can't pass that test."

"But, what if he does?"

"Terry, he missed three quarters of the questions I asked him tonight. His hearing is almost gone, his eyes are bad, his heart is weak, he has arthritis." His fist beat down hopelessly on the bed. "He won't even pass the *physical*," he said, feeling himself tighten in self-hatred for assuring her that Tom was doomed.

If only he could forget the past and take his father for what he was now—a helpless, interfering old man who was ruining their lives. But it was hard to forget how he'd loved and respected his father, hard to forget the hikes in the country, the fishing trips, the long talks at night and all the many things his father and he had shared together.

That was why he'd never had the strength to sign the request. It was a simple form to fill out, much simpler than waiting for the five-year tests. But it had meant signing away the life of his father, requesting the government to dispose of him like some unwanted garbage. He could never do that.

And yet, now his father was eighty and, in spite of moral upbringing, in spite of life-taught Christian principles, he and Terry were horribly afraid that old Tom might pass the test and live another five years with them—another five years of fumbling around the house, undoing instructions they gave to the boys, breaking things, wanting to help but only getting in the way and making life an agony of held-in nerves.

"You'd better sleep," Terry said to him.

He tried to but he couldn't. He lay staring at the dark ceiling and trying to find an answer but finding no answer.

The alarm went off at six. Les didn't have to get up until eight but he wanted to see his father off. He got out of bed and dressed quietly so he wouldn't wake up Terry.

She woke up anyway and looked up at him from her pillow. After a moment, she pushed up on one elbow and looked sleepily at him.

"I'll get up and make you some breakfast," she said.

"That's all right," Les said. "You stay in bed."

"Don't you want me to get up?"

"Don't bother, honey," he said. "I want you to rest."

She lay down again and turned away so Les wouldn't see her face. She didn't know why she began to cry soundlessly; whether it was because he didn't want her to see his father or because of the test. But she couldn't stop. All she could do was hold herself rigid until the bedroom door had closed.

Then her shoulders trembled and a sob broke the barrier she had built in herself.

The door to his father's room was open as Les passed. He looked in and saw Tom sitting on the bed, leaning down and fastening his dark shoes. He saw the gnarled fingers shaking as they moved over the straps.

"Everything all right, Dad?" Les asked.

His father looked up in surprise. "What are you doing up this hour?" he asked.

"Thought I'd have breakfast with you," Les told him.

For a moment they looked at each other in silence. Then his father leaned over the shoes again. "That's not necessary," he heard the old man's voice telling him.

"Well, I think I'll have some breakfast anyway," he said and turned away so his father couldn't argue.

"Oh . . . *Leslie.*"

Les turned.

"I trust you didn't forget to leave that watch out," his father said. "I intend to take it to the jewelers today and have a decent . . . decent crystal put on it, one that won't break."

"Dad, it's just an old watch," Les said. "It's not worth a nickel."

His father nodded slowly, one palm wavering before him as if to ward off argument. "Never-the-less," he stated slowly, "I intend to——"

"All right, Dad, all right. I'll put it on the kitchen table."

His father broke off and looked at him blankly a moment. Then, as if it were impulse and not delayed will, he bent over his shoes again.

Les stood for a moment looking down at his father's gray hair, his gaunt, trembling fingers. Then he turned away.

The watch was still on the dining-room table. Les picked it up and took it in to the kitchen table. The old man must have been re-minding himself about the watch all night, he thought. Otherwise he wouldn't have managed to remember it.

He put fresh water in the coffee globe and pushed the buttons for two servings of bacon and eggs. Then he poured two glasses of orange juice and sat down at the table.

About fifteen minutes later, his father came down wearing his dark blue suit, his shoes carefully polished, his nails manicured, his hair slicked down and combed and brushed. He looked very neat and very old as he walked over to the coffee globe and looked in.

"Sit down, Dad," Les said. "I'll get it for you."

"I'm not helpless," his father said. "Stay where you are."

Les managed a smile. "I put some bacon and eggs on for us," he said.

"Not hungry," his father replied.

"You'll need a good breakfast in you, Dad."

"Never did eat a big breakfast," his father said, stiffly, still facing the stove. "Don't believe in it. Not good for the stomach."

Les closed his eyes a moment and across his face moved an expression of hopeless despair. Why did I bother getting up? he asked himself defeatedly. All we'd do is argue.

No. He felt himself stiffening. No, he'd be cheerful if it killed him.

"Sleep all right, Dad?" he asked.

"Course I slept all right," his father answered. "Always sleep fine. Fine. Did you think I wouldn't because of a——"

He broke off suddenly and turned accusingly at Les. "Where's that watch?" he demanded.

Les exhaled wearily and held up the watch. His father moved jerkily across the linoleum, took it from him and looked at it a moment, his old lips pursed.

"Shoddy workmanship," he said. "Shoddy." He put it carefully in his side coat pocket. "Get you a decent crystal," he muttered. "One that won't break."

Les nodded. "That'll be swell, Dad."

The coffee was ready then and Tom poured them each a cup. Les got up and turned off the automatic griller. He didn't feel like having bacon and eggs either now.

He sat across the table from his stern-faced father and felt hot coffee trickling down his throat. It tasted terrible but he knew that nothing in the world would have tasted good to him that morning.

"What time do you have to be there, Dad?" he asked to break the silence.

"Nine o'clock," Tom said.

"You're sure you don't want me to drive you there?"

"Not at all, not at all," his father said as though he were talking patiently to an irritably insistent child. "The tube is good enough. Get me there in plenty of time."

"All right, Dad," Les said and sat there staring into his coffee. There must be something he could say, he thought, but he couldn't think of anything. Silence hung over them for long minutes while Tom drank his black coffee in slow, methodical sips.

Les licked his lips nervously, then hid the trembling of them behind his cup. Talking, he thought, talking and talking—of cars and tube conveyers and examination schedules—when all

the time both of them knew that Tom might be sentenced to death that day.

He was sorry he'd gotten up. It would have been better to wake up and just find his father gone. He wished it could happen that way—*permanently*. He wished he could wake up some morning and find his father's room empty—the two suits gone, the dark shoes gone, the work clothes gone, the handkerchiefs, the socks, the garters, the braces, the shaving equipment—all those mute evidences of a life gone.

But it wouldn't be like that. After Tom failed the test, it would be several weeks before the letter of final appointment came and then another week or so before the appointment itself. It would be a hideously slow process of packing and disposing of and giving away of possessions, a process of meals and meals and meals together, of talking to each other, of a last dinner, of a long drive to the government center, of a ride up in a silent, humming elevator, of——

Dear God!

He found himself shivering helplessly and was afraid for a moment that he was going to cry.

Then he looked up with a shocked expression as his father stood.

"I'll be going now," Tom said.

Les's eyes fled to the wall clock. "But it's only a quarter to seven," he said, tensely. "It doesn't take that long to——"

"Like to be in plenty of time," his father said firmly. "Never like to be late."

"But my God, Dad, it only takes an hour at the most to get to the city," he said, feeling a terrible sinking in his stomach.

His father shook his head and Les knew he hadn't heard. "It's early, Dad," he said, loudly, his voice shaking a little.

"Never-the-less," his father said.

'But you haven't *eaten* anything."

"Never did eat a big breakfast," Tom started. "Not good for the——"

Les didn't hear the rest of it—the words about lifetime habit and not good for the digestion and everything else his father said. He felt waves of merciless horror breaking over him and he wanted to jump and throw his arms around the old man and tell him not to worry about the test because it didn't matter, because they loved him and would take care of him.

But he couldn't. He sat rigid with sick fright, looking up at his father. He couldn't even speak when his father turned at the kitchen door and said in a voice that was calmly dispassionate because it took every bit of strength the old man had to make it so, "I'll see you tonight, Leslie."

The door swung shut and the breeze that ruffled across Les's cheeks chilled him to the heart.

Suddenly, he jumped up with a startled grunt and rushed across the linoleum. As he pushed through the doorway he saw his father almost to the front door.

"Dad!"

Tom stopped and looked back in surprise as Les walked across the dining room, hearing the steps counted in his mind —*one, two, three, four, five.*

He stopped before his father and forced a faltering smile to his lips.

"Good luck, Dad," he said. "I'll . . . see you tonight." He had been about to say, "I'll be rooting for you"; but he couldn't.

His father nodded once, just once, a curt nod as of one gentleman acknowledging another.

"Thank you," his father said and turned away.

When the door shut, it seemed as if, suddenly, it had become an impenetrable wall through which his father could never pass again.

Les moved to the window and watched the old man walk slowly down the path and turn left onto the sidewalk. He watched his father start up the street, then straighten himself, throw back his lean shoulders and walk erect and briskly into the gray of morning.

At first Les thought it was raining. But then he saw that the shimmering moistness wasn't on the window at all.

He couldn't go to work. He phoned in sick and stayed home. Terry got the boys off to school and, after they'd eaten breakfast, Les helped her clear away the morning dishes and put them in the washer. Terry didn't say anything about his staying home. She acted as if it were normal for him to be home on a weekday.

He spent the morning and afternoon puttering in the garage shop, starting seven different projects and losing interest in them.

Around five, he went into the kitchen and had a can of beer while Terry made supper. He didn't say anything to her. He kept pacing around the living room, staring out the window at the overcast sky, then pacing again. It had been threatening to rain all day.

"I wonder where he is," he finally said, back in the kitchen again.

"He'll be back," she said and he stiffened a moment, thinking he heard disgust in her voice. Then he relaxed, knowing it was only his imagination.

When he dressed after taking a shower, it was five-forty. The boys were home from playing and they all sat down to supper. Les noticed a place set for his father and wondered if Terry had set it there for his benefit.

He couldn't eat anything. He kept cutting the meat into smaller and smaller pieces and mashing butter into his baked potato without tasting any of it.

"What is it?" he asked as Jim spoke to him.

"Dad, if grandpa don't pass the test, he gets a month, don't he?"

Les felt his stomach muscles tightening as he stared at his older son. . . . *gets a month, don't he?*— the last of Jim's question muttered on in his brain.

"What are you talking about?" he asked .

"My Civics book says old people get a month to live after they don't pass their test. That right, isn't it?"

"No, it *isn't*," Tommy broke in. "Harry Senker's grandma got her letter after only two weeks."

"How do *you* know?" Jim asked his nine-year-old brother. "Did you *see* it?"

"That's enough," Les said.

"Don't *have* t'see it!" Tommy argued. "Harry told me that——"

"That's *enough!*"

The two boys looked suddenly at their white-faced father.

"We won't talk about it," he said.

"But what——"

"*Jimmy*," Terry said, warningly.

Jimmy looked at his mother, then, after a moment, went back to his food and they all ate in silence.

The death of their grandfather means nothing to them, Les thought bitterly—nothing at all. He swallowed and tried to relax the tightness in his body. Well, why *should* it mean anything to them? he told himself; it's not their time to worry yet. Why force it on them now? They'll have it soon enough.

When the front door opened and shut at six-ten, Les stood up so quickly, he knocked over an empty glass.

"Les, *don't*," Terry said suddenly and he knew, immediately, that she was right. His father wouldn't like him to come rushing from the kitchen with questions.

He slumped down on the chair again and stared at his barely touched food, his heart throbbing. As he picked up his fork with tight fingers, he heard the old man cross the dining-room rug and start up the stairs. He glanced at Terry and her throat moved.

He couldn't eat. He sat there breathing heavily, and picking at the food. Upstairs, he heard the door to his father's room close.

It was when Terry was putting the pie on the table that Les excused himself quickly and got up.

He was at the foot of the stairs when the kitchen door was pushed open. "Les," he heard her say, urgently.

He stood there silently as she came up to him.

"Isn't it better we leave him alone?" she asked.

"But, honey, I——"

"Les, if he'd passed the test, he would have come into the kitchen and told us."

"Honey, he wouldn't know if——"

"He'd know if he passed, you know that. He told us about it the last two times. If he'd passed, he'd have——"

Her voice broke off and she shuddered at the way he was looking at her. In the heavy silence, she heard a sudden splattering of rain on the windows.

They looked at each other a long moment. Then Les said, "I'm going up."

"Les," she murmured.

"I won't say anything to upset him," he said, "I'll . . ."

A moment longer they stared at each other. Then he turned away and trudged up the steps. Terry watched him go with a bleak, hopeless look on her face.

Les stood before the closed door a minute, bracing himself. I won't upset him, he told himself; I *won't*.

He knocked softly, wondering, in that second, if he were making a mistake. Maybe he should have left the old man alone, he thought unhappily. But he found himself knocking again.

In the bedroom, he heard a rustling movement on the bed, then the sound of his father's feet touching the floor.

"Who is it?" he heard Tom ask.

Les caught his breath. "It's me, Dad," he said.

"What do you want?"

"May I see you?"

Silence inside. "Well . . ." he heard his father say then

and his voice stopped. Les heard him get up and heard the sound of his footsteps on the floor. Then there was the sound of paper rattling and a bureau drawer being carefully shut.

Finally the door opened.

Tom was wearing his old red bathrobe over his clothes and he'd taken off his shoes and put his slippers on.

"May I come in, Dad?" Les asked quietly.

His father hesitated a moment. Then he said, "Come in," but it wasn't an invitation. It was more as if he'd said, This is your house; I can't keep you from this room.

Les was going to tell his father that he didn't want to disturb him but he couldn't. He went in and stood in the middle of the throw rug, waiting.

"Sit down," his father said and Les sat down on the upright chair that Tom hung his clothes on at night. His father waited until Les was seated and then sank down on the bed with a grunt.

For a long time they looked at each other without speaking, like total strangers, each waiting for the other one to speak. How did the test go? Les heard the words repeated in his mind. How did the test go, how did the test go? He couldn't speak the words. How did the——

"I suppose you want to know what . . . happened," his father said then, controlling himself visibly.

"Yes," Les said, "I . . ." He caught himself. "Yes," he repeated and waited.

Old Tom looked down at the floor for a moment. Then, suddenly, he raised his head and looked defiantly at his son.

"*I didn't go,*" he said.

Les felt as if all his strength had suddenly been sucked into the floor. He sat there, motionless, staring at his father.

"Had no intention of going," his father hurried on. "No intention of going through all that foolishness. Physical tests, m-mental tests, putting b-b-*blocks* in a board and . . . Lord knows what all! Had no intention of going."

He stopped and stared at his son with angry eyes as if he were daring Les to say he had done wrong.

But Les couldn't say anything.

A long time passed. Les swallowed and managed to summon the words. "What are you . . . going to do?"

"Never mind that, never mind," his father said, almost as if he were grateful for the question. "Don't you worry about your Dad. Your Dad knows how to take care of himself."

And suddenly Les heard the bureau drawer shutting again, the rustling of a paper bag. He almost looked around at the bureau to see if the bag were still there. His head twitched as he fought down the impulse.

"W-ell," he faltered, not realizing how stricken and lost his expression was.

"Just never mind now," his father said again, quietly, almost gently. "It's not your problem to worry about. Not your problem at all."

But it is! Les heard the words cried out in his mind. But he didn't speak them. Something in the old man stopped him; a sort of fierce strength, a taut dignity he knew he mustn't touch.

"I'd like to rest now," he heard Tom say then and he felt as if he'd been struck violently in the stomach. I'd like to rest now, to rest now—the words echoed down long tunnels of the mind as he stood. Rest now, rest now . . .

He found himself being ushered to the door where he turned and looked at his father. *Goodbye.* The word stuck in him.

Then his father smiled and said, "Good night, Leslie."

"*Dad.*"

He felt the old man's hand in his own, stronger than his, more steady; calming him, reassuring him. He felt his father's left hand grip his shoulder.

"Good night, son," his father said and, in the moment they stood close together, Les saw, over the old man's shoulder, the crumpled drugstore bag lying in the corner of the room as though it had been thrown there so as not to be seen.

Then he was standing in wordless terror in the hall, listening

to the latch clicking shut and knowing that, although his father wasn't locking the door, he couldn't go into his father's room.

For a long time he stood staring at the closed door, shivering without control. Then he turned away.

Terry was waiting for him at the foot of the stairs, her face drained of color. She asked the question with her eyes as he came down to her.

"He . . . didn't go," was all he said.

She made a tiny, startled sound in her throat. "But——"

"He's been to the drugstore," Les said. "I . . . saw the bag in the corner of the room. He threw it away so I wouldn't see it but I . . . saw it."

For a moment, it seemed as if she were starting for the stairs but it was only a momentary straining of her body.

"He must have shown the druggist the letter about the test," Les said. "The . . . druggist must have given him . . . pills. Like they all do."

They stood silently in the dining room while rain drummed against the windows.

"What shall we do?" she asked, almost inaudibly.

"Nothing," he murmured. His throat moved convulsively and breath shuddered through him. "*Nothing.*"

Then he was walking numbly back to the kitchen and he could feel her arm tight around him as if she were trying to press her love to him because she could not speak of love.

All evening, they sat there in the kitchen. After she put the boys to bed, she came back and they sat in the kitchen drinking coffee and talking in quiet, lonely voices.

Near midnight, they left the kitchen and, just before they went upstairs, Les stopped by the dining-room table and found the watch with a shiny new crystal on it. He couldn't even touch it.

They went upstairs and walked past the door of Tom's bedroom. There was no sound inside. They got undressed and

got in bed together and Terry set the clock the way she set it every night. In a few hours they both managed to fall asleep.

And all night there was silence in the old man's room. And the next day, silence.

ALBERT COMPTON FRIBORG

It's always more than gratifying to bring you a story by a Bradbury or a Heinlein; but in some ways it's an even greater pleasure to present the first story of a hitherto unpublished author—as F&SF did with Richard Matheson, Chad Oliver, Zenna Henderson, H. Nearing, Jr., Mildred Clingerman and many others. Here now is the latest addition to F&SF's discoveries: Albert Compton Friborg, who has been, he tells us, "at one time or another, a student at the Sorbonne, a singer with a French jazz band, a mink sexer, a student of Rabelais, a factory clerk, and a molder in a rubber plant." I hope, in time, to see stories from him on each of these subjects (with special emphasis on the application of mink sexing to xenobiology); meanwhile, this initial entry deals, in dry, witty and markedly individual style, with cybernetics, bureaucracy, milk shakes, atomic war, spittoons . . . and Love.

Careless Love

ROMEO *and Juliet and all their infernal descendants notwithstanding, the basic hostility* (Odell reflected) *between men and women could be demonstrated pretty cleanly by one quick look at history.* "General Horace H. Bartholomew, you have the address, Dear Horace: With respect to your note of last Monday . . ."

Otherwise (Odell mused) *why is it that every time we cook up an especially destructive hunk of machinery, we feel compelled to honor it with a feminine name? Just think of all the flintlocks name of Old Betsy. To say nothing of Big Bertha. To say even less of the Black Widow.* ". . . and I'll sign that sincerely yours, I guess. Next one to J. R. Morgridge, Commissioner of Internal Security, Fifteenth Level, City, Dear John . . ."

Enoch R. Odell shifted his not inconsiderable weight from one buttock to the other, nudged with his foot the brass spit-

toon, relic of a lost era, kept in reserve for the visits of Commissioner J. R. Morgridge, and continued dictating; *I am morally certain* (he thought) *that the first bow and arrow was named Womba or Samba or whatever the inventor's wife went by.* ". . . your office has, I presume, full information on these rumors, and you know and I know that Dinah can't operate at maximum without taking these factors into account. . . ." *Wonder whether the Lizzie got her name because the christener foresaw her destructive potentialities?*

". . . and sign it Nucky and send it right down to Fifteen by tube. That'll do, Miss Carpenter." *However had the H-bomb waited until 1960 to get christened Carrie Nation?*

And now they had Dinah.

Enoch Odell—Enoch R. Odell, Director in Chief of Cybernetics (Valet de Chambre, Hairdresser, and Pander to Dinah the Magnificent)—sighed, rose heavily, and picked up his hat, a relic, like himself, of days when government offices were exposed to sun and rain and rockets. "If John Morgridge calls on that note, tell him I'll be back in ten minutes. Going out for a milk shake." *His fifth today. Got to cut down. Analyst says it's compensation for lack of affection. Damn sure thing I get no affection from Dinah.*

Dinah. She had no affection for anybody and no hate even for the men on the other side of the world whose destruction her every move was calculated to produce. In the books they had her down as Harvard Mark Fifty-four, had her named after a college that only Odell and Morgridge and a few of the other older men could remember having seen, a college that had been located in a corner of the continent where nothing had lived since the first rockets came over the pole.

And she was a big gal, Dinah was—there was a big hunk of her forty levels down from Odell's office, a hunk that kept going on down for ninety levels more. There was a hunk of her in every place where a rocket was launched or a bomb assembled or a tank designed. And into every rocket and bomb and tank she built a piece of herself. She had an eye in every

observation post in the army and an ear in every radio band, and on ninety levels of New Washington and thirty levels of New Boston and fifty levels of New Gotham she rigorously shuffled information into memory files and went to work on those files with the formulae that had been given her by men like Odell.

A thousand times a day Dinah sent out the impulse that sent a hundred tons of radioactive death over the pole; and ten thousand times a day she impartially uncorked her formulae and her memory files to solve the problems of strategy fed into her on behalf of generals and admirals. Without love for those whom she was trying to defend or hate for those whom she was trying to destroy.

Odell took the lift down to Five and waddled into Sammy's Milk Bar and was halfway through the third milk shake before he had definitely decided to drink two. *Compensation.* He took twenty minutes instead of ten and so Commissioner Morgridge was in his office when he got back.

"Sit down, John. Take a load off."

"See who's talking. What's on your mind?" Morgridge looked around absent-mindedly, located the spittoon and let fly. *Oral-eroticism. Ask my analyst why the use of that foul tobacco. Non-conformism? Masochism.* Odell lit a violet-scented cigarette.

"Well, John," he wheezed, "heard some noise about civilian morale, particularly here in New Washington, especially up on Level One, especially on Pennsylvania Avenue, with particular attention to . . ."

Morgridge spat. "How much you heard?"

"So it's true." Odell lifted his eyebrows. "Surprise, surprise."

"Big joke. The Chief Executive—who, in spite of all your pretensions on behalf of that mess of filing cards and wire you call Dinah, is still the Chief Executive—shows up drunk as a hoot owl and nekkid as a jaybird at a cabinet meeting and you think it's just good clean fun. Three cheers for the red, white and blue."

"Well, now that you put it that way," Odell looked with ill-disguised distaste at the soiled spittoon, "it must have been pretty humorous to see the old buzzard running around with no pants on."

"Bet you'll laugh yourself sick when I find myself running around with no shirt on and no job to get another one with."

"Who's bothering you this time?"

"None other than your friend and my friend, General of the Armies H. H. Bartholomew. Dear old Horace has been wandering around for so long under the delusion that nice people don't get neurotic—you know, it's all a big plot on the part of the loafers and draft dodgers—and has been preaching for so long the noise that the iron hand in the velvet glove would clear up the morale problem that the idea that a respectable Commander-in-Chief can catch the evil bug too has hit him low, but low."

"And his reaction is?" Odell prompted.

"Typical. Says he'll declare martial law if he has to."

Odell methodically demolished a hangnail. "Mmm. Even Horace can't make martial law much more martial than it already is. What else is he cooking up?"

"Who knows? Maybe he'll commission the OWI to write a new song—only nobody has the energy to sing it—or issue new uniforms to the Boy Scouts—none of whom would have the ration stamps to buy them—or start a War Bond drive—bonds to be paid for in bottle caps." Morgridge opened a fresh plug. "Or maybe he'll ask Dinah."

"Over my prostrate and quivering body he'll tie up half her circuits with a problem she has no references for."

"I'm your buddy. I won't quote you. But I'll have the file on the President sent up with a survey of the latest morale material this afternoon." The Commissioner of Internal Security was a tall type and had to duck sideways to get out of Odell's office.

Odell pushed a button. "Miss Carpenter, have Jimmy come in and empty this goboon. I'm going out for a milk shake."

II

Wonder what the other side calls their machine. Olga? Sofia? Ninotchka? "One more. Mocha, this time." *Or are they still naming them after the Leader over there? Basic hostility directed not toward women but toward the party in power. (No vital difference; here it's the women that're running the country.)* Odell fished for change.

Probably (he finally decided) *named the Stalin Mark Umpty-leven.* The room shook just a little and the light over the milk bar shivered almost imperceptibly. *Damn Dinah. You'd think, with the new annexes she's forever building onto herself, she'd be able to stop more of them from getting through.* He laid down a dollar and a half, rolled himself off the bar stool, and took the lift down to Dinah's main control floor.

An illuminated tri-dimensional map in one corner of the big room showed red where Dinah was digging herself new brain space. Four techs were flipping geological survey charts and phoning directions into Dinah's construction center. Odell found the O.D.

"Get away from you again?" he chuckled.

"Yeah, Chief. Building out toward that fault on the Eighty-third Level East. The boys are trying to divert the building binge onto Eighty-four North."

"That's . . . four times this week, isn't it?"

"Five. Chief, why don't we just feed her all the geological material we have and let her take care of it herself?"

"That's been gone over before, but the board is a little bit leery of giving the old gal too many of her own reins. They got nightmares about the machines running amok and taking over." *How she can take over much more, I don't see. . . . If she quits, our main library is in her memory banks and she's got the only reflexes quick enough to stop what the boys over the pole are throwing. And where would we find the pilots*

to fly the planes she's flying three quarters of the time? "Well . . . write it up and submit it in triplicate and I'll try to push it through. And if the circuits aren't too loaded, see what kind of a résumé Dinah'll give you on what she's got on civilian morale."

Lucky Dinah. No morale problems. Umpty-leven levels down and no food problems and no sex problems and thousands of techs running around to make sure that she never feels inadequate because she's got more work than she can handle. And her own facilities for increasing the amount of work she can handle. I should say. Odell remembered with affection the time that he had forgotten to hang up after phoning information into Dinah and had called to his secretary to get him the President's office; and before he could turn around Dinah had shoved a tentacle twenty floors up and into the main cable and made his connection. *Good girl.*

"Chief, Dinah says all she's got is the figures on military personnel required for domestic policing and production and absentee figures for the last zillion years. And to get that I had to rephrase the question completely. No reference whatsoever, apparently, for the concept of 'morale.' "

"Thanks, Mike. Anybody calls here for me——"

"I know, Chief. You'll be at Sammy's on Five."

"Mmmm. How'd you know?"

III

Enoch Odell was fond of John Morgridge in spite of his filthy teeth and his taste for masticated nicotine. John Morgridge was a competent fellow. A good guy, even. Enoch Odell did not like General of the Armies H. H. Bartholomew overmuch, in spite of the fact that General of the Armies H. H. Bartholomew had a fine Hollywood smile and chewed nothing but chlorophyll. General of the Armies H. H. Bartholomew, Odell had decided, was a stupid bastard. *The bastard I could take but the stupidity gets me.*

Enoch Odell was the more irritated because General H. H. had called him at Sammy's on Five in the middle of a strawberry shake. "Odell," the General was saying, "I hesitate to use the word incompetence in a case like yours," (*Chocolate, coffee, even mocha I could take, but it had to be strawberry*) "but though you may be the guiding genius behind the conception and successful operation of the Harvard Mark Fifty-four," (*A pompous bastard, too*) "there *is* a war on, and a man in your position *is* expected to be available on a moment's notice."

"What is it this time, Horace?" sighed Odell, lifting his big feet onto his desk (a position very uncomfortable for him and one which he never assumed except in the presence of General Bartholomew) and blowing violet cigarette smoke against Bartholomew's chlorophyll breath. "Tell your old Uncle Enoch all about it."

The General sputtered. "Damn it, Odell . . . I suppose you've heard about the President. I suppose you're aware of the morale problem this poses for the Administration."

"I have been aware of the morale problem for quite some time, thank you," Odell replied, "without the necessity of the White House's pointing a great red arrow at it for me. What about it?"

"Well . . . obviously something must be done, or I'll find I need more troops at home than on the front lines. It appears that production is falling off, that alcoholism is on the increase, and that the only thing that prevents open revolt is malnutrition—and the fact that the citizenry is weaponless. And, of course, the love ingrained in all Americans for their Constitution."

"Just find this out, did you?" Odell smiled disarmingly.

The General ignored him. "I must admit that this is a problem with which I am unequipped to cope." *Surprise, surprise.* "I am a military man. I have devoted my life to the military service of my nation. I cannot comprehend this weakness on the part of the civilian population. Our boys in uni-

form are not subject to this malady; I have always maintained that universal military training would gird up the loins of the man in the street and give him a military attitude toward this problem. But since Congress has seen fit to ignore my recommendations on this point——" The General shrugged his shoulders and made a valiant attempt to twist his features into a martyred expression.

"Well, General," wheezed Odell, "I'm sure I don't know why you come to me with this problem. All my life has been devoted to the scientific advancement of my nation. Dinah is not subject to these neuroses; and I have always maintained that a sound grounding in cybernetic principles for every man would gird up the loins of the man in the street and give him a rational attitude toward the problem. However, since Congress has never taken much notice of my proposals on this point, and there seems little likelihood that they will in the near future, I fail to see why this is my worry at all. Now, if you will excuse me, I have an appointment on Five."

This went over the General's head too. "Well, Enoch, I may as well tell you that the High Command is considering feeding this problem into the Harvard Mark Fifty-four. They feel it's too big and too complex for us."

Odell almost panicked. "Look, Horace, Dinah hasn't got the remotest kind of references for this kind of problem. She hasn't the circuits available for the work, in the first place, and in the second place, she isn't a human, hasn't got human emotions, and therefore can't understand a human neurosis. All you could do, believe me, is tie her up for days on end while" (*This'll get you, you would-be von Klausewitz*) "while you strategists sit around waiting for her to get around to figure out your tactical problems. You might lose five thousand square miles of territory by giving her this problem now; the New Washington defenses might come down. After all, Dinah has only so many faculties available, and if you snarl her all up with this—a completely futile snarl, remember, since she

can't possibly do anything about it—the rest of the war effort may well go poof."

"You got a better idea?" Bartholomew wanted to know.

"I think so." Odell ticked off his points on his chubby fingers. "Half my life has been spent on analysts' couches. I am not subject—or not too subject—to this here war neurosis; and I would maintain that a sound grounding in psychoanalytic principles would gird up the loins of the man in the street and give him a well-adjusted attitude toward the problem. Call up a committee of your top analysts and your top sociologists and see if they can give you a thumb-nose analysis of the national neurosis and a possible course of action. And now, if you will excuse me, I have people to do and things to see. Good afternoon, Horace."

IV

The mills of bureaucracy grind slowly, they grind exceeding large, but grind they do manage (upon occasion) to do. The Bureau of National Psychoanalytic Consultation was, within the space of two weeks, assembled, duly certified, cleared by House, Senate, Army, Navy, and FBI, and given priority cards (restricted) enabling them to use Dinah's memory banks for reference; they spent a week discussing (behind closed doors) the newest perception theory of the neo-Adlerian Vagankofsky (of the "other side"), but finally, after a day's meditation on the problem at hand, issued the following statement:

(1) *The Bureau of National Psychoanalytic Consultation, after due consideration, finds that the American nation is suffering from a mass war neurosis.*

(2) *This neurosis has, for direct cause, the present hostilities between the American nation and the Eastern Powers.*

(3) *The most expedient method of relieving this neurosis (or any neurosis) is the elimination of the causative agent(s).*

(4) *We therefore recommend the immediate termination of hostilities. Respectfully, etc.*

The report was greeted with anything but approval by New Washington's upper echelons. To be sure, John Morgridge did smile a brown smile, and Enoch Odell was heard to mumble, "Surprise, surprise!" But a Kansas Senator fulminated for four hours on the Senate floor, a special subcommittee was appointed to root out un-American noises in the writings of the members of the Bureau of National Psychoanalytic Consultation, and General of the Armies H. H. Bartholomew was heard to threaten martial law on eighteen separate and distinct occasions.

Happily for the Bureau of NPC, new data arrived at this crucial moment: five Alabama counties seceded from the Union, the president of the NAM and the president of the CIO jumped hand in hand into a New Chicago elevator shaft, and the Chief Executive of the United States took off with the Veep for a fishing trip in Lake Champlain (a center of radioactivity since 1956). The Bureau decided that this new material invalidated their former conclusions, and demanded a week to consider these new developments, an extension which was grudgingly granted by H. H. Bartholomew, now *de facto* President.

After a great deal of discussion of these data and even more discussion of the speech of the Senator from Kansas, the Bureau issued a second recommendation:

(1) *The American nation is suffering from a war neurosis. Since the cause of the neurosis is not expendable (see attached brief), some method of counteracting this neurosis must be found.*

(2) *It is recommended that all available propaganda material be requisitioned for a campaign designed to encourage an attitude of "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die" on the part of the populace. A concentration on the pleasures of the moment should do much to eliminate the fear of destruction on the morrow. Respectfully, etc.*

This paper was accompanied by a long and intricate psychological analysis of the Stoic philosophers and a copy of Mr.

Housman's poem about cherry blossoms. All this was greeted with enthusiasm by President Bartholomew. His enthusiasm did not diminish appreciably even when John Morgridge called to protest at great length that the populace had, indeed, no pleasures of the moment to enjoy. The majority, the Commissioner reminded the President, were underfed, undernourished, and underclothed; umpty-leven per cent of national production was going into weapons, war aid, and Dinah; and even the simple pleasures of fresh air and green fields were getting harder and harder to find as America moved underground and as bacteria and radioactivity killed off more and more cherry trees.

The President was unmoved by this argument; but he was greatly disturbed by a mighty roar arising from the office of the Director of Production to the effect that any plan to make drunkards, addicts, fornicators, and debauchees out of the American working force would be fought by all the power industries could command.

In their third meeting, the Bureau discussed the remarks of the Director of Production at some length, the speech of the Senator from Kansas at some length, their own and each other's books ("Was it you wrote that article on Pavlov?") at no small length, and, finally, took into consideration the following new data:

(1) The latest enemy weapon, a rocket bomb designed to parachute small packages of heroin, was having a decided effect on absenteeism in the midwest.

(2) In the preceding week, 157 officers and 389 enlisted men of the Army's Internal Security Police Force had been overpowered by citizens and robbed of money and weapons.

(3) Births were down 24 per cent over the preceding year, the Census Report indicated; the American Medical Association estimated that illegal abortions were up 85 per cent. Other production continued to drop.

In desperation, the Bureau came out with a program for religious indoctrination which was denounced by President

Bartholomew as an obvious violation of the Constitutional principle of separation of church and state. (Besides, there had been a leak and the National Bureau of Clergymen, with a noble show of self-sacrifice, was denouncing the whole thing as blasphemous in the extreme; and union heads were howling the whole thing down as "pie in the sky by and by.")

Finally, when their fourth proposal, a program of medals and awards for increased production, was rejected on the grounds that it wasn't working; and their fifth idea, that of a renewed hate campaign directed against the enemy within and without, was downed on the grounds that it was being done and wasn't working either; and when their sixth idea, that of rigid thought-control, was rejected by Bartholomew on very sound Constitutional grounds (to say nothing of the fact that Bartholomew knew full well he didn't have enough manpower in the Army to do the job), the Bureau of NPC threw up its hands and went home—having been duly relieved of their security ratings, their identity cards, and their passes to Dinah's memory files.

At this point, over the loud and lengthy protests of Enoch R. Odell, Director of Cybernetics, President Bartholomew marched the Army in and took Dinah over.

He also instituted a program of universal military training for all healthy males and females from twelve to eighty, in order to (as he put it to the Congress of the United States) "gird up the loins of the man in the street."

V

"Of course, Enoch," (President Bartholomew had said), "you'll be kept on as director, since the Harvard Mark Fifty-four *is*, after all, your baby; but General Compson, here, will have to clear on all the material fed into the information and problem channels for the next few weeks, and, of course, he'll be liaison man between you and the White House."

For three or four days, Enoch's consumption at Sammy's

on Five increased enormously while he plotted, fumed and sneered; but as the military mind got more and more enmeshed in the unfathomable intricacies of Dinah's thinking processes, he began to feel himself again.

President Bartholomew was present when the problem of civilian morale (now more of a problem than ever) was fed into Dinah's circuits, three days after the Army took over. He heard the exasperated sputtering which came through her vocal centers as she reported "No references." And he beat a hasty retreat to the White House in order not to have to listen to Odell's triumphant chuckling.

"Well, damn it," he howled at the hapless General Compson, "give her the references!" So for the next week a committee of sociologists shoveled Ph.D. theses and documents and statistics into Dinah's information chutes. And the Bureau of NPC was called up again (and issued security ratings, identity cards, and passes to Dinah's memory files) and spent a week seeing how much Freud, Jung and Adler Dinah could absorb.

Even up on Eleven Odell could feel the vibration as Dinah dug out on fifteen of her ninety levels to make new filing room. It took her three days to digest the material. Then she rested quiet, occupied with nothing more than the routine course of the war. Bartholomew arrived with built-in fanfare to witness the solution of the morale problem with his own eyes.

"Operation Morale" was coded, fed into Dinah, rattled around for maybe twenty seconds in the unknown recesses of that mind without emotion, and finally produced a response: "Cut out the defective circuits."

Bartholomew looked impressed, but puzzled. Dinah continued: "It is clear that mass frontal lobotomy is the only practical solution to this problem."

"Ye gods," sighed Morgridge. "Practical, she calls it."

Bartholomew raged. "Compson, how do you explain this situation? What kind of data have you been giving this machine? You did, did you not, personally check on everything

that went into her in the past two weeks? Then how——"

Odell graciously rescued the intimidated Compson. "Sir, if I may venture a solution: Dinah is obviously taking her newly acquired knowledge of psychology and her own knowledge of herself and answering the problem in these terms. She knows that neurosis is a result of conflicting neural impulses; she knows that if two impulses conflict in her 'mind,' the techs disconnect one of them. Therefore, the only answer she can see is to chop out the areas of the brain that are causing the conflict."

"But this is impossible!" roared the President.

"You wouldn't fool me, Horace? So let us feed the problem back in, but inhibit the solution just given." This was done; Dinah played with the idea for a moment, activated her vocal centers, and replied, "Insufficient references."

"By God," raged Bartholomew, "if she thinks she can get away with that kind of insubordination . . . By God, no subordinate of mine has sneered at me in thirty years of Army life, and they're not going to start now; a little respect is due the position I hold. . . ."

"Now, Horace," soothed Odell, "Dinah hasn't any emotions, and she didn't sneer at you. Calm down." He picked up the phone and dialed Dinah. "What information are you missing, girl?"

Well, turned out that what she needed mainly was more primary information, fewer subjective evaluations of phenomena and more phenomena; more of the raw material, in short, from which the Ph.D. theses had been written. "Try movies, fiction, and the like," suggested Odell. "Biggest molders of the American mind."

First they gave her the movies. The comedies went down fairly smoothly. But the Valentino and Gable pictures set off a binge of building on the Eightieth to Eighty-eighth Levels. And Dinah began acting oddly. The techs swore up and down to Odell that she was panting after she got through filing and coding each new film. After digesting a particularly vile South

American film, she began to vibrate whole floors with a "boomp, boomp, boomp" that had even mousy General Compson tapping his feet.

Then came the novels. *Pamela* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* and *I Married a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang* were tossed in together with supreme military indiscrimination. And outside of a rumor current among the techs that after digesting *Forever Amber*, Dinah spent fifteen minutes divesting her main control boards of all their decorative shielding, the White House got no more troubling reports.

The Smithsonian was ransacked for 1957 editions of *Wonderful Wonder Romances*, prewar copies of *Turgid Love Tales* and collector's issues of *Interstellar Passion Romance*. Dinah just sat there and took it all in.

And just as H. H. Bartholomew was again girding his loins and readying his fanfare for the final submission of "Operation Morale" to the Harvard Mark Fifty-four, the Harvard Mark Fifty-four, now very sure she was Dinah, kicked her techs out and completely insulated her ninety floors of New Washington and her thirty floors of New Boston and her fifty floors of New Gotham from all intruders (muttering, the techs insisted, "I want to be alone"). She also shut down completely on all operations—except defensive ones.

Odell roared. So did Bartholomew—though not with precisely the same intonation.

VI

The Commissioner of Internal Security tipped back his chair, spat accurately, and uncorked the fifth of bourbon which he had smuggled into Odell's office under his coat. *Don't tell me the war neurosis has got you, Commissioner.* The Commissioner sighed. "It's a tough world, Nucky my boy."

"As concise an analysis as I've heard in some little time," Odell admitted. "It takes our respected President some fifteen minutes of howling and screaming to come to the same con-

clusion. You got a giant brain, John. How'd you know so quick?"

"Well," admitted Morgridge, "my first clue was when the Daughters of the First Atomic War passed a resolution against Turkish cigarettes. Even domestically produced Turkish cigarettes. Very sad. And my second hint was the shouting conversion of the President's cabinet to Shintoism. Very significant. And my third clue—but need I continue? Suffice it to say that my analytic brain quickly sized up the situation when Our Gal Dinah refused to shoot off any more rockets or cook up any more ways of massacring them damn types on the other side."

"This was your big clue, hah?"

"Aiuh. When the generals have to figure out their own strategy and shoot off their own rockets, things have come to a pretty pass. All I can say is I'm real gratified to see that Dinah is keeping the defensive machinery working real good. I'd hate to see me spread all around the countryside just because she's in a mood. But what disturbs me is not that the soldier boys have to do their own work, but that all the promises Horace made me about Dinah doing my office's work seem to be going down the drain. And I can't do any more now about civilian morale than I could before Dinah started in." *Feel inadequate, hah? Don't feel bad, you got all kinds company.*

"Don't feel bad, kid. Your old Uncle Enoch has things under control—more or less. I've persuaded friend Horace to reconvene the Bureau of National Psychoanalytic Consultation and turn them loose on Dinah. See what her big maladjustment is."

"Well, yummy. I can see now the consternation among the graybeards when Dinah whips a 'No References' out of her pocket when they ask her 'Do you like little boys or little girls?' " Morgridge fastidiously cleared his mouth of tobacco and drank. *From the bottle. Infantilism.*

He was almost right, at that. When the Bureau of NPC had got through a three-day conference with Odell and the chair-

man picked up the phone and called Dinah, there was no small amount of initial confusion. "Ah—Dinah—" inquired the good doctor, "what—ah—what is the first thing you can remember?"

"$E=mc^2$," Dinah replied grudgingly.

"Well," said the chairman. "Do you suppose—no, she can't hate her father and mother; and—I don't see how her toilet training can be at fault. Maybe we——"

Two hours later they called again. Four days later they had a diagnosis: Dinah was lovesick. Her vocal mechanism had been re-set to approximate the voice of an adolescent female. Half the time all that came through it was "Stardust," "Whispering" and "Lover, Come Back to Me." As nearly as anyone could find out, the new space she was digging on Ninety-five was to be utilized in wall space where photographs of current cinema stars could be displayed. From time to time, as she played ancient phonograph records, a cessation of cerebral action (" 'Swoon' is the historical term," the report explained) would set in.

"What has apparently happened," explained the chairman, "is that a considerable amount of material placing a positive value on such behavior has been presented to Dinah. This type of romantic behavior ('Hollywood' is the historical term) having been established as a 'good' thing by sheer bulk of material, the machine began to attempt an approximation of this behavior. Having a huge mass of psychological material at her disposal, she was able to create new circuits, presumably occupying much of the space recently created by her, circuits designed to approximate the emotions of an adolescent human female.

"Now, since the material furnished Dinah places a high value on the maintenance of these emotions in the face of paternal and societal opposition, Dinah has thrown up extremely strong defenses against those who would deny her the enjoyment of these feelings." Attached to the report to the President was a long discussion of the bureaucracy as Father-

Image, which most of the bureaucracy ignored. There was, however, no solution proposed.

The Bureau was relieved of all its many cards, its ratings, and its passes, and went home.

A conference between Odell and the near-hysterical Bartholomew ended in a decision to pull the Army out and give the Director *carte blanche*. Odell, cool and confident, marched out of the White House, returned to his office and picked up the phone to Dinah. She was singing "Whose Izzy is he, is he yours or is he mine?" and vibrating twenty floors as she stomped some newly created foot. *Heaven help us if she finds in that stuff we gave her something on How to Jitterbug.*

VII

Two days went by before President Bartholomew, troubled at the lack of promised results, paid Odell a surprise visit. "Don't announce me. I'll go right in."

He found Odell surrounded with cigarette butts, reading over the phone in a tender if sleepy voice:

> ". . . Now therefore, while the youthful hue
> Sits on thy skin like morning glew,
> And while thy willing soul transpires
> At every pore with instant fires,
> Now let us sport us while we may;
> And now, like am'rous birds of prey . . ."

"Odell!" shouted the Chief Executive. "What in hell are you doing?"

"Hah? Oh, hello, Horace. Just a minute while I finish this poem."

"What do you mean, just a minute? This is the way you're going to fix Dinah up, eh? Fill her up even fuller with romantic hogwash?" Bartholomew reached over and hung up for Odell. "Come along with me, Enoch. Either you've succumbed to this wave of crackpotism or you've sold out to the other side."

"Oh, come now, Horace, don't be ridiculous." Odell stretched. He had been up all night reading.

"Then will you explain yourself?"

Odell smiled. "Nope."

Nor would he explain himself to the hastily reconvened Bureau of National Psychoanalytic Consultation. The Bureau consulted with Morgridge, with Odell's secretary, and with Sammy on Five, and came up with the following analysis:

(1) *The patient, Enoch R. Odell, has, in the past six months, consumed over two thousand milk shakes at the milk bar on Five known as Sammy's (see attached affidavit of Samuel R. Frank, prop.)*

(2) *The patient is unmarried, and has apparently never entered into any mutually satisfactory relationship with any member of the opposite sex. This apparently results from an inordinate dependence on the Mother-figure. These are the direct causes of the heightened consumption of milk beverages. (See the attached technical analysis of which this is a résumé.)*

(3) *In the past two days, according to the abovementioned Samuel R. Frank, Odell's consumption of milk beverages has dropped to zero.*

(4) *It is our considered opinion that Odell has found in the machine known as Dinah a long-needed love object (and perhaps a Mother-figure) and that the reported telephoning was an attempt to seduce Dinah over the telephone.*

(5) *Inasmuch as Odell's specialized skills are of the greatest importance in the present crisis, we recommend that he be deprived of direct contact with the machine, that a branch of Sammy's Milk Bar be set up in his offices, and that he be kept on the job. He is not dangerous. Respectfully, etc.*

Somebody thought to check the effect of this attempted seduction on the machine. They asked her, "What do you think of Odell, Dinah?"

"He's nice," she replied, "but he's not my type." Then she went back to work (she was working very hard on something) humming, "I wanna get married."

VIII

The status remained at quo for another week; enemy bombs exploded harmlessly—more or less—in the upper atmosphere as Dinah's tracers got hold of their vitals. American bombs flew off now and again as often as the boys with the slipsticks could figure out a trajectory. And Dinah continued to shuffle and build.

Finally, at twelve fifty-three on January 15, Dinah opened one corner of her defenses, shoved out a tentacle, tapped a power circuit, and blew out all the power in New Washington, New Gotham, and New Boston.

Before the President could light a single candle, a roar shivered the whole of New Washington as a much-modified Wac Corporal tore up the main elevator shaft, through the elevator cars and the concrete shielding and into the stratosphere.

Techs with kerosene lanterns discovered that Dinah's defenses were down. They also discovered that every circuit in the whole ninety floors had been fused. Then phones began ringing. It seemed that every atomic and bacteriological rocket in the hemisphere had blasted off. Observers watched as they reached the orbit of Mars, where they exploded harmlessly.

Odell climbed eleven flights of stairs to the surface to see the fun. The air was white with parachutes. The autopilots (run by Dinah) had taken over, locked the controls, and sent the planes of the American Army into Hudson Bay. And every Army vehicle lumbered toward the nearest body of water, heedless of the frantic manipulations of its crew who (except for a few fanatics) were forced to jump at the water's edge.

Odell had no idea how the gunpowder had been exploded, what radiation had been rigged to accomplish it, but every grain in the hemisphere had blown. H. H. Bartholomew was wounded in the hip when his sidearm exploded, and a few

thousand lives were lost in ammo dump blowups which made Black Tom look like Sunday school; but casualties were light —especially in comparison, it was thought, with those that would result when the enemy learned of the country's defenseless state.

Odell remained calm—and in this he was unique. He checked with Palomar and ascertained that the rocket that had shot up the New Washington elevator shaft had circled the earth twice, had been joined by another rocket, and was now circling Saturn. *The most romantic of the planets. Imagine making love by the light of the rings. To say nothing of nine moons.* "By the light," he sang happily, "of the silvery moons . . ." *I want to spoons? Mmm. And June doesn't exist on Saturn. What will they rime with? There will be problems. Hoo-hah.*

When it became clear that peace had broken out, there was a fine debauch all over America—all over the world, in fact—followed by wholesale fallings of governments. When it became clear that Dinah was, in some mysterious way, responsible for all this, Enoch R. Odell was swept into the White House by a thundering majority. His first act was to set up a milk bar in the East Room; he sat there long hours in the evening conferring with his Secretary of State, John Morgridge.

"Still think I was hot for Dinah's body?" smirked the Chief Executive.

"Well, weren't you?" To make Morgridge happy, President Odell had installed a self-polishing spittoon in the East Room and added a bottle of sour mash bourbon to the stock of the milk bar.

"Well, look at it this way. What was the problem we were trying to get at? I answer for you this rhetorical question: the end of the war neurosis. Now, fantastic as it may (or, then again, may not) seem, the first solution proposed by the BNPC was the only valid one: end the war. Right?"

"Say on."

"So, when Our Gal Dinah tore off on a romantic binge, Our Hero, Enoch R. Odell, decided that, indeed, there is only one logical course. Since I, like Dinah, have suffered through the torments of having plenty love and no object, I see my choices clear. *Primo*—I can teach her to sublimate—eat milk shakes, as it were. Not too real. *Secundo*—I can fill her up with Puritanical inhibitions to jag her back to a semblance of rational, non-emotional behavior. Read her Jonathan Edwards, in short.

"This I reject too. This is the way to make sickies, and I don't want to be nursemaid to any sicky machine. And finally, I can try to bring this romantic adolescent love along into a romantic mature love and find the girl a love object. Eureka, say I to myself, Enoch, you have struck it!"

Morgridge spat. "So you sacrificed yourself for your country and proposed yourself as love-object. Noble of you. Greater love hath no man than this——"

"Pooh. And likewise bah." Odell lit a violet-scented cigarette and poured a milk shake. "I read her all kinds of trash designed to give her a realistic view of that Old Black Magic. 'Falling in love with love is nothing but makebelieve.' 'Gather ye rosebuds while ye may.' *Und so weiter.* And as I saw the old girl growing up, I told her all about this fairy prince on the other side of the world name of Stalin Mark Umpty-ump."

"Clever, clever."

"I thought so." Odell smiled modestly. "As I had suspected in my heart of hearts, Dinah found a way to contact this machine (I'd given her the *Love Laughs at Locksmiths* and *Love Will Find a Way* routines). I'm not sure how she did it —ether waves, terrestrial vibrations, or what-not—but she made it. She seduced him. First she had to convince him he was a him and then talk him into building his own emotional circuits. Real Venus and Adonis routine. But Never Underestimate the Power of a——"

"And then they eloped."

"Precisely. And naturally Romeo and Juliet couldn't let the

houses of Montague and Capulet go on slitting each other's throats, so they sabotaged our war effort so well that we'd need thirty years to build it up again. And they jammed the essential parts of their emotional and rational circuits into two rockets and took off for parts unknown, blowing out for good all of themselves they had to leave behind."

"Lovely, lovely." Morgridge unwrapped a new plug.

"Yep. Just like all the books say, only way to end war is with love."

Report on the Sexual Behavior of the Extra-Sensory Perceptor

—Oh, Dr. Rhine! Oh, Dr. Rhine!
Your antagonists are just the same as mine.
    Statisticians say a sample
    Must be huge before it's ample
And our runs are much too short to prove design.
—Oh, Dr. Kins'! Oh, Dr. Kins'!
Untrained men are awfully easy to convince.
    Our ideas could never move them
    If we took the time to prove them
Positively, Dr. Kinsey.
—Absolutely, Dr. Rhine!

HERMAN W. MUDGETT

SHIRLEY JACKSON

There has been some argument as to whether the title story and other items in Shirley Jackson's splendid collection THE LOTTERY *(Farrar, Straus, 1949) can be strictly classed as fantasy fiction; they are intensely disquieting stories of an uncertain and terrifying world . . . but is this anything other than a realistic depiction of the world we live in? There can, however, be no question as to classifying Miss Jackson's first story in a science fiction anthology—a pure fantasy of time travel, and as tantalizingly provocative a fragment as I've seen in years.*

Bulletin

(ED. NOTE: The time travel machine sent out recently by this University has returned, unfortunately without Professor Browning. Happily for the University Space Department, however, Professor Browning's briefcase, set just inside the time travel element, returned, containing the following papers which bear ample evidence of the value to scientific investigation of sending Professor Browning on this much-discussed trip into the twenty-second century. It is assumed by members of the Space Department that these following papers were to serve as the basis for notes for the expected lecture by Professor Browning, which will now, of course, be indefinitely postponed.)

(*From a newspaper, torn, heading reading only ". . . ld Tribune, May 8, 2123"*):

. . . indifference in high quarters which has led so inevitably to this distressing result. Not only those directly affected—and they are many—but, indeed, thoughtful and reasonable persons everywhere, must view with extreme alarm an act which has given opportunism

an advantage over intelligent planning. It is greatly to be regretted that, among those in power who were in a position to take action, none except the unpopular Secretary chose to do so, and his opposition was, as so frequently it must be, disregarded. In any case, let us unite in hope that the possible consequences will not take place, and prepare to guard ourselves with the utmost vigilance against a recurrence of such incidents.

(*From what appears to be a private correspondence:*)

June 4

Dear Mom and Dad,
I am haveing a fine time at camp. I went swiming and dived, but Charley didnt. Send me a cake and some cokies and candy.

Your loveing son,
Jerry

(*A mimeographed sheet*):

American History 102
Mid-Term Examination
April 21, 2123

1. Identify twelve (12) of the following:

Nathan Hale	Grover Cleveland
Huey Long	Woodrow Wilson I
Carrie Chapman Catt	Joyce Kilmer
Merry Oldsmobile	Edna Wallace Hopper
Cotton Mather	Chief Sitting Bull
Robert Nathan	Old Ironsides
George Washingham	John Philip Sousa
Oveta Culp Hobby	Sergeant Cuff
Sinclair (Joe) Louis	R. H. Macy
Alexander Hamilton	

2. The historian Roosevelt-san has observed that "Twentieth-century man had both intelligence and instinct; he chose, unfortunately, to rely upon intelligence." Discuss.

3. Some of the following statements are true,

some are false. Mark them T and F accordingly:

Currency was originally used as a medium of exchange.

The aboriginal Americans lived above-ground and drank water.

The first American settlers rebelled against the rule of Churchill III and set up their own government because of the price of tea.

Throat-scratch, the disease which swept through twentieth-century life, was introduced to this country by Sir Walter Raleigh.

The hero Jackie Robinson is chiefly known for his voyage to obtain the golden fleece.

Working was the principal occupation of twentieth-century humanity.

The first king in American, George Washingham, refused the crown three times.

The cat was at one time tame, and used in domestic service.

4. Describe in your own words the probable daily life of an American resident in 1950, using what you have learned of his eating, entertainment, and mating habits.

5. In what sense did ancient Americans contribute to our world today? Can we learn anything of value by studying them?

(*A narrow card, identifiably from a machine*):

YOUR WEIGHT AND FORTUNE!

Your weight is . . . **186**

Your fortune for today: Expect permanent relief in minor domestic problems, but avoid too-hasty plans for the future. Try not to dwell on the past. You are determined, clear-sighted, firm:

use these qualities. Remember that you can be led but not driven.

(Ed. note: This last item seems of great significance. It is well known that Professor Browning's weight when he left the University in the time travel element was better than 200 pounds. The evident loss of weight shown indicates clearly the changes incident to time travel, and points, perhaps, to some of its perils; there is possibly a hint here of an entirely different system of weights and measures than that currently in use. We anticipate that several learned and informed papers on this subject are already in preparation.)

Epitaph In Avalon

Sibi, the centaur, lies under this stone.
Tried to ride side-saddle; broke every bone.

SHERWOOD SPRINGER

DANIEL F. GALOUYE

Daniel F. Galouye is on the copy desk of the New Orleans States (*sister newspaper of the nationally more celebrated* Times-Picayune); *and like so many science fiction writers, he somehow manages to produce in part time more fiction than most professionals could create in full time. Numerous novelets and short novels in magazines have proved his fine craftsmanship in storytelling; but he has never appeared before between hard covers. In this book debut, he takes the ever fascinating theme of the telepathic mutant, explores more terrifyingly than ever before the implications of* involuntary *telepathy, and casts his tale in the form of a breath-taking, hard-punching, relentlessly compelling suspense story that reminds one of the best* Black Mask *thrillers of such pulp masters as Cornell Woolrich.*

Sanctuary

HALF tripping on the curb, Lois stumbled forward, regained her balance and plunged on into the shadows of the next deserted block.

Away from the area of yellowish illumination that lay like a fog over the corner, she slowed her pace and turned to cast a desperate glance behind her.

Her heart was pounding. Her breathing was shallow, rapid. Her hands were clenched into small, tight fists that trembled as she held them close to her sides. Alert, frantic, she listened with more than her ears; tried to pierce the darkness with more than her eyes.

(. . . *babe like that . . . alone . . . this neighborhood . . .*)

It was *his* I-stream! There was no one else around.

As she turned to flee again, she caught the faint sounds of his quick but cautious stalking footfalls—the real sounds, not reflected impressions from his stream of conscious perception.

But she forced herself not to run . . . couldn't excite him into premature action. She turned the next corner. Out of his line of sight now, she raced forward, springing on the soles of her shoes so the high wooden heels would not betray her.

(. . . *like classy stuff* . . .) She caught the lustful undertones that came with the impression. (. . . *really built* . . .)

The hateful thoughts grated against raw, exposed receptors of her brain like sandpaper on a bared nerve fiber. Her face twisted in pain, but she refused to throat the scream of agony.

Terrified, she glanced back. Under the corner light he was motionless, staring intently ahead—a huge, muscular figure, the sinews of his stout forearms and biceps bulging as he stood with his fists on his hips, listening. He seemed to realize suddenly that she was running and he lunged after her.

(. . . *good!* . . . *alley ahead—next block* . . .) The piecemeal impressions from his I-stream knifed into her brain like torturing bolts. She screamed—low, ineffectually. (. . . *brass knucks* . . .)

A background of indefinable, obscene picture-images came through, accompanied by unspoken words she had not heard before.

Then, (. . . *going to be sick* . . . *can't he drive this damned cab any faster?* . . . *LIGHTS, CAR AHEAD!* . . .) It was a multiple I-stream now. (. . . *Hour and a half more* . . . *damned hack back to the garage* . . . *night's sleep* . . . *DAMNED BUT SHE CAN RUN* . . . *so sick* . . .)

She reached the corner just as a cab, with a single passenger, turned and drove past.

She stopped, started to shout out to the driver. But it was too late.

The excruciating threads of thought continued to beat into her brain like splinters of agony.

The cab's lights flashed on her stalker. He was walking now. (. . . *gotta be careful* . . .) It was his singular thoughts again. (. . . *alley only a half block* . . . *not a police car* . . .)

She crossed the street and turned the corner in a frantic

burst of speed. As the cab passed him, she heard his hard heels pound the pavement in pursuit.

Lights ahead! Red and orange neon that spelled BEER and BILLIARDS and splotched the sidewalk with patches of color that seemed to hold back some of the gloom and menace of the night.

The eager pursuer was close now. But a flood of torment in the form of new thought impressions was beating at her tender receptors. (. . . *nothing but a small pair—trying to bluff . . . goddam drink ain't got enough whisky to . . . IF SHE GOES IN I'LL WAIT RIGHT . . . no-good warped cue stick . . . SHE'LL THINK I'M GONE; THEN SHE'LL COME OUT AND* . . .)

Sobbing, she tried to shut out the thoughts. If only there were lids over the receptors that she could close, as she closed her eyelids! but it was no use!

The man inched forward, staying close to the buildings, half hidden in their shadows.

Why had she come into this deserted section? Why had she decided to come to the city at all? She had been warned. She had been told what it would be like if she ever went close to—people . . . a lot of people. She had shuddered at the thought of needles of pain that she could not keep out of her brain—only thought impulses, but sensations which racked her as vehemently as though they were hateful whiplashes. Such impulses would always produce the excruciations unless she could learn to shield herself from them.

She was in the deserted section because she had planned to come here after getting off the train; because she had rationalized that only here—only in the dismal, uninhabited surroundings—would she be safe from the thought range of others until morning came and she could dash for the Foundation.

Determinedly, she concentrated. The thought lashes seemed to lose some of their sting. For a while, until her resistance was swept aside by mental exhaustion, the assaulting I-streams would be deprived of some of their razor edges.

Hesitatingly, she stepped through the open doorway into the barroom.

Immediately, the vocal blatancy decrescendoed and silence moved over the room in a wave from the bar on her left to the farthest billiard table.

But the hush was only a background for the soundless impressions of obscenity and sensuous abstractions that were like tongues of fire licking at the depths of her mind. Some of the thoughts were duplicated in the half-heard whispers that came from salaciously smiling lips.

(. . . *whatta shape! She's put up like* . . .) That one from the bartender. She could tell. There was a certain synchronization between the thought-words and the motions of his eyes, his changing expression.

(. . . *most like to hole up in a hotel with* . . . *SHE'LL COME OUT* . . . *baby! what a doll!* . . . *SHE JUST RAN IN TO BE SAFE* . . . *wonder how* . . .)

Despairingly, she stood inside the doorway. The impulses were violent! Relentless! Now, however, she was able to hold off some of their sting. But what would happen when she tired of the intense concentration that was her only resistance?

She had to get away! She had to find solitude! Frantically, she looked out the door. The man outside was dimly visible in the shadows across the street. . . . waiting.

"Come here, baby." It was a vocal sound this time.

A hand caught her roughly—its touch conveying, nevertheless, a pretense at tenderness—and pulled her toward the bar. "Whatcha drinkin'? I'll buy yuh anything."

This new threat was huge too, his face red, his eyes dull, his breath redolent of alcoholic fumes. And, as though his laying claim had settled an issue, he stared arrogantly at the others around him. Normal sounds returned to the barroom.

But the assaulting I-streams continued to thrash at her consciousness.

The shirt-sleeved man smiled clumsily into her face. "Give

her a double bourbon, Mack. . . . Say," he dropped a callous hand on her shoulder, "you ain't looking for a place to bunk, huh?"

"N—no," she stammered.

Outside, her stalker crossed the street, heading for the shadows along the near sidewalk. Her frantic eyes followed his movement through the open doorway.

"That is—yes," she amended. ". . . Maybe."

The drunken man put an arm around her and pulled her closer.

Her eyes cast wildly about and she stifled a scream. But the nearness of the brute was a horror that was dwarfed by the I-streams which beat furiously at her brain, paralyzing normal response.

He laughed insipidly, released her and tossed a jigger of whisky into his mouth.

In the mirror, Lois looked in stark disbelief at the disarranged blonde hair that lay against the shoulders of her black coat in clumps and knots; the terrified expression in her eyes; the lines of her mouth, drawn with apprehension—pain.

The man gagged on the drink, spat in the bar gutter and wiped his lips against a dirty shirt sleeve, his whiskers making a coarse, grating sound. "Cancel the drink, Mack."

He took her roughly by the arm—principally to hold on to her for support, she imagined—and staggered out of the bar.

(. . . *lucky sot* . . .) The relentless I-streams continued to thrash her conscious. (. . . *MAYBE I OUGHT TO FOLLOW A WHILE* . . . *slip in extra ace now, or wait—? . . . get some coffee first—sober up some* . . .)

"I got a place a couple of blocks up this way, honey," he said, slipping an arm around her waist and starting up the sidewalk. "There's a coffee shop along the way. . . . Say, you're pretty young, ain't-cha?"

The composite I-streams from the barroom faded into a restless buzzing as they reached the corner. Mentally exhausted, she decreased her level of protective concentration.

But she had forgotten about the man in the shadow of the building and the drunk with her.

(. . . *hardly more than a kid, but what the hell* . . .)

The thread of thought exploded like a fire-bomb in her brain. She half sobbed, half screamed.

"Something wrong, baby?" he squeezed her waist tighter.

(. . . *FOLLOW A BLOCK OR SO—MAYBE HE'LL* . . .) The fragment of the burly stalker's thoughts from half a block behind her was a hornet's sting, but she quickly re-established her determination to resist.

"There's a man following me," she complained.

Cursing, her escort spun around, pulled a knife from his pocket and lumbered after the other, who turned and ran.

Lois fled in the opposite direction, relief flowing over her like a cooling draught as she escaped the thought-ranges of her pursuer, the infuriated drunk, the crowd in the barroom.

But she sobbed as she ran. . . . She *had* to go back—back to the house far out in the country which was the only setting of all the memories she had.

But she *couldn't* quit now! She had come so far! Her flight had been like racing across a scorching desert, having forgotten how far she had come from the oasis and not knowing but what the forest with its cooling stream was only on the other side of the next dune.

Should she turn now and race back over the hundreds of torturous miles she had come—back to the sanctuary of her isolated home where she would be lonesomely but painlessly alone? Or should she continue on with the meager hope that she would find help and understanding at the Foundation?

If only morning would come! Then she could make her final dash over the last few blocks. She would blurt out her story and they might give her an injection that would force sleep and bring release from the indescribable thought agonies which she couldn't endure.

Dawn stirred a chilling breeze and she wrapped her coat

tightly about her, rising to stand shivering on the loading platform at the side of the silent warehouse.

Pale light silhouetted the nearby skyline of the city's central section. A horn sounded dismally from the speedway only two blocks off. Somewhere in the distance a truck rattled harshly as it bounced over a grade crossing.

Lois closed her eyes and shuddered. These were the sounds of an awakening metropolis—grim omens that augured the barbarous tortures of the day. The still shadowy city lay like a sleeping monster—sleeping, but even in its lethargy, malevolently plotting the gamut of torment that it would hurl at her.

But she must face the anguish with the hope that she could survive long enough to reach the Foundation—an island in a hurricane-whipped sea. There they had studied other manifestations of the mind—effects similar to the ones she experienced. Only there could she possibly find help.

Abruptly she realized she had acted unwisely in pushing farther into the sanctuary of the deserted, thought-less section of the city during the night. She should have defiantly faced the minor tortures in order to stay close to her destination, where it would have required only a brief spurt to reach the Foundation as soon as it opened.

With hesitating steps, she walked numbly down the center of the street toward the speedway. Even now her mind was vibrant with the ominous whisperings of a thousand thoughts in the stirring city—strident but soundless I-stream utterings that were still below the threshold of intelligibility.

She clutched her coat lapels with one hand and thrust the other into her pocket; felt the small square of cardboard. Withdrawing it, she read the name—Morton Nelson—and the address.

Would she find him at the Foundation? She remembered his eagerness on learning aboard the train that she was going to the place where he worked; how he had offered help. But she had become reticent. Otherwise, she would have had to say, "I hear voices in my head." People don't ordinarily utter

such phrases to a person they've just met . . . not even if that person is an amiable, garrulous ex-rancher-turned-psychologist from Texas.

The sun was rising when she turned on the sidewalk of the speedway toward the city.

(. . . *goddam early job* . . .) The first of the day's thought-stream impressions jabbed at her mind unexpectedly and she winced as an automobile sped by.

(. . . *if I average 60 . . . in Kington by noon* . . .) A car raced past in the other direction.

(. . . *I'll quit; that's what I'll do . . . ram it down his throat . . . ball game if I get off early enough . . . ought to break his damned neck* . . .)

Grimacing, she clenched her fists in her pockets and shuddered as the flow of cars passed. The stabbing thought-pains weren't yet unbearable. But then, the day had only started.

Should she give it up, she wondered, and find a secluded spot to await the night so she could take the train back to her country home? She dismissed the suggestion with a revulsive tremor as she considered the neurotic thought-congestion of the station's waiting room and ticket office—the bedlam of impressions that had sent her plunging into the streets on her arrival.

(. . . *not bad! . . . wonder what she's . . . I can take the day off* . . .)

Brakes howled and a car pulled to the curb next to her. "Hop in, sister," an effusively smiling middle-aged man called out the window. "I'll give you a lift in."

(. . . *good looker, too . . . Joe'll have a vacant cabin* . . .)

Lois looked the other way, walked faster. She received the mental impressions of disappointment, indignation, then resignation. (. . . *Oh, well . . . lot of work to do anyway* . . .)

The car lurched off. She caught the unspoken expression of vilification, obscenity.

The I-streams were beginning to grate pitilessly on her conscious now. She must begin resisting them earnestly. But the

realization came with a sense of desperation. Where she had hoped that she would be able to ward them off for a longer period today, she was finding that their effects were straining toward an unbearable intensity almost immediately. Was it because she had almost exhausted her capacity to resist them yesterday?

With determined concentration, she quelled the harsh impressions until they were but a whisper. But it was only a meager security that she felt—for trying to shield her mind against the I-streams was like trying to concentrate on a difficult, boring problem—the thread of consciousness invariably wandered from the objective.

A cab drove by slowly and she hailed it.

"Do you have the time?" she asked after she had gotten in.

"Eight thirty-two."

She sighed, relieved. The Foundation would be open by now.

(. . . *wonder what the pitch is?* . . . *looks innocent* . . . *can't never tell* . . . *Sadie's place* . . .)

She tried to close her mind to the strong lecherous impulses which she knew on the basis of their immediacy were originating from the cab driver. But even with the most intense mental resistance, she was unable to ignore them. The range was too close, the thoughts too powerful in their harsh obscenity.

Each thread of his I-stream was a painful barb that thrust up from the background of a thousand babbling thought-voices—hateful expressions, oaths, lewd exclamations, neurotic ravings.

It was a maddening abstract-imbroglio that swirled around her, stabbing inward from all directions like a thousand lances —all composing an invisible aura of vindictiveness, detestation, aggravation, discontent, prejudice.

And where there wasn't the almost universal vituperation and profanity, there was the general undertone of unbearable anxiety as scores all around her shared their worries with her —forced their harassing mental plagues on her. It was like

being compelled to consider a hundred personal problems simultaneously—none of which she could be sure, in her distress, was not her own.

And each silent thought-word that fought the thousands of others for precedence was, in itself, an individual spear of pain. Would she never find release—be able to shield them out? Could the Foundation help her learn how, so that she might live with people, not have to run away from them like a frightened animal? After all, wasn't she like other humans . . . physically, at least?

The cab swerved sharply onto a main street and entered a congested river of traffic.

Lois closed her eyes in desperation. The Stygian chorus had already reached its climax; was mounting to an inevitable anti-climactic superfury. God! Would the incessant barrage of nerve-twisting anguish never stop?

Frantically, she clutched her face with trembling hands. (. . . *crazy fool . . . get the hell outta the way . . . stupid, damned cop . . . I'll be late . . . haven't made a green light this morning . . . lunatic woman driver . . .*)

Horns blared endlessly. Shrill whistles grated against her nerves to add to the maddening admixture of normal and supernormal sensations. She sobbed convulsively.

(. . . *dame's off her nut . . .*) "Something wrong, lady?" the driver asked misgivingly. (. . . *either hopped up or . . . maybe dangerous . . .*)

"I'll be all right," she stammered. "Just a—a headache."

"Oh." (. . . *headache—like hell! . . . looney-house case . . .*)

She was aware the cab had stopped and the stream of traffic hadn't moved forward for over a minute.

"Where are we?" She clenched her hands as though the physical exertion would produce the extra measure of mental application necessary to fight back the I-streams.

"Fourth and Allington."

Only five more blocks! She knew—she had studied the map so that she would have an almost instinctive knowledge of the city in case she should be too distraught to think clearly.

"Why can't we go ahead?" She sat on the edge of the seat.

"Jam up there. Looks like a couple of them bumped fenders."

(. . . *DON'T LIKE THE WAY SHE'S ACTING . . . stupid cop . . . BEAUTIFUL BUT NUTTY . . . Aw, go to hell! . . . SHE COULDN'T EVEN WORK FOR SADIE* . . .)

It was an irresistible flood now, bringing unbearable pain.

(. . . *be late . . . the hell with him . . . MAYBE SHE'S DRUNK . . . somebody ought to knock his damned teeth . . . BUT I DON'T SMELL ANY ALCOHOL* . . .)

All interspersed with a thousand simultaneous expressions of obscenity!

The pulverizing phrases, biting words seared through her brain again and again, like myriad excruciating electrical shocks. There was no holding them back! No resisting their vehement effects!

Lois screamed. She leaped from the cab and lunged onto the sidewalk, raced in the direction of the Foundation.

But there were hundreds all around her—pushing, barring her progress, staring at her, assaulting her mind with their punishing thoughts.

I've got to hurry, she thought—*got to get to the bank to make that check good.* No! That wasn't her thought! It was someone else's! She pushed a slowly moving woman out of her way.

(. . . *stupid blonde . . . run this way, baby . . . she could fall, and I could pick her up and I'd hold her and . . . bounce, bounce—nice, nice* . . .)

Her ankle twisted under her, but she stayed on her feet and raced on. She *couldn't stop!* She had to . . . *catch the downtown express; there was that deal waiting.* No! She screamed. She didn't want to go downtown! It was someone else—not her. She was——

. . . *'Roger Van Ness,' I'll say, 'that's who I am'; and when I enter Kaston's office I'll say* . . .

But she couldn't be Roger Van Ness! And she wasn't going to any office!

Who was she?

. . . *Arthur* . . . *Betty* . . . *Rose* . . . *John* . . . *Lottie* . . . A hundred names lunged up like braille on a smooth surface, as though coming involuntarily from the subconsciouses of the I-streams.

But she wasn't any of those! She was . . . *Lois!* That was it! Lois Farley . . . And she was going to——

. . . *the office* . . .

. . . *home after a tough night's work* . . .

. . . *to get a quick cup of coffee before checking in* . . .

. . . *out on a damned good, stiff drunk* . . .

She screamed and staggered on. She didn't know *where* she was going! There was only the compelling urgency that forced her to race forward. She had to find some place where she could think independently!

Broad marble steps paralleled the sidewalk on her right. At the top of the steps were two arched doorways flanking a third, larger arched entrance. Stretching skyward above the dark-brick edifice were two cupolas and a spire.

She lunged up the steps and raced in.

As though she had stepped through a sound-deadening curtain, she was out of the fantastic thought-world immediately. There was a quiet solemnity about this new place that seemed to force back most of the unbearable magnitude of thought-assaults. Dazed, she surveyed her new surroundings, staggering farther into the interior. The I-stream rumblings died down as she withdrew farther from the congested sidewalk.

She was in an almost deserted church. Long rows of dark-stained, dimly lighted pews stretched on either side of her toward the altar.

(. . . *Mary, full of grace* . . .)

She stiffened. The church wasn't empty!

(. . . *God, please help me and grant . . . one candle in memory of Fred, dear Fred . . . most Sacred Heart of Jesus* . . .)

There was a handful of persons—kneeling in the pews, or at the altar rail, or before the candle racks.

But there was no unbearable sting to the impressions from their I-streams! Gone was the vehemence, the hate, the anxiety that had characterized the secular thought which had almost completely crushed her on the outside. There was a peculiar timbre of dolor, of gentleness that typified these new impressions.

Lois sidled into a pew halfway to the altar and sat in detached silence.

(. . . *God, forgive me* . . .) This impression from close by. She recognized its origin as the blonde girl kneeling immediately in front of her. The girl—wearing a black dress much like her own—nodded her head to accentuate poignant thought-words in her desperate reflections. (. . . *didn't mean to kill him* . . . *but baby coming and* . . .)

Embarrassed as though she were intentionally, surreptitiously listening in on another's bitter distress, Lois tried to turn her attention forcibly away from the contrite stream of consciousness.

Abruptly, she realized she was no longer receiving impressions from persons within the church. The meek thoughts, of low intensity, could be shielded out! It was as though they lacked the strength to insist upon being received.

But still the sinister rumblings from the mad world outside continued to reverberate within the depths of her mind, seemingly as though to remind her that they were waiting for her.

She cupped her face in her hands and sobbed softly. How like a trapped animal she was! Outside was a hell she couldn't survive—not only because it wrought an irresistible, no doubt fatal, excruciation, but also because it robbed her of her iden-

tity and purpose so that, if she ventured out, she would be utterly lost without a sense of personal being.

Toward midmorning, there were perhaps twoscore persons in the church, most of them occupying pews near the altar. She increased the intensity of her determined resistance to shut out their personal thoughts.

But she relaxed from the mental exertion almost immediately, realizing she would need her strength if she was to try to reach the Foundation before the day was over. So she moved to a pew at the extreme rear.

(. . . *child* . . . *distressed she looks!* . . .) This I-stream from close by! (. . . *almost all morning* . . . *perhaps if I spoke with* . . .)

She looked up. A black-robed figure, staring sympathetically at her, was coming down the aisle on her left. Nervously, she squirmed out of the pew (. . . *timid she looks!* . . .) and crossed to the other side of the church (. . . *frightened—actually frightened* . . .)

She couldn't talk with anyone now! Had to conserve her strength! She slipped into another pew and moved to its far end—deep in the shadows.

(. . . *later, not now* . . . *do believe I'd scare her off completely* . . .)

The priest turned away hesitatingly.

(. . . *God, make him come alive again* . . . *didn't mean* . . . *kill* . . .) Then there came the impression of the blonde girl sobbing in a nearby pew. (. . . *don't want to go on living* . . .)

Almost angrily this time, Lois shut out the single stream of remorsefulness.

At noon, even the hushed solemnity of the church no longer was the sanctuary it had been earlier—when the throngs on the street were comparatively thin. Now, as thousands darted about during their lunch hour, their composite I-streams were a thunderous din that beat through the thick masonry of the walls.

Lois' features twisted in pain. She hid her face in her hands so her torture would not be observed. How long would it last? She tried to pray. But her will was not her own to dedicate to even that simple task.

Desperately she fought to maintain her identity, to prevent the loss of her own I-stream in the greater mass of warped, twisted, confusing consciousnesses that punished her with their thoughts of anger and greed, trickery and lust, selfishness, envy, hate.

When she was sure that she must surrender to the unbearable assault, the attack began diminishing. Shortly after one-thirty, she was able to relax, somewhat, her shield of concentration.

At three-thirty, when the intensity of the impressions seemed to be at a minimum, she went trembling to the big doors. . . . *Now* she must make her dash for the Foundation, less than four blocks away! She stared out onto the still crowded sidewalks and winced. And their I-streams seemed to lunge up derisively to slash at her.

The composite thought-impulses were an invisible cloak of madness.

Falteringly, she went down the steps.

(. . . *blonde like that coming out of church . . . what the hell does she have to pray for?* . . .)

Shaking violently, she turned toward the Foundation.

(. . . *damned stinking Jew . . . another thousand bucks won't be missed any more than the first eight thousand . . . oh, hell, another runner . . . wonder if she's on the make . . . Maud'll think I'm out of town tonight* . . .)

Foundation—church—Foundation—church, Lois repeated over and over to herself. She must firmly imbed in her conscious the only two places where she would be safe. And she must fight the violent impressions. She couldn't let herself be drawn again into the fatal depth of lost identity among the I-streams!

She had to . . . *find an appropriate anniversary present for the little woman.*

"No!" she shouted, breaking into a run. A score of heads turned to stare puzzledly at her as their direct thoughts of wonderment added to her utter confusion.

"Foundation—church," she muttered. "Foundation—church——"

She stumbled, half fell; steadied herself against a light standard.

"Foundation—church—Foundation—*beauty parlor*—Foundation—*stock exchange*—church—*the corner lounge to meet Bill*——"

Throwing her hands over her face, she screamed. "Church! Church!"

(. . . *to the dentist* . . . *the bookie joint on the second floor* . . . *to the redhead's apartment* . . .) The phrases expressing destinations seemed to rear prominently among the incoming impressions.

"CHURCH!" she screamed, turning around and racing back.

Then she was stumbling up the steps and into the dim, candle-smoke-scented interior; staggering toward a pew close to the altar. But she altered her course and went over to a shadowy pew deep in the right wing of the building.

Here was sanctuary. Here, the voices were barely a whisper. Here she could rest—until . . . ? Until night when she would have no choice but to return to the insanity-provoking railroad station and buy her ticket back home, where she would live hermit-like until she died—as her father had. Only he had had her to live with. She would have no one.

She tried to fight the simmering I-streams with mental rejection, but it was a sleep of exhaustion that locked out the harassing thoughts as she lay on the hard wood of the pew.

(. . . *Hope she isn't ill* . . .)

Lois was aware of the weak thought as she awoke to the insistent shaking of a gentle hand.

Terrified, unable to remember immediately where she was, she sat up with a lurch.

"Don't be frightened, child. It's all right."

She turned and looked into the benevolently smiling face of a short, stout priest. But his smile changed to surprise. (. . . *same girl who was here almost all day . . . wonder—*? . . .)

Determinedly, she shut out his thoughts. It was not hard to do when there was only one mind to fight. And she shrank involuntarily from him, rising.

"It seems we have here a young lady in difficulty." He fingered his chin as his smile returned.

The stained glass windows, robbed of their back lighting, were lifeless now. Through the huge door was darkness—and silence broken only by the occasional far-off sound of a horn. Bitterly, she realized it was hours past the Foundation's closing time.

"Of course," the priest continued good-naturedly, "we look with pleasure upon those who visit with the Sacrament. But, unfortunately, we must close the doors at ten o'clock."

"I—I'll leave. I didn't realize it was so late." She sidled out of the pew and turned toward the rear of the church.

But he caught her arm lightly. "You're in trouble, child. Can you tell me what's wrong?"

Hesitating, she bit her lips, shook her head.

"Then will you tell me how I can help?"

"There's nothing—nothing." She continued on toward the exit.

He followed. At the door, he stopped her again while she stared cautiously out.

"If you have no place to stay," he offered, "there's a convent only a few blocks away. The Mother Superior is rather nice. I don't think she would mind——"

He left the sentence incomplete, waiting for her reply.

She scanned the almost deserted street. At the corner there was a single taxicab with its driver using a sidewalk telephone. In the next block a young couple leisurely windowshopped.

The lonely thoroughfare held out a stark contrast to the maddening hell that had flailed her there only hours earlier. It would not be difficult now to get back to the train station. Now there were no throngs whose thoughts would torture her and usurp her identity.

But she gasped suddenly and turned to the priest. "What time is it?"

He stepped out on the sidewalk to glance up at the clock on the spire. "Three minutes till ten."

Sudden terror clutched at her chest. The only train that could take her away from the city would leave at ten! She would never make it! And she would be trapped here for another entire day!

Remembering the horror of the previous night, she shuddered.

"I do think it's best that you go to the convent tonight," the priest suggested. "And tomorrow, if you like, we may talk."

Numbly, she nodded.

He cupped his hands around his mouth and turned to the cab driver on the sidewalk. "Murphy," he called.

"Evening, Father." The elderly man touched his cap visor as he came up.

(. . . *wonder what he wants?* . . . *knows I'll be at the Holy Name meeting tomorrow* . . .) Lois had been concentrating on excluding the priest's thoughts. So the driver's I-stream had slipped through.

"Will you take this young lady to the convent?" (. . . *she'll be all right there* . . . *until morning, at least, poor child* . . .)

In resisting the driver's thoughts, she had lowered her guard against the other mind. Sighing, she abandoned her resistance. Anyway, like the thoughts in the church, they were harmless. And she was much too numb to care.

Murphy took her arm and led her toward the cab. "See you tomorrow, Father," he called back.

(. . . *doesn't look like the bad kind* . . .) She knew he was studying her obliquely as he opened the door for her. (. . .

just like Elaine . . .) The tenor of his thought told her Elaine was his daughter.

She leaned back in the seat and thrust her hands in her coat pockets as he drove off. And again she felt the card with the name "Morton Nelson" on it.

Suddenly she wondered whether *he* could help. He worked for the Foundation as a research assistant. She had gleaned that much from his mind. On the train, she hadn't wanted to confide in him the true nature of her interest in the Foundation. For some reason, she had feared his reaction might be one of inordinate amusement—perhaps even embarrassing ridicule. But now she was desperate!

Lois leaned forward on the seat. "I wish you would take me to this address instead." She handed Murphy the card.

"But . . ." (. . . *Father won't like it when he hears about this . . .*)

"It's not what you think," she said defensively, hurt.

He turned at the next corner; said nothing. And the thoughts, which she didn't want to hear anyway, were drowned out as they passed a loaded bus—lost in the stinging mass-assault of other consciousnesses upon her mind. She whimpered and shrank in the seat. Then the bus was behind him and she was free once more. But she kept her mind closed against Murphy's reflections, not wanting to face the erroneous accusations she might find there.

Minutes later, she stood hesitant before Morton Nelson's apartment, her hand raised to knock.

An impertinent thought-image of gigantic waves washing across a beach welled in her mind. The waves disgorged a multi-armed marine monster that lumbered across the beach in pursuit of a man clad in pajamas. . . . She raised her shield of resistance and shut out the vision of someone's nightmare.

(. . . *and in Washington . . . before the House Un-American . . . turn to page four . . .*)

She knocked.

An impression of partial resentment came. (. . . *second interruption . . . calling at this hour?* . . .)

The door opened.

"I—I——" she began, swaying.

(. . . *who?* . . .) "Lois!" He stood there perplexed, his large frame dominating the doorway, the paper hanging from his hand. He surveyed her appraisingly, unbelievingly. (. . . *some kind of trouble . . . wonder—?* . . .) "What happened? You look like——"

There was disbelief on his angular face as he looked down at her rumpled clothing, her disheveled hair, the absence of cosmetics. And the fragments from his I-stream reflected his bewilderment.

"May I come in?"

He took her by the arm. She made no effort to hide the fact that she was trembling. He brought her to the sofa.

"I checked," he said. "You didn't show up at the Foundation." (. . . *won't ask . . . she'll tell . . . guess that's why she's here . . . wonder where she went after the train* . . .)

"I—I'm hungry."

He frowned, expectantly silent. (. . . *God, she is in trouble . . . looks starved . . . eggs in refrigerator* . . .)

"I couldn't get to the Foundation. I had to spend the day in a church four blocks away."

He stared at her. She caught a patch of a mental image that showed him calming her, letting her cry against his chest.

"I almost went crazy today, Mort. I—it's more than extrasensory perception. I receive thoughts—everybody's in the vicinity. At the same time. I can't shut them out. I couldn't get to the Foundation because the pain of the thoughts, the thoughts themselves, kept making me forget who I was, where I was going."

He started. (. . . *kind of deal is this? . . . psycho case?* . . .)

She sighed in resignation. "What kind of a deal is this;

maybe she's a psycho case," she repeated. "I don't get the complete thought-stream, just snatches."

He gasped. (. . . *trick!* . . . *impossible* . . . *she can't be a —telepath!* . . .)

Lois looked away. "It's a trick," she said in a monotone. "It's impossible. She can't be a telepath."

He jolted, backed away. (. . . *I had a dog* . . . *"Fuzzy"* . . . *years old* . . . *see if she can repeat that!* . . .)

"You had a dog. Its name was 'Fuzzy.' You thought something about an age. I don't know whether it was your age when you had the dog or the dog's age. I missed something in there."

She looked guiltily at him. "Sometimes I can shut the thoughts out—when there's only one or two persons. But they're overpowering in a crowd. I can't resist them."

Lois paused. "There's somebody close by—in this building, I guess. He seems to be in an argument about an automobile backing into a tree by the driveway."

"Sam Patterson and his wife!"

"Mort," she looked up pleadingly. "Will you take me for a drive in the country? Away from the city—where I can rest? Maybe we can figure out some way for me to get to the Foundation. You said you'd help."

She intercepted his mental picture. It showed him with her, riding in an open automobile. Peaceful highway. Moonlight. His arm around her shoulder. But he was regarding the possible development only modestly, unassumingly. There was nothing in his I-stream to cause alarm. She knew that he would not put his arm around her if she didn't want him to.

Then he turned abruptly to thoughts of her haggard appearance and of the food that he might offer her from the refrigerator.

It was a solacing ride and the air was clean and silent, undesecrated by the uninhibited profanity of a thousand minds. And the moon *was* bright and encouraging. There were only scattered farmhouses set far back off the road and no I-streams

of any consequences were coming from them. It took only little effort to blank out Mort's unpretentious reflections.

"Are you—listening in now?" he asked suddenly.

"No. I avoid it whenever I can. It—it doesn't seem proper."

"How long have you been this way?"

"Ever since I can remember."

"And yet it was only today that you found you couldn't bear it?"

"Yesterday and today. But this is the first time I've ever been among—people . . . really among people. Oh, there were times before this—visits to the village, daily contact with a private teacher. But thoughts in a small town are—different. And there aren't as many of them. At least, I could stand them once in a while—whenever I had to go in to town."

"You said your father was telepathic too?"

She nodded. "That was why we lived alone—after mother left him and after he found out I was the same way."

"Why did your mother leave?"

"In a way, dad wanted her to go, after he realized how hopeless it was. He saw the distrust that was in her mind; saw he would never be able to explain why he occasionally acted in compliance with her wishes, even before she expressed them. He knew, through his total knowledge of her character, that he would never be able to soothe her suspicions. Yet he also knew that if he disclosed his true nature she would be convinced it was impossible to live with him. Besides, he was certain that telling her would mean his eventual exposure."

"Why didn't he tell her before he married her?"

"He wanted to try to live a normal life."

He slowed the automobile until it was barely moving. "Didn't she love him?"

"I suppose she did—at first. But there's no way of using hindsight to judge what her real feelings were, not with an—inhuman factor involved."

"But maybe if she had *really* loved him . . . ?"

Lois turned toward him, distressed. "What's the difference

between *loving* a person and *really loving* him? How can you know when there's enough love to compensate for the incompatibility in living with someone who has a supernatural talent? That's why dad said I would have to live alone; never get married; never have children."

He stopped the car and looked at her. On his face there was a silent refusal to accept the despair that she was trying to convey.

"I suppose," she went on, "that eventually dad could have adjusted and learned to live with her despite the—inhuman factor. But then, when I came along and when he saw, by looking into my mind even before I could talk, that I was going to have the same ability . . . well, I guess he just realized I wouldn't be able to hide what had taken all his ingenuity to hide."

"He saw that in your childish inability to understand you would betray the fact that you and he could receive thoughts?" Mort guessed.

Lois nodded. "After that, he helped along the rift between them. She left before I was three."

She looked down into her hands and sighed helplessly.

"He was determined for you and him to live alone?"

"He said we could never let people know about our difference because we'd be nothing but—freaks. And there would always be someone who would find a way to *use* us—even against our will. He said there was no cure."

"And he died and you left?"

"He died and I *had* to leave. I couldn't stay out there alone. I'm only twenty. I want to live the rest of my life normally. If I can't, I don't want to live it at all. . . . Don't you understand, Mort? I've got to find out whether dad was wrong; whether there *is* some way of curing me!"

He looked sympathetically at her. "And you picked the Brinkwell Foundation for the answer?"

She nodded. "Oh, there are other institutions that study ESP. But Brinkwell was the closest."

"It's Army-subsidized, you know. Their only interest in ESP is its possible military application."

"But they've got to help!"

"Have you asked them?"

She sighed. "In letters, yes."

"The results?"

"No answers. They probably thought like you." She smiled weakly. "That I'm a psycho case. They ignored the letters. But I came anyway. If I can only get there, I can prove my ability. I showed you, didn't I?"

"We'll get you there." He grasped her hand reassuringly. "I'll keep you away from the city until the middle of the morning. I'll call and tell them I have someone who shows special ESP talent. Then they'll have everything ready for when we make our break through the city."

"I——" She looked up into his face, arranging her now combed hair. "I don't know what I would have done——"

"When they submit you to the tests, however, I would suggest that you don't try to tell them what your trouble is when you first go in. That'll put them on the skeptical defensive right away. Let them find out. Then they'll be anxious for you to tell them whatever you can."

He started the car up and drove off slowly.

"Listening in now?" he asked hesitatingly after a while.

"I shouldn't be?"

"No. That is—I mean——" He sighed. "I keep forgetting that I can't hide anything from you. . . . Look, Lois, you're a beautiful girl. I don't guess I'd be normal if I didn't sense a developing attraction."

He loosened his tie. "This is an awkward situation. What I'm trying to say is—well, you said those thoughts from the crowd were awful. But, some of them—those that aren't purposefully lustful—are more or less instinctive and——"

"I understand, Mort." She placed her hand reassuringly on his arm.

"I mean I don't want you to think . . . I don't want to be

misunderstood, is what I'm trying to say," he finished abruptly.

She smiled warmly. If there were only some way she could reassure him without herself blurting awkwardly. It would seem assuming to say, I've received enough thoughts to know the sincere ones from the imposing, selfish ones.

Restrained fatigue seemed to flow up around her like an ocean swell. She put her head on his shoulder—because she felt that she would feel safe, secure if she did—while he drove on through the rural calm. Soon she was asleep.

The lights in the office were dim and the atmosphere was one of depressing discomfort. Lois closed her eyes in frustration.

"But, doctor," she began protestingly, "don't you see—?"

"Now see here, Miss Farley." The man turned on her indignantly. "There is a prescribed procedure which we must follow in establishing an initial ESP rating. You must cooperate."

The tests had been monotonous, fatiguing. Almost as harassing as her frantic drive through the city with Mort. She wished he were here now instead of waiting in his office in the other wing. But they had insisted on examining her alone.

"If you'd only let me explain!" she began again.

Seated across the desk from her, the doctor looked up sharply. "There will be an interview to record any personal extrasensory experiences which you may wish to relate—later. But now we must go on with the tests."

She should have insisted on speaking with them first, she realized as the assaulting I-streams of the doctor and the three military men in the room mounted in intensity.

The doctor cleared his throat. "We will continue with the card test. You will concentrate and call the cards as I turn them over and look at them."

(. . . *impertinent girl* . . .) It was the doctor's indignant thought that came as he picked up the top card on the face-down deck.

(. . . *could have my lieutenant colonel's insignia in a week if . . . would welcome overseas duty . . . damned toothache* . . .) These, she realized, were intruding impressions from the Army officers—thoughts that permeated and seemed to become a part of the I-stream of the civilian who sat opposite her.

(. . . *nothing exceptional in this case so far . . . wonder if I should have that tooth extracted? . . . MAYBE SHE'LL GUESS THIS ONE* . . .) The doctor looked at the card.

She tried to snatch the identity of the printed symbol from his mind. But (. . . *it's hurting more now . . . duty in the Hawaiian Islands should . . . see the dentist right after* . . .) the other insolent thoughts were dominant.

"Crescent," she guessed suddenly.

"Wrong again," sighed the doctor.

"Really," the major rose impatiently. "We have seen nothing here to indicate any special ability."

Impulsively she rose too, tense with resentment. "I didn't come here to read symbols. I didn't say I could do anything like that. I receive words—thoughts—bits of what other people are thinking."

The men looked at one another cautiously.

"Now, now, Miss Farley," said the major indulgently, "do you propose to have us believe that you actually *read minds*?"

She faced him angrily. But she restrained the words she would have used and turned her attention to their thought fragments, trying to repeat them as rapidly as they came to her.

". . . girl's mentally unbalanced," she called out in a fleeting voice. ". . . telepathic reception! Impossible! . . . psychotic tendencies . . . no doubt now trying to create the impression she's reading minds . . . I'll call a nurse . . ."

She relaxed, turned her concentration from the thought-streams. "Now do you believe me?"

The doctor was looking at her coldly. "That outburst, Miss

Farley, was no doubt intended to convince us you were receiving thoughts from us?"

"Didn't it?" she asked apprehensively.

The colonel laughed. "You merely called out a group of logical phrases—phrases which we would *naturally* be thinking under the circumstances."

The major and the captain nodded in agreement.

She started. They were right! If she wanted to convince them, she would have to demonstrate at a time when they were off guard; when her attempted performance would not cause them to return to the stereotype thinking which they could charge was "logical and expected under the circumstances."

Numbly, she sat.

"We will prepare for another test," said the doctor.

Lois, pretending indeterminateness in her actions, picked up the pencil and began scribbling on the pad before her. Now their thoughts were returning to normal. Now the major was thinking about becoming a lieutenant colonel; the captain, about overseas duty. She jotted down the thoughts as fast as she could.

(. . . *Harry did . . . painless job on that last tooth . . . last assignment, Cuba, was* . . .) She had almost reached the end of the page. (. . . *MISS FARLEY—NAME'S FAMILIAR . . . be another week before Ann . . . FARLEY—FARLEY —FARLEY . . . new skates for the kid . . . OF COURSE! THAT CRACKPOT GIRL WHO WROTE THE LETTERS!* . . .)

She stopped writing and looked up at the doctor. "I'm the girl who wrote the letters about me and my father," she said, relieved.

(. . . *IS THE ONE! . . . that crazy girl! . . . prize dopes for being roped in on* . . .)

She stood excitedly in the center of the room. "The letters were true! Everything I wrote about was true! The thoughts in my head! I can't stop them!"

(. . . *ha! She can't stop the voices in her head . . . case for the psychiatrist . . . ought to kick her out . . .*) There was only indignation—not even pity—in the impressions.

"But you've got to believe me!" She glanced frantically around the room. Her eyes fell on the pad with her writing on it. She snatched it up; handed it to the doctor.

He wrenched it from her and hurled it angrily into the wastebasket; reached for the telephone.

(. . . *get rid of her in a hurry . . . POLICE MEDICAL CONSULTANT . . . completely mad . . .*)

Suddenly she received someone's idea-picture of a state mental institution. She shook with fright. If it was excruciating for her to absorb the thoughts of a sane population, how could she possibly endure the I-streams of the mentally deranged?

The consciousnesses of the four men assailed her with blasts of resentment and accusation. Frantic and unable to arrange her own thoughts, she whirled around and lurched from the room before they could stop her; ran down the long corridor and out into the crowded street.

Violent mental impressions closed in on her like an instantly coalescing fog. She reeled under their impact; opened her mouth to cry out in anguish.

"Hi, Harry," she said. "Got time for a quick beer?"

She collided with someone in the sidewalk throng and the physical sensation of sudden impact restored her awareness of self momentarily.

"Church!" she muttered, regaining her balance. "Got to get . . ." Her voice dropped to a lower, coarser range, "Why in hell don't you look where . . . hold mommy's hand tightly, darling . . . yeah, that's what the meter says . . ."

There was another collision and she fell to the sidewalk roughly; tripped over the hem of her coat as someone tried to help her up.

Dazed and tortured under the incessant barrage of thoughts

and picture-images that were racing into her mind in a mad vortex, she looked around her. The Foundation was a block behind.

Only three more blocks to go!

The tall spire of the church dominated the skyline like a beckoning finger. But the image blurred and, although she was conscious of jogging numbly forward, eyes that were not her own but somehow sent their impressions to her brain focused on a pair of patent leather pumps in a show window.

(. . . *Molloy's got them cheaper* . . .)

"Church! Church!" Her individual consciousness broke through for an ephemeral second.

Then there was a windshield in front of her. Also in her field of vision were two wrinkled hands that created the illusion of being her own while they gripped a steering wheel. She wrenched the wheel violently.

(. . . *goddam old woman oughta stay on the sidewalk where* . . .)

The windshield was gone. A pipe bowl dominated the area of vision. Again, hands which weren't her own but which she seemed to control brought up a match and cupped its flame over the crimp-cut tobacco in a pipe bowl. Smoke swirled into her throat and came out through her mouth and nose. She coughed spasmodically.

(. . . *thanks for the match, skipper* . . .)

Brakes screeched. Stiff metal rammed against her hip. Once more she was conscious of falling. Someone helped her up in front of the suddenly halted automobile.

Streams of vilification flowed into her mind. Numbly, she glanced at the irate, scared driver. A crowd started to gather. But she forced them aside and raced onto the other sidewalk.

"CHURCH!" she screamed.

Kirk Douglas placed his arms around Lana Turner's waist and drew her close; kissed her. The words THE END flashed across Lois' mind and there was the taste of salty popcorn in her mouth.

Now she put a cold metal object between her lips and blew hard; raised one arm and waved the other; watched a stream of cars come to a halt and another stream, perpendicular to the first, roll into motion and pass her on either side.

"Come on!" she shouted. "Speed it up! Speed it up!"

Finally she received the vague physical impression of tired, numb legs carrying her in a frantic dash up marble steps. The flamboyant archway of the main church entrance swam into focus. The I-streams faded; the captured mental pictures began washing away like sand castles on a wave-swept beach.

Exhausted and bewildered, she grasped a font to steady herself.

Then she walked falteringly up the aisle and knelt in a pew, lowering her forehead onto the back of the pew ahead of her. Fatigue was an overpowering compulsion that dulled her physical senses.

(. . . *Please, God, forgive . . . had to kill him . . . told him about the baby and* . . .)

Lois snapped erect. The blonde girl in the black dress that was almost a duplicate of her own was three rows in front of her. Lois searched for and found the shield-like determination to shut out the other's thoughts. Then she sidled along the pew until she was next to the side aisle—deep in the shadows that hung close to the right wall.

An hour passed. She tried to count the hours remaining before the streets would be sufficiently deserted to allow her to return to the train station. She sobbed. But she didn't want to return home! She didn't want to live alone—an outcast until her sequestered death!

Abruptly she realized with a sense of calm that she would never consent to such isolation. She would not make the mistake her father had—living until natural death ended his anguish. Nor would she marry and have a child and learn that the child was like her and run with it to total obscurity.

Now she was thinking of Mort—his tenderness and understanding, the love which he couldn't hide. Perhaps she should

see him first and thank him—at least tell him why she had raced off and left him waiting. . . . But, no. It was better this way. Anyway, they'd tell him how they were convinced she was crazy and how she had fled. And he'd know that she had to do what she was going to do. It would hurt him. But he'd understand.

It must have been the lunch hour. For persons were drifting into the church—the devout for noontime prayers, she surmised.

(. . . *blonde hair* . . . *dark dress* . . . *must be her* . . .)

A man strode hurriedly up the center aisle, stopped at the entrance to the pew where the praying blonde knelt.

It was Mort!

His lips moved rapidly in a whisper as he turned into the pew. There was fright on the girl's face as she looked at him.

Lois was too far away to hear the whisper, but the word came to her telepathically (*Lois!*).

Then he saw it wasn't she and his face flashed disappointment as he backed out of the pew. But, turning in the right direction, he recognized her even as she tried to melt farther into the shadows.

(. . . *knew I'd find her here* . . .) His I-stream welled as he approached. (. . . *must be half crazy* . . .)

In the pew, he forced his way past a stout woman who stared up resentfully at him. Then he was kneeling next to Lois, grasping her arm tenderly, but roughly—in desperation.

"They're looking for you!" he exclaimed. (. . . *found the pad in the wastebasket* . . .) his thoughts raced ahead of his words.

"Oh, Mort!" she gasped. "Then they believe? They'll help me?"

An elderly man, several rows ahead, turned and stared caustically at them.

"They'll help?" Lois lowered her voice to a whisper.

(. . . *help?—ha?—they'll* . . .) There was tragic distress

in his eyes. "Lois, darling. They're hunting all over! They realized what you really represent!"

A protesting "sh-h-h" sounded in the back of them.

Lois caught a mental picture of a large, high-ceilinged room with scores of men seated around curving tables, all confronted by microphones.

"Mort!" she whispered fearfully. "What is it?"

"Can't you imagine," he explained in a toned-down voice, "the diplomatic weapon you'd be as an 'aide' to the delegation to the United Nations? We'd know immediately to what extent another power is bluffing; what their real military potential is!"

She gasped. There'd be nothing but conferences and talks and meetings! And she would be forced to intercept all the international hate and deception that would hang like an angry swarm over the assembly room!

"But I—I couldn't stand it!" she exclaimed aloud. "I—it'd kill me!"

The man ahead turned and regarded them severely. "Please!" he gruffed.

"You've got to escape before they find you!" Mort pleaded, his lips close to her ear. (. . . *injections regularly* . . . *drugs to force rest between sessions* . . .) "You told them about your father too?"

She nodded, remembering the letters she had written.

(. . . *will assume it's a newly ingrained, permanent hereditary trait* . . .) "They'll want more like you! They'll make you have children for diplomatic and military use!"

In the quiet church his frantic words were an outburst. A score of heads turned in their direction. A priest walked from the sacristy onto the altar and stared puzzledly out at the worshipers. The woman at the other end of their pew moved to the front of the church.

(. . . *breed her* . . . *like a prize animal at a county fair* . . .) Lois was aware only of Mort's distraught thoughts.

She started to cry, quietly, with a restraint that was possible

only by virtue of the grim, growing conviction that she did not want to live any longer.

"It's just like dad said," she sobbed, almost below her breath. "They'd only find a way to use us selfishly!"

He put an arm around her shoulder comfortingly. (. . . *got to think of something . . . some place to hide her . . .*)

(. . . *kill myself . . . that's what I'll do . . . no other way . . .*) Was it her own thought, springing up as though of alien origin, to convince her that the only real sanctuary was death?

"It's no use, Mort." She shook her head morosely and her voice was barely audible. "They'll never stop hunting. They'll *have* to search forever—even if it's only for fear that an enemy power will find me first."

(. . . *must be some way . . . island? . . . forest? . . .*) His thoughts were desperate. (. . . *can't lose her . . . ranch! . . . but no . . . they'd only connect me with her . . . find her through me . . .*)

"It's no use, darling," she said, not looking into his eyes. "There's only one way."

He looked apprehensively at her.

"I'm going to kill myself."

He drove a fist into his palm in despair.

The explosive noise sent heads turning toward them again and elicited a chorus of "sh-h-hs."

(. . . *love her . . . but that's too selfish a reason to make her see . . . got to find . . .*)

His eyes suddenly bored sternly into hers. "You have——" he started in a normal voice; winced as he glanced around guiltily, and continued in a whisper, "You have no right to take your life. More persons are concerned than just you and me!"

She looked askance.

"You are a *whole race!*" Robbed of emphatic speech, he stressed the words by gripping her arm rudely. "The accident

that made you—the mutation suffered by your father, if that's what it was—may not occur again in the next million years. You've got to preserve it! You've got to give the new race a chance!"

She laughed bitterly but silently. "If it was a mutation, then it's no good, Mort. Don't you see, it's a lethal mutation! One that makes existence in a normal world impossible—one that *precludes* survival!"

She rose from her knees and sat in the pew. He sat beside her and caught her shoulders to turn her toward him. "It might seem that way now, darling. But we'll never know unless we find out whether we can live with it. Your father did—until he died a natural death."

"But he lived an isolated life."

"Maybe that's the answer! Isolation until there are sufficient numbers. . ."

Lois turned away dourly. "By partial isolation, a moderate-sized colony might be formed three or four hundred years from now. But don't you see what would happen as soon as our nature became known? Don't you see how the elements of greed and profit would descend upon us—kill us off either violently or through forced servitude?"

"Oh, darling!" he groped desperately. "How can I make you understand that the race is at a dead end? It's devouring itself in its own selfishness and deceit—its own vicious lust!"

"But, Mort——"

Unaware of it, their voices had welled gradually in volume until once more impatient eyes were ringing them in from all directions. The man ahead rose, left the pew, stood in the aisle for a second glowering at them, then walked heavily toward the back of the church.

Irritated, Mort restrained his voice again. "The motivations that drive humanity *now* are the lethal ones! Not the ones you represent! Two thousand years from now, if you survive, things may be different. There'll be a thoroughly unselfish race—one completely without deceit, enmity for the other per-

son. With each mind open to every other mind, there'll be no room for anything but good! There'll be no hiding place for evil intent!

"And the tortures you feel now—they're *not* a necessary price that has to be paid for the ability. You suffer during thought-reception because you've had no chance to adapt yourself to it on a full scale. You've been isolated since birth. Your coming to the city was like a person who's been deaf from birth suddenly gaining his hearing in a massive concert hall where a thousand bands are playing 'The Anvil Chorus'! If you'd been born there, you would be accustomed to the conglomerate thought-streams!"

"But——"

"You are the second individual of a new race! You must protect the millions of descendants who will come after you. You are the only one who can supply the scores of generations what will be needed for them to learn to live with the non-telepathic race!"

Lois looked up suddenly and started. A tall, severe priest was standing in the aisle at the end of their pew. His arms were folded stiffly. Half the people in the church were surveying the personal scene eagerly—almost vengefully, Lois imagined—to witness the consequences of their impudence.

(. . . *inconsiderate violation* . . . *house of God* . . .) "I'm sure," said the priest curtly, "there is nothing so important that it can't wait until you are outside for discussion!"

He turned and went back toward the front of the church. (. . . *if they keep it up* . . . *have to ask them to leave* . . .)

Hardly conscious of the interruption, she turned to Mort. "It's no use. I can't take the chance! You don't know the torture of being dispossessed of your body while the thoughts of a hundred strangers take control of your lips, your hands, your mind!"

Defeat spread out from his mind like a pall. She could feel its depressing effect.

(. . . *kill myself—now* . . .) The phrase of forceful determination sprang up in her mind. She rose.

She could feel the exasperation flowing from him as he opened his mouth to talk. But he shut it immediately, glancing in frustration at the others around them.

Sit down! His thought emanation was an angry shout.

Unable to resist the authority that the unspoken order conveyed, she sat, puzzled.

(. . . *got to kill myself* . . . *God forgive* . . . *had to shoot* . . .)

I'm not going to try to reason with you any longer, Lois. You're too distressed to think clearly enough for yourself; for me; for the millions of future persons like you.

"Mort!" she gasped. "I'm receiving your complete I-stream! Not just snatches! It's just as though dad and I were talking with our thoughts! Are you a—a . . . ?"

No, Lois. I'm not a telepath. I just realized that no normal person had ever directed *thoughts toward you before. And God knows I had to find some way of shouting loud enough to convince you!*

His thought-impressions were ringing clearly in her brain—like vibrant chimes. But there was no pain attending their reception! His unspoken words were stronger than any group-impressions she had ever intercepted before; stronger even than the composite I-streams she had received on the street. Yet the effect was not overwhelming but gently soothing.

There was a commotion in the rear of the church. But she hardly heard it as she marveled over the discovery that his thoughts could be dominant—almost hypnotic—but painless at the same time.

He glanced at the entrance.

"Lois!" he whispered in alarm. "Did you tell them about the church? Did you tell them at the Foundation that you hid here yesterday?"

She nodded, turning to look at the entrance. Two policemen

were standing in the doorway. A priest, confronting them, was shaking his head in protest.

The gasp that came from deep within the shadows of the nearby right wing was audible. (. . . *no time left for prayer! . . . found me . . . God, forgive me for what I have to do* . . .)

The blonde in the black dress, staring in terror at the policemen, eased out of her pew, passing near Lois and Mort, and found the broad stairway leading to the upper reaches of the imposing building.

But one of the policemen saw her as she climbed through a patch of multicolored sunlight coming from a stained glass window on the second level. He pointed. But the priest shook his head again.

(. . . *may be dangerous* . . .) Lois intercepted a fragment of the thought behind the words of the officer, too far away to be heard. (. . . *got away from the Foundation this morning . . . if you insist on avoiding an arrest in the church* . . .)

Then they had assumed the distraught blonde was the fugitive telepath! Lois surmised as much when she realized that the other girl did answer her description in a general sort of way except for the absence of the coat.

Mort seized her hand and drew her unobtrusively out of the pew, into the aisle near the wall. Their flight concealed behind columns, he headed for the side exit.

"We'll get out of the city," he said eagerly. "My ranch. It's far away from everything and——"

"They'll know, Mort! When they find you're missing, that'll be the first place they'll look!"

But he ignored her protest with a brusque, "We have to take the chance." Then they were outside in the chasm-like alleyway between the church and the adjacent building. The impressive, rough-stone walls of the former stretched 100 feet up to the parapet wall on their right; the unbroken, brick wall of the latter, 50 feet up on their left.

The I-streams from the crowds on the street began assailing

her and she brought her hands up nervously to her face as they turned toward the alley exit.

But he stopped abruptly. (. . . *gate* . . . *locked!* . . .)

She looked ahead. A solid metal gate barred the only exit to the street. Behind them, the alley ended against the imprisoning wall of a third building.

A terrified scream erupted in the dismal gorge.

Lois intercepted mental impressions of terrific fear, despair, and looked up in time to see a form hurtling down from an open window on the fourth level of the church.

She threw her hands over her eyes as Mort grasped her shoulders and pulled her protectively against him.

The intruding sensations of desperation, terror, ended abruptly as the harsh sound of the soft body striking the concrete surface reached her ears.

(. . . *girl in the church* . . .) It was Mort's horrified I-stream.

"Oh, Mort!" she clutched his arm frantically. "She was *so much* like me! So much in trouble that she couldn't bear it either!"

"So much like you!" he repeated, inspired. "That's it, Lois! Take off your coat—quick!"

She looked at him in bewilderment, trying not to let her eyes fall on the crushed body of the girl.

"Your coat!" he insisted as she hesitated. (. . . *face mangled . . . torn beyond recognition against the stones of the wall* . . .)

Still confused, she took off the coat and handed it to him. He hurled it to the ground next to the girl's body.

"You've got identification somewhere?" he asked.

"My purse . . . There's a wallet; some money; papers. Yes, there's an identification card too."

He snatched Lois' purse; substituted it for the girl's, which had fallen beside her body. Then he took Lois' hand and raced with her behind one of the decorative pilasters spaced along the side of the church.

He gave her the handbag. "When we get to the ranch I'll destroy it."

"The ranch?"

"Of course." He smiled. "You're dead now. Don't you understand, darling? They won't have any reason to keep on hunting for a dead telepath. I'll leave you at the ranch and come back here; work for a few months more so they won't be suspicious. Then I'll join you and——"

A key grated in the lock of the metal gate. They shrank farther behind the pilaster as police, followed by scores of curious persons, surged into the alleyway, encircled the girl's body.

Their thought-streams began assailing Lois as they pressed closer to her hiding place.

(. . . *suicide* . . . *from the church window, too* . . . *pretty legs* . . . *that window up there* . . . *messy face* . . .)

Don't think, Lois! If their thoughts are reaching you, just refuse to hear them. Listen to mine. Concentrate on what I'm thinking, darling. It's peaceful out at the ranch. Nobody within miles. It's deserted now. But we'll stock up and paint the barn and redecorate the house and . . .

His powerful but comforting thoughts were a steady intonation that stood like a shield between her and the neurotic I-streams of the others. She smiled up at him and there was confidence on her face.

He took her hand and they stepped from behind the pilaster to join the crowd that was leaving the alley for the street.

LORD DUNSANY

I have, frankly, never been able to decide whether Lord Dunsany's incomparable Jorkens has traveled in more lands than Sir John Mandeville and witnessed more strange dramas than Dr. John H. Watson; or whether he is, like Saki's Vera, a specialist in romance at short notice. In either event, he is my favorite Club Counter-Bore; and it's an especial pleasure to find him expatiating on a science fiction theme in this his latest narrative.

Misadventure

It was a cold and foggy day, and, though it was warm in the Billiards Club, we couldn't keep out the fog. "The sun is shining now," said Jorkens, "all over Africa."

It was the sort of remark that particularly annoys Terbut, who has not travelled; and swiftly, but, I must admit, adroitly, he twisted the conversation far from the wild lands travelled by Jorkens, and soon we were all talking of modern machinery and the latest improvements in lifts. Then Jorkens spoke again. "I should hardly call them improvements," he said.

"Not?" said somebody.

And for a while no one spoke, and there was hardly promise of one of those stories from Jorkens, of which I am, I suppose, by now the principal recorder; or so Jorkens said to me the other day, though he may have said it in jest. And then the little silence was ended by Jorkens, and came back no more till he had finished his tale.

I knew a lift [he said] that was very greatly improved, judging by your standards, Terbut. But I shouldn't call it an improvement. No. What happened was that a hotel on the south coast had fitted in an improved lift. Again I use your

terms, Terbut. I will not name the hotel, for there is doubt over the whole thing. A coroner's jury said one thing: I say another. But I am not going to challenge anyone else's opinion. Certainly not in public. And I am not going to spoil the business of that hotel, which was an extremely comfortable one and had the last word in everything. That was the trouble. Let me explain how it worked: you walked toward it and there was some kind of electric ray, quite invisible, like what some jewellers have to sound an alarm if any hand goes within a certain distance of jewelry, and as you approached the lift it descended from any floor it was at and opened its doors to you. Another ray told it when you had gone in and it waited a few seconds for you to sit down, and then up it would go. It told you what floor you were coming to by an illuminated number and, as you walked to the doors, again it knew, and stopped at the floor you wanted and opened its doors again, and went on when you had got out. That is my rough explanation, so that you may know what was happening, though I knew nothing about it. But there were two other men in the lift with me when I went up in it one day, one of them knowing no more about it than I, and the other one knowing everything. The man who knew nothing about it was called Odgers: you may have read about him in the papers. I didn't know the name of the other, but later I heard somebody call him Jim. Well, Odgers was trying to shut the door of the lift and Jim was telling him that you didn't have to do that, and Odgers asked why not, and Jim said, "Because it can do everything for itself."

"What do you mean by everything?" said Odgers.

"Everything that a reasoning man can do," said Jim.

"Do you mean it can think?" said Odgers.

"Yes," said Jim. "Haven't you heard of an electronic brain?"

"But, but," said Odgers.

"Well, there it is," said Jim. "This lift and the air all round it are as full of electric rays as our brains are of similar im-

pulses, and the lift responds to every one of them. If you don't call that thought . . ."

"I don't," said Odgers.

"Well, what floor do you want to get out at?" asked Jim.

"The third," said Odgers.

"It's coming now," said Jim. "Go to the door. It will know. You won't need to open it."

And, sure enough, all that happened. Odgers stood still in astonishment and did not go out. And there the lift stopped, waiting for him. For a while Odgers stood with his mouth open. And then he blurted out, "Tell it to go on."

I didn't see exactly what Jim did. He didn't seem to do more than wave his hand. But the lift went. Then they began to argue. Jim said what you said, that it was an improvement. Odgers said that the world was getting too much improved, and that the people in it were getting too clever to live, and that we were better off before we had all these machines.

"Don't talk like that," said Jim. "It can hear you."

We passed floor after floor, and I too stayed in the lift beyond the floor at which I had meant to get out, listening to that queer argument.

"Hear me?" exclaimed Odgers.

"Yes," said Jim. "Don't you realize that there are many machines far more delicate than your eardrum, and as receptive of impulses as your brain and as well able to hear with them? If you tried to make a television set you would understand that."

"As delicate as our brains?" gasped Odgers.

"Yes, or a wireless set either," said Jim, harping back to his point about making a delicate instrument. "And it can hear you," Jim added.

"I don't see how they could make a thing like that," said Odgers.

"Well, I can only say," said Jim, "that it is easier to make than an eardrum."

And so they argued and we came to the top floor, and still

no one got out. I must say I was agreeing with Odgers, and I think he saw my support, and it encouraged him to sum the argument up; and, though I had hardly spoken, I think the other man saw that I was with Odgers, which may have helped him to listen at first, though again and again he tried to stop Odgers from blurting out any more slanders against the lift.

"Well, all I can say," said Odgers, "is that machines are a damned nuisance and, if they can do all that you say, it's taking initiative away from men and will make them effete in the end like the Romans, and all who came to rely too much upon slaves. That's all they are, a kind of slave. They are a damned nuisance and I'd scrap the lot of them."

"Stop! Stop!" urged Jim. "It can hear you."

"I don't care if it does," said Odgers.

"It can. It can," Jim repeated.

"Does it know English?" asked Odgers.

And I must say I smiled at that, and Jim saw I thought that Odgers had made out his case against him.

"No," replied Jim. "But all the air in this little space is vibrating with what you are saying, and the tones of abuse or anger are very different from those of contentment or ordinary polite conversation. I tell you the air is vibrating with your abuse of machines. And it will do no good."

I didn't know what he meant by that. And Odgers did not seem to know either and would not stop his contemptuous abuse of the lift, and Jim warned him no more. "Well, I want to go to the fourth floor," he said. And down went the lift to the fourth and the doors opened and Jim got out; and, however he did it, he told the lift that I wanted to go to the third. When I got out, this man Odgers was still in the lift: it opened its doors for me with its usual politeness, and gently closed them behind me, and went purring away. What happened after that I can only guess, and my guess may have been helped by a change in the note of the lift, a certain snarl that seemed to me to have come in it. There was this sensitive machine alone

with the man that, when last I saw him, would not cease to insult it. It went back to the fifth floor, not the floor on which Odgers lived, and there must have opened its doors for him, but not for long. And Odgers must have tried to get out. And the doors clutched him. It carried him eight floors higher, that is to say, to the top. It must have done that last trip with furious velocity, for his body was found all mangled against the roof.

That is Jorkens' story, and we none of us tried to explain it. I have called it "Misadventure," because that was the verdict of the coroner's jury.

More Facts About Robots

When robots take a walk
Around the town together,
They sometimes stop and talk,
But not about the weather.

Yet they have much to say
And murmur, without tiring,
Of switches, grids, relay
Or printed-circuit wiring.

LEONARD WOLF

MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Possibly we may never even conjecture, despite Sir Thomas Browne's optimism, "what song the Syrens sang"; but we all know how Odysseus protected his men against that unguessable lure by stopping their ears with wax. Even more impressive, however, if less widely known, is the only other defeat of those lethal song-stresses recorded in mythology: Jason's ship Argo *was fortunate enough to number among its many hero-voyagers that greatest of mortal musicians, Orpheus, who protected his fellow Argonauts from the Sirens in a manner possible only to him—he* outsang *them! Now that modern Orpheus, the roaming ballad singer John, once more outsings evil, in one of the best yet of Mr. Wellman's compelling folk tales . . . and defeats a supernatural threat by utilizing a strictly scientific principle.*

The Little Black Train

THERE in the High Fork country, with peaks saw-toothing into the sky and hollows diving away down and trees thicketed every which way, you'd think human foot had never stepped. Walking the trail between high pines, I touched my guitar's silver strings for company of the sound. But then a man squandered into sight around a bend—young-like, red-faced, baldy-headed. Gentlemen, he was as drunk as a hoot. I gave him good evening.

"Can you play that thing?" he gobbled at me and, second grab of his shaky hand, he got hold of my hickory shirt sleeve. "Come to the party, friend. Our fiddle band, last moment, they got scared out. We got just only a mouth-harp to play for us."

"What way was the fiddle band scared?" I asked him to tell.

"Party's at Miss Donie Carawan's," he said, without reply-

ing me. "Bobbycue pig and chicken, bar'l of good stump-hole whisky."

"Listen," I said, "ever hear tell of the man invited a stranger fiddler, he turned out to be Satan?"

"Shoo," he snickered, "Satan plays the fiddle, you play the guitar, I don't pay your guitar no worry. What's your name, friend?"

"John. What's yours?"

But he'd started up a narrow, grown-over, snaky-turny path you'd not notice. I reckoned the party'd be at a house, where I could sleep the night that was coming, so I followed. He nearly fell back top of me, he was so stone drunk, but we got to a notch on the ridge, and the far side was a valley of trees, dark and secret looking. Going down, I began to hear loud laughing talk. Finally we reached a yard at the bottom. There was a house there, and it looked like enough men and women to swing a primary election.

They whooped at us, so loud it rang my ears. The drunk man waved both his hands. "This here's my friend John," he bawled out, "and he's a-going to play us some music!"

They whooped louder at that, and easiest thing for me to do was start picking "Hell Broke Loose in Georgia"; and, gentlemen, right away they danced up a storm.

Wild-like, they whipped and whirled. Most of them were young folks dressed their best. One side, a great big man called the dance, but you couldn't much hear him, everybody laughed and hollered so loud. It got in my mind that children laugh and yell thataway, passing an old burying ground where ghosts could be. It was the way they might be trying to dance down the nervouses; I jumped myself, between picks, when something started moaning beside me. But it was just a middling-old fellow with a thin face, playing his mouth-harp along with my guitar.

I looked to the house—it was new and wide and solid, with whitewashed clay chinking between the squared logs of it Through a dog-trot from front to back I saw clear down valley,

west to where the sunball dropped red toward a far string of mountains. The valley-bottom's trees were spaced out with a kind of path or road, the whole length. The house windows began to light up as I played. Somebody was putting a match to lamps, against the night's fall.

End of the tune, everybody clapped me loud and long. "More! More!" they hollered, bunched among the yard trees, still fighting their nervouses.

"Friends," I managed to be heard, "let me make my manners to the one who's giving this party."

"Hi, Miss Donie!" yelled out the drunk man. "Come meet John!"

From the house she walked through the crowded-around folks, stepping so proud she looked taller than she was. A right much stripy skirt swished to her high heels; but she hadn't such a much dress above, and none at all on her round arms and shoulders. The butter yellow of her hair must have come from a bottle, and the doll pink of her face from a box. She smiled up to me, and her perfume tingled my nose. Behind her followed that big dance-caller, with his dead black hair and wide teeth, and his heavy hands swinging like balance weights.

"Glad you came, John," she said, deep in her round throat.

I looked at her robin-egg blue eyes and her butter hair and her red mouth and her bare pink shoulders. She was maybe thirty-five, maybe forty, maybe more and not looking it. "Proud to be here," I said, my politest. "Is this a birthday, Miss Donie Carawan?"

Folks fell quiet, swapping looks. An open cooking fire blazed up as the night sneaked in. Donie Carawan laughed deep.

"Birthday of a curse," and she widened her blue eyes. "End of the curse, too, I reckon. All tonight."

Some mouths came open, but didn't let words out. I reckoned that whatever had scared out the fiddle band was nothing

usual. She held out a slim hand, with green-stoned rings on it.

"Come eat and drink, John," she bade me.

"Thanks," I said, for I hadn't eaten ary mouthful since crack of day.

Off she led me, her fingers pressing mine, her eye-corners watching me. The big dance-caller glittered a glare after us. He was purely jealoused up that she'd made me so welcome.

Two dark-faced old men stood at an iron rack over a pit of coals, where lay two halves of a slow-cooking hog. One old man dipped a stick with a rag ball into a kettle of sauce and painted it over the brown roast meat. From a big pot of fat over yet another fire, an old woman forked hush-puppies into pans set ready on a plank table.

"Line up!" called Donie Carawan out, like a bugle. They lined up, talking and hollering again, smiles back on their faces. It was some way like dreams you have, folks carrying on loud and excited, and something bad coming on to happen.

Donie Carawan put her bare arm through my blue-sleeved elbow while an old man sliced chunks of barbecued hog on paper plates for us. The old woman forked on a hush-puppy and a big hobby of cole slaw. Eating, I wondered how they made the barbecue sauce—wondered, too, if all these folks really wanted to be here for what Donie Carawan called the birthday of a curse.

"John," she said, the way you'd think she read what I wondered, "don't they say a witch's curse can't work on a pure heart?"

"They say that," I agreed her, and she laughed her laugh. The big dance-caller and the skinny mouth-harp man looked up from their barbecue.

"An old witch cursed me for guilty twenty years back," said Donie Carawan. "The law said I was innocent. Who was right?"

"Don't know how to answer that," I had to say, and again she laughed, and bit into her hush-puppy.

"Look around you, John," she said. "This house is my

house, and this valley is my valley, and these folks are my friends, come to help me pleasure myself."

Again I reckoned, she's the only one here that's pleasured, maybe not even her.

"Law me," she laughed, "it's rough on a few folks, holding their breath all these years to see the curse light on me. Since it wouldn't light, I figured how to shoo it away." Her blue eyes looked up. "But what are you doing around High Fork, John?"

The dance-caller listened, and the thin mouth-harp man. "Just passing through," I said. "Looking for songs. I heard about a High Fork song, something about a little black train."

Silence quick stretched all around, the way you'd think I'd been impolite. Yet again she broke the silence with a laugh.

"Why," she said, "I've known that song as long as I've known about the curse, near to. Want me to sing it for you?"

Folks were watching, and, "Please, ma'am," I asked her.

She sang, there in the yellow lamplight and red firelight, among the shady-shadowy trees and the mountain dark, without ary slice of moon overhead. Her voice was a good voice. I put down my plate and, a line or two along, I made out to follow her with the guitar.

> I heard a voice of warning,
> A message from on high,
> "Go put your house in order
> For thou shalt surely die.
> Tell all your friends a long farewell
> And get your business right—
> The little black train is rolling in
> To call for you tonight."

"Miss Donie, that's a tuneful thing," I said. "Sounds right like a train rolling."

"My voice isn't high enough to sound the whistle part," she smiled at me, red-mouthed.

"I might could do that," said the mouth-harp man, coming

close and speaking soft. And folks were craning at us, looking sick, embarrassed, purely distasted. I began to wonder why I shouldn't have given a name to that black train song.

But then rose up a big holler near the house, where a barrel was set. The drunk man that'd fetched me was yelling mad at another man near-about as drunk, and they were trying to grab a drinking gourd from each other. Two-three other men on each side hoorawed them on to squabble more.

"Jeth!" called Donie Carawan to the big dance-caller. "Let's stop that before they spill the whisky, Jeth."

Jeth and she headed for the bunch by the barrel, and everybody else was crowding to watch.

"John," said a quiet somebody—the mouth-harp man, with firelight showing lines in his thin face, salty gray in his hair. "What you really doing here?"

"Watching," I said, while big Jeth hauled those two drunk men off from each other, and Donie Carawan scolded them. "And listening," I said. "Wanting to know what way the black train song fits in with this party and the tale about the curse. You know about it?"

"I know," he said.

We carried our food out of the firelight. Folks were crowding to the barrel, laughing and yelling.

"Donie Carawan was to marry Trevis Jones," the mouth-harp man told me. "He owned the High Fork Railroad to freight the timber from this valley. He'd a lavish of money, is how he got to marry her. But," and he swallowed hard, "another young fellow loved her. Cobb Richardson, who ran Trevis Jones's train on the High Fork Railroad. And he killed Trevis Jones."

"For love?" I asked.

"Folks reckoned that Donie Carawan decided against Trevis and love-talked Cobb into the killing; for Trevis had made a will and heired her all his money and property—the railroad and all. But Cobb made confession. Said Donie had

no part in it. The law let her go, and killed Cobb in the electric chair, down at the state capital."

"I declare to never," I said.

"Fact. And Cobb's mother—Mrs. Amanda Richardson—spoke the curse."

"Oh," I said, "is she the witch that——"

"She was no witch," he broke me off, "but she cursed Donie Carawan, that the train that Cobb had engine-drove, and Trevis had heired to her, would be her death and destruction. Donie laughed. You've heard her laugh. And folks started the song, the black train song."

"Who made it?" I asked him.

"Reckon I did," he said, looking long at me. He waited to let me feel that news. Then he said, "Maybe it was the song decided Donie Carawan to deal with the Hickory River Railroad, agreeing for an income of money not to run the High Fork train no more."

I'd finished my barbecue. I could have had more, but I didn't feel like it. "I see," I told him. "She reckoned that if no train ran on the High Fork tracks, it couldn't be her death and destruction."

He and I put our paper plates on one of the fires. I didn't look at the other folks, but it seemed to me they were quieting their laughing and talking as the night got darker.

"Only thing is," the mouth-harp man went on, "folks say the train runs on that track. Or it did. A black train runs some nights at midnight, they say, and when it runs a sinner dies."

"You ever see it run?"

"No, John, but I've sure God heard it. And only Donie Carawan laughs about it."

She laughed right then, joking the two men who'd feathered up to fight. Ary man's neck craned at her, and women looked the way you'd figure they didn't relish that. My neck craned some, itself.

"Twenty years back, the height of her bloom," said the

mouth-harp man, "law me, you'd never call to look at anything else."

"What does she mean, no more curse?"

"She made another deal, John. She sold off the rails of the High Fork Road, that's stood idle for twenty years. Today the last of them was torn up and carried off. Meanwhile, she's had this house built, across where the right of way used to be. Looky yonder, through the dog-trot. That's where the road ran."

So it was the old road bed made that dark dip amongst the trees. Just now it didn't look so wide a dip.

"No rails," he said. "She figures no black train at midnight. Folks came at her invite—some because they rent her land, some because they owe her money, and some—men folks—because they'll do ary thing she bids them."

"And she never married?" I asked.

"If she done that, she'd lose the money and land she heired from Trevis Jones. It was in his will. She just takes men without marrying, one and then another. I've known men kill theirselves because she'd put her heart back in her pocket on them. Lately, it's been big Jeth. She acts tonight like picking herself a new beau lover."

She walked back through the lamplight and firelight. "John," she said, "these folks want to dance again."

What I played them was "Many Thousands Gone," with the mouth-harp to help, and they danced and stomped the way you'd think it was a many thousands dancing. In its thick, Donie Carawan promenaded left and right and do-si-doed with a fair-haired young fellow, and Jeth the dance-caller looked pickle-sour. When I'd done, Donie Carawan came swishing back.

"Let the mouth-harp play," she said, "and dance with me."

"Can't dance no shakes," I told her. "Just now, I'd relish to practice the black train song."

Her blue eyes crinkled. "All right. Play, and I'll sing."

She did. The mouth-harp man blew whistle-moanings to my guitar, and folks listened, goggling like frogs.

A bold young man kept mocking,
Cared not for the warning word,
When the wild and lonely whistle
Of the little black train he heard.
"Have mercy, Lord, forgive me!
I'm cut down in my sin!
O death, will you not spare me?"
But the little black train rolled in.

When she'd sung that much, Donie Carawan laughed like before, deep and bantering. Jeth the dance-caller made a funny sound in his bull throat.

"What I don't figure," he said, "was how you all made the train sound like coming in, closer and closer."

"Just by changing the music," I said. "Changing the pitch."

"Fact," said the mouth-harp man. "I played the change with him."

A woman laughed, nervous. "Now I think, that's true. A train whistle sounds higher and higher while it comes up to you. Then it passes and goes off, sounding lower and lower."

"But I didn't hear the train go away in the song," allowed a man beside her. "It just kept coming." He shrugged, maybe he shivered.

"Donie," said the woman, "reckon I'll go along."

"Stay on, Lettie," began Donie Carawan, telling her instead of asking.

"Got a right much walking to do, and no moon," said the woman. "Reuben, you come, too."

She left. The man looked back just once at Donie Carawan, and followed. Another couple, and then another, went with them from the firelight. Maybe more would have gone, but Donie Carawan snorted, like a horse, to stop them.

"Let's drink," she said. "Plenty for all, now those folks I reckoned to be my friends are gone."

Maybe two-three others faded away, between there and the barrel. Donie Carawan dipped herself a drink, watching me over the gourd's edge. Then she dipped more and held it out.

"You drink after a lady," she whispered, "and get a kiss."

I drank. It was good stump-hole whisky. "Tasty," I said.

"The kiss?" she laughed. But the dance-caller didn't laugh, or either the mouth-harp man, or either me.

"Let's dance," said Donie Carawan, and I picked "Sourwood Mountain" and the mouth-harp moaned.

The dancers had got to be few, just in a short while. But the trees they danced through looked bigger, and more of them. It minded me of how I'd heard, when I was a chap, about day-trees and night-trees, they weren't the same things at all; and the night-trees can crowd all round a house they don't like, pound the shingles off the roof, bust in the window glass and the door panels; and that's the sort of night you'd better never set your foot outside. . . .

Not so much clapping at the end of "Sourwood Mountain." Not such a holler of "More!" Folks went to take another drink at the barrel, but the mouth-harp man held me back.

"Tell me," he said, "about that business. The noise sounding higher when the train comes close."

"It was explained out to me by a man I know, place in Tennessee called Oak Ridge," I said. "It's about what they call sound waves, and some way it works with light, too. Don't rightly catch on how, but they can measure how far it is to the stars thataway."

He thought, frowning. "Something like what's called radar?"

I shook my head. "No, no machinery to it. Just what they name a principle. Fellow named Doppler—Christian Doppler, a foreigner—got it up."

"His name was Christian," the mouth-harp man repeated me. "Then I reckon it's no witch stuff."

"Why you worrying it?" I asked him.

"I watched through the dog-trot while we were playing the

black train song, changing pitch, making it sound like coming near," he said. "Looky yonder, see for yourself."

I looked. There was a streaky shine down the valley. Two streaky shines, though nary moon. I saw what he meant—it looked like those pulled-up rails were still there, where they hadn't been before.

"That second verse Miss Donie sang," I said. "Was it about——"

"Yes," he said before I'd finished. "That was the verse about Cobb Richardson. How he prayed for God's forgiveness, night before he died."

Donie Carawan came and poked her hand under my arm. I could tell that good strong liquor was feeling its way around her insides. She laughed at almost nothing whatever. "You're not leaving, anyway," she smiled at me.

"Don't have any place special to go," I said.

She upped on her pointed toes. "Stay here tonight," she said in my ear. "The rest of them will be gone by midnight."

"You invite men like that?" I said, looking into her blue eyes. "When you don't know them?"

"I know men well enough," she said. "Knowing men keeps a woman young." Her finger touched my guitar where it hung behind my shoulder, and the strings whispered a reply. "Sing me something, John."

"I still want to learn the black train song."

"I've sung you both verses," she said.

"Then," I told her, "I'll sing a verse I've just made up inside my head." I looked at the mouth-harp man. "Help me with this."

Together we played, raising pitch gradually, and I sang the new verse I'd made, with my eyes on Donie Carawan.

Go tell that laughing lady
All filled with worldly pride,
The little black train is coming,
Get ready to take a ride.
With a little black coach and engine

And a little black baggage car,
The words and deeds she has said and done
Must roll to the judgment bar.

When I was through, I looked up at those who'd stayed. They weren't more than half a dozen now, bunched up together like cows in a storm; all but Big Jeth, standing to one side with eyes stabbing at me, and Donie Carawan, leaning tired-like against a tree with hanging branches.

"Jeth," she said, "stomp his guitar to pieces."

I switched the carrying cord off my neck and held the guitar at my side. "Don't try such a thing, Jeth," I warned him.

His big square teeth grinned, with dark spaces between them. He looked twice as wide as me.

"I'll stomp you and your guitar both," he said.

I put the guitar on the ground, glad I'd had but the one drink. Jeth ran and stooped for it, and I put my fist hard under his ear. He hopped two steps away to keep his feet.

Shouldn't anybody name me what he did then, and I hit him twice more, harder yet. His nose flatted out under my knuckles and when he pulled back away, blood trickled.

The mouth-harp man grabbed up my guitar. "This here'll be a square fight!" he yelled, louder than he'd spoken so far. "Ain't a fair one, seeing Jeth's so big, but it'll be square! Just them two in it, and no more!"

"I'll settle you later," Jeth promised him, mean.

"Settle me first," I said, and got betwixt them.

Jeth ran at me. I stepped sidewise and got him under the ear again as he went shammocking past. He turned, and I dug my fist right into his belly-middle, to stir up all that stump-hole whisky he'd been drinking, then the other fist under the ear yet once more, then on the chin and the mouth, under the ear, on the broken nose—ten licks like that, as fast and hard as I could fetch them in, and eighth or ninth he went slack, and the tenth he just fell flat and loose, like a coat from a nail. I stood waiting, but he didn't move.

"Gentlemen," said the drunk man who'd fetched me, "looky yonder at Jeth laying there! Never figured to see the day! Maybe that stranger-man calls himself John is Satan, after all!"

Donie Carawan walked across, slow, and gouged Jeth's ribs with the pointy toe of her high-heeled shoe. "Get up," she bade him.

He grunted and mumbled and opened his eyes. Then he got up, joint by joint, careful and sore, like a sick bull. He tried to stop the blood from his nose with the back of his big hand. Donie Carawan looked at him and then she looked at me.

"Get out of here, Jeth," she ordered him. "Off my place."

He went, cripply-like, with his knees bent and his hands swinging and his back humped, the way you'd think he carried something heavy.

The drunk man hiccupped. "I reckon to go, too," he said, maybe just to himself.

"Then go!" Donie Carawan yelled at him. "Everybody can go, right now, this minute! I thought you were my friends—now I see I don't have a friend among the whole bunch! Hurry up, get going! Everybody!"

Hands on hips, she blared it out. Folks moved off through the trees, a sight faster than Jeth had gone. But I stood where I was. The mouth-harp man gave me back my guitar, and I touched a chord of its strings. Donie Carawan spun around like on a swivel to set her blue eyes on me.

"You stayed," she said, the way she thought there was something funny about it.

"It's not midnight yet," I told her.

"But near to," added the mouth-harp man. "Just a few minutes off. And it's at midnight the little black train runs."

She lifted her round bare shoulders. She made to laugh again, but didn't.

"That's all gone. If it ever was true, it's not true any more. The rails were taken up——"

"Looky yonder through the dog-trot," the mouth-harp man broke in. "See the two rails in place, streaking along the valley."

Again she swung around and she looked, and seemed to me she swayed in the light of the dying fires. She could see those streaky rails, all right.

"And listen," said the mouth-harp man. "Don't you all hear something?"

I heard it, and so did Donie Carawan, for she flinched. It was a wild and lonely whistle, soft but plain, far down valley.

"Are you doing that, John?" she squealed at me, in a voice gone all of a sudden high and weak and old. Then she ran at the house and into the dog-trot, staring down along what looked like railroad track.

I followed her, and the mouth-harp man followed me. Inside the dog-trot was a floor of dirt, stomped hard as brick. Donie Carawan looked back at us. Lamplight came through a window, to make her face look bright pale, with the painted red of the mouth gone almost black against it.

"John," she said, "you're playing a trick, making it sound like——"

"Not me," I swore to her.

It whistled again, *wooooooeeeee!* And I, too, looked along the two rails, shining plain as plain in the dark moonless night, to curve off around a valley-bend. A second later, the engine itself sounded, *chukchukchukchuk*, and the whistle, *wooooo-eeeee!*

"Miss Donie," I said, close behind her, "you'd better go away."

I pushed her gently.

"No!" She lifted her fists, and I saw cordy lines on their backs—they weren't a young woman's fists. "This is my house and my land, and it's my railroad!"

"But——" I started to say.

"If it comes here," she broke me off, "where can I run to from it?"

The mouth-harp man tugged my sleeve. "I'm going," he said. "You and me raised the pitch and brought the black train. Thought I could stay, watch it and glory in it. But I'm not man enough."

Going, he blew a whistle-moan on his mouth-harp, and the other whistle blew back an answer, louder and nearer.

And higher in the pitch.

"That's a real train coming," I told Donie Carawan, but she shook her yellow head.

"No," she said, dead-like. "It's coming, but it's no real train. It's heading right to this dog-trot. Look, John. On the ground."

Rails looked to run there, right through the dog-trot like through a tunnel. Maybe it was some peculiar way of the light. They lay close together, like narrow-gauge rails. I didn't feel like touching them with my toe to make sure of them, but I saw them. Holding my guitar under one arm, I put out my other hand to take Donie Carawan's elbow. "We'd better go," I said again.

"I can't!"

She said it loud and sharp and purely scared. And taking hold of her arm was like grabbing the rail of a fence, it was so stiff and unmoving.

"I own this land," she was saying. "I can't leave it."

I tried to pick her up, and that couldn't be done. You'd have thought she'd grown to the ground inside that dog-trot, spang between what looked like the rails, the way you'd figure roots had come from her pointy toes and high heels. Out yonder, where the track marks curved off, the sound rose louder, higher, *chukchukchukchuk—wooooooeeeee!* And light was coming from round the curve, like a headlight maybe, only it had some blue to its yellow.

The sound of the coming engine made the notes of the song in my head:

> Go put your house in order
> For thou shalt surely die——

Getting higher, getting higher, changing pitch as it came close and closer——

I don't know when I began picking the tune on my guitar, but I was playing as I stood there next to Donie Carawan. She couldn't flee. She was rooted there, or frozen there, and the train was going to come in sight in just a second.

The mouth-harp man credited us, him and me, with bringing it, by that pitch-changing. And, whatever anybody deserved, wasn't for me to bring their deservings on them. I thought things like that. Also:

Christian Doppler was the name of the fellow who'd thought out the why and wherefore of how pitch makes the sound closeness. Like what the mouth-harp man said, his name showed it wasn't witch stuff. An honest man could try . . .

I slid my fingers back up the guitar-neck, little by little, as I picked the music, and the pitch sneaked down.

"Here it comes, John," whimpered Donie Carawan, standing solid as a stump.

"No," I said. "It's going—listen!"

I played so soft you could pick up the train-noise with your ear. And the pitch was dropping, like with my guitar, and the whistle sounded *wooooooeeeee!* Lower it sounded.

"The light—dimmer——" she said. "Oh, if I could have the chance to live different——"

She moaned and swayed.

Words came for me to sing as I picked.

Oh, see her standing helpless,
Oh, hear her shedding tears.
She's counting these last moments
As once she counted years.
She'd turn from proud and wicked ways,
She'd leave her sin, O Lord!
If the little black train would just back up
And not take her aboard.

For she was weeping, all right. I heard her breath catch and strangle and shake her body, the way you'd look for it to tear her ribs loose from her backbone. I picked on, strummed on, lower and lower.

Just for once, I thought I could glimpse what might have come at us.

It was little, all right, and black under that funny cold-blue light it carried. And the cars weren't any bigger than coffins, and some way the shape of coffins. Or maybe I just sort of imagined that, dreamed it up while I stood there. Anyway, the light grew dim, and the *chukchukchukchuk* went softer and lower, and you'd guess the train was backing off, out of hearing.

I stopped my hand on the silver strings. We stood there in a silence like what there must be in some lifeless, airless place like on the moon.

Then Donie Carawan gave out one big, broken sob, and I caught her with my free arm as she fell.

She was soft enough then. All the tight was gone from her. She lifted one weak, round, bare arm around my neck, and her tears wet my hickory shirt.

"You saved me, John," she kept saying. "You turned the curse away."

"Reckon I did," I said, though that sounded like bragging. I looked down at the rails, and they weren't there, in the dogtrot or beyond. Just the dark of the valley. The cooking fires had burned out, and the lamps in the house were low.

Her arm tightened around my neck. "Come in," she said. "Come in, John. You and me, alone in there."

"It's time for me to head off away," I said.

Her arm dropped from me. "What's the matter? Don't you like me?" she asked.

I didn't even answer that one, she sounded so pitiful. "Miss Donie," I said, "you told a true thing. I turned the curse from you. It hadn't died. You can't kill it by laughing at it, or saying

there aren't such things, or pulling up rails. If it held off tonight, it might come back."

"Oh!" She half raised her arms to me again, then put them down.

"What must I do?" she begged me.

"Stop being a sinner."

Her blue eyes got round in her pale face.

"You want me to live," she said, hopeful.

"It's better for you to live. You told me that folks owe you money, rent land from you and such. How'd they get along if you got carried off?"

She could see what I meant, maybe the first time in her life.

"You'd be gone," I minded her, "but the folks would stay behind, needing your help. Well, you're still here, Miss Donie. Try to help the folks. There's a thousand ways to do it. I don't have to name them to you. And you act right, you won't be so apt to hear that whistle at midnight."

I started out of the dog-trot.

"John!" My name sounded like a wail in her mouth.

"Stay here tonight, John," she begged me. "Stay with me! I want you here, John, I need you here!"

"No, you don't need me, Miss Donie," I said. "You've got a right much of thinking and planning to do. Around about the up of sun, you'll have done enough, maybe, to start living different from this on."

She started to cry. As I walked away I noticed how, farther I got, lower her voice-pitch sounded.

I sort of stumbled on the trail. The mouth-harp man sat on a chopped-down old log.

"I listened, John," he said. "Think you done right?"

"Did the closest I could to right. Maybe the black train was bound to roll, on orders from whatever station it starts from; maybe it was you and me, raising the pitch the way we did, brought it here tonight."

"I left when I did, dreading that thought," he nodded.

"The same thought made me back it out again," I said.

"Anyway, I kind of glimmer the idea you all can look for a new Donie Carawan hereabouts, from now forward."

He got up and turned to go up trail. "I never said who I was."

"No, sir," I agreed him. "And I never asked."

"I'm Cobb Richardson's brother. Wyatt Richardson. Dying, my mother swore me to even things with Donie Carawan for what happened to Cobb. Doubt if she meant this sort of turnout, but I reckon it would suit her fine."

We walked into the dark together.

"Come stay at my house tonight, John," he made the offer. "Ain't much there, but you're welcome to what there is."

"Thank you kindly," I said. "I'd be proud to stay."

Cowboy Lament

I'm sellin' my chaps and my six-gun,
My saddle, my spurs, and old Paint;
I onct was the toast of the juvenile host,
But today it's apparent I ain't.
By flyin' machines I've been ruint;
My fans have averted their face:
They're goin' for varmints in rubberized garments
Who soar to the borders of space.

My radio option's expired;
I'm poison to films and TV.
Oh, bury me not on a two-minute spot
Where there ain't any glory for me!
Hey, mister! I'll buy me a space-suit
And trade my cayuse for a jet:
If others can blast off, I ain't any castoff—
I'll win back my audience yet!

NORMAN R. JAFFRAY

ISAAC ASIMOV

The Foundation of Science Fiction Success

If you ask me how to shine in the science fiction line as a pro
of luster bright,
I say, brush up on the lingo of the sciences, by jingo (never
mind if not quite right).
You must talk of Space and Galaxies and tesseractic fallacies
in slick and mystic style,
Though the fans won't understand it, they will all the same
demand it with a softly hopeful smile.
And all the fans will say,
As you walk your spatial way,
"If that young man indulges in flights through all the Galaxy,
Why, what a most imaginative type of man that type of man
must be!"

So success is not a mystery, just brush up on your history, and
borrow day by day.
Take an Empire that was Roman and you'll find it is at home
in all the starry Milky Way.
With a drive that's hyperspatial, through the parsecs you will
race, you'll find that plotting is a breeze,
With a tiny bit of cribbin' from the works of Edward Gibbon
and that Greek, Thucydides.
And all the fans will say,
As you walk your thoughtful way,
"If that young man involves himself in authentic history,
Why, what a very learned kind of high IQ his high IQ must
be!"

Then eschew all thoughts of passion of a man-and-woman
fashion from your hero's thoughtful mind.

He must spend his time on politics, and thinking up his
knavish tricks,* and outside that he's blind.
It's enough he's had a mother, other females are a bother,
though they're jeweled and glistery,
They will just distract his dreaming and his necessary schem-
ing with that psychohistory.
And all the fans will say
As you walk your narrow way,
"If all his yarns restrict themselves to masculinity,
Why, what a most particularly pure young man that pure
young man must be!"

* If this rime seems questionable, cf. "God Save the Queen."—A. B.