

# TURNCOAT

A Novel by Damon Knight

## PROLOGUE

**1990:** THE pressroom on the eightieth floor of the World Legislature Building was a bedlam, but it quieted the minute the big sandy-haired man walked in.

"You know what we want, Doctor," somebody called. "Let's have it."

"Print this," said Dr. Kusko, enunciating clearly.

"The passage by the World Legislature today, of the bill creating a universal analogue treatment program, not only gives me and my associates a very deep gratification, but should be a cause for rejoicing on the part of every citizen of this globe. This date marks the beginning of the world's maturity. We have put an end to war, to crimes of violence, to conspiracy against the peace, to corruption in public office, to all the myriad insanities that have oppressed and divided us since the beginning of history. From now on, we go forward."

Pencils scribbled busily for another second or two. "What are you going to do next, Doctor?" asked a reporter.

Kusko grinned. "Off the record—" A groan went up; the big man's grin widened. "Off the record, I've spent the last twenty years, figuratively speaking, in building a bug-trap. Now that it's built, I'm going to sleep for thirty-six hours, spend the next twelve getting reacquainted with my wife—and after that, praise God, I believe I can begin to get some real work done."

"Some of us thought," said a woman, "that Mr. Haggerty of the Civil Rights Commission might block the passage of the bill at this session and perhaps defeat it altogether. Have you any comment on that?"

"How could he?" Kusko asked. "Haggerty had the analogue treatment himself six years ago. He was developing a suicidal mania—off the record."

After an uncertain pause, the woman said, "Dr. Kusko, forgive me if I'm misinterpreting you—do you mean that when you treated Mr. Haggerty for that condition, that you also deliberately made it impossible for him to interfere with the passage of this bill?"

"That's what I mean," said Kusko. "Just as all of you in this room have had the treatment to keep you from revealing anything your informant asks you to keep quiet—otherwise you wouldn't be getting this story. The only difference is, Haggerty didn't know what was being done to him. Neither did the fifty-odd world senators who came to us for one reason or another. And everything I have just said, by the way, is—very definitely—off the record."

Most of the reporters laughed. They liked Kusko; you couldn't help it.

"The end justifies the means, is that it, Doctor?" said a little-man in the front row, who had not laughed.

"In this case," said Kusko seriously, "it does."

**2035:** "Gentlemen," said the bulky, well-groomed man at the head of the table, "now that the mutual introductions are over, you undoubtedly realize that we have here a rather unique assemblage. Here in this room are representatives of some of the major interests in every field of production in North America, from food to steel. Together, the companies we represent can clothe Mr. Average North American Consumer, feed him, amuse him, keep him healthy, house him, and sell him everything he needs or wants: And we are all interested in that same consumer, yet we are not in competition with one another. For that reason"—he cleared his throat—"I believe that every one of you will be intensely

interested in the proposition I have to lay before you here today."

He glanced down the double line of faces, then consulted his notes. "As a matter of fact," he said, "there is one amendment I should make to the statement I have just made. There is, in this room, no representative of the advertising industry. The reason for that will become apparent in a moment.

"My company, gentlemen, spends seven million credits each year on advertising and promotion. I believe that figure is not greatly out of line with the average figure of our respective companies. Now let me ask you this. How would you, as representatives of your companies, like to increase the sales of your products and services, while at the same time reducing your advertising and promotion budgets to exactly zero?"

At his signal, two young men came forward, one on either side of the table, and began to pass out large rectangles of plastic. Mounted on each was a glossy sheet of paper bearing a three-color sketch of a young man and woman standing under a golden cornucopia, from which a shower of jewelry, miniature automobiles, hams, fountain pens and fur coats was descending into their outstretched arms. The banner-line was:

FREE! FOR A WHOLE YEAR!!!

"That," said the bulky man after a few moments; "is what I might refer to as the advertisement to end all advertisements. As you will note, the text here has been drawn up to represent sample brand names and lines of products from each of the companies and associations represented at this table. You will note that some companies have one brand name or line of products mentioned, while others have two or more.

"That has been done, in every case, to represent five percent of each company's gross yearly sales. And also you will note that the total of the free goods and services amounts, pricewise, to the same percentage—five percent of the different items that the North American Consumer wants and needs. In other words, each company will take a one-hundred-percent loss for one year on five percent of its products, in order to induce the consumer to buy *all the products of that company*, exclusive of all other competitors. I have here"—the young men stepped forward again and distributed piles of documents—a table of estimated profit and loss resulting from this offer, based on an enrollment of ten million heads of families the first year. I believe that in every case, the capital reserves of every company represented here will be ample to cover that first year deficit."

For the first time, one of the other men at the table spoke up. "I believe," said a thin-faced oldster, "that this would be characterized as an association in restraint of trade, Mr. Dine."

## *The Deadly Cycle*

IN EVERY age there have been those who sought, for reasons of power or profit, to shackle men's minds. A character named Hitler believed in the Big Lie—and it is true that for a while you can sell almost any idea, no matter how senseless, to enough people to make a difference. But in every age there are minds and spirits which cannot be deformed, no matter what the pressures, no matter how big the lies. Truth will out, if we may be pardoned a cliché, although sometimes it takes a devilish long time.

Meanwhile, there is little to suggest that the deadly cycle of intolerance and rebellion will not continue to be repeated in the future as it has in the past. Only as man becomes more ingenious the patterns will become more clever, the tortures more refined, the rebellions more cunningly fought. TURNCOAT reminds us that a thousand years from now Jefferson's warning about the price of liberty may have greater point than ever as Iron Curtains give way to atomic force screens.

—The Editor

"Our legal department has covered this question very thoroughly, Mr. Hoyle, and they assure me that the offer is perfectly legal. Our respective companies will be associated only for the purpose of this offer. There will be no consolidation of capital, no interlocking directorates—nothing whatever of that

nature, *yet*. There is no compulsion to accept the offer on the part of any person whatsoever. All we are doing is selling large quantities of merchandise at the same time and offering a premium—there will be a contract for the consumer to sign, over and above the analogue treatment. However, the contract is renewable yearly, and the treatment is permanent."

The assembled gentlemen smiled the sort of smiles acquired at poker tables and board meetings.

"A more important question might be," said a red-faced man with a clipped white mustache, "can you get the analogue facilities? I thought that was all owned by the government."

"No, Colonel," said the chairman, "I believe you will find that the Kusko Psycho-psychiatric Institute is a private, non-profit institution, licensed and subsidized by the government. The use of the analogue facilities is controlled by statute, but it is an interesting fact that according to the law, anyone can get analogue treatment, for a fee, to prevent him from doing anything he does not wish to do, except of course for legally compulsory acts. Gentlemen—"

He spread his hands. "I have too much respect for your intelligence to belabor the obvious to you. Let me be brutally frank. There it is. If we don't take it first, somebody else will."

**2130:** INSIDE the multiple carapace formed by his two thin undershirts, the heavier, weighted stole, young Arthur Bass itched intolerably.

Sweat trickled down his ribs across the exact focus of the itch, not relieving it but coaxing it to still greater virulence. Bass clenched his teeth and stared rigidly out across the massed hats of the Sunday crowd. Under the cod-like eye of Senior Salesman Leggett, he dared not scratch, wriggle or even change his expression.

Cursing himself silently for the frailty of his flesh, he waited until Leggett had done with his customer, then entered the amount of the last purchase on his machine, totaled it, and tore off the itemized tab, together with the customer's credit card. The customer, a jaundiced, shriveled little woman, thrust out a liver-spotted hand for them, but Leggett's voice stopped her.

"There is still time to alter your purchase, madam. This sweater"—he pointed to the image on the screen behind him—"is acceptable enough, I grant you, but this one— (thirty-seven-oh-nine-five, Bass, quickly)—is guaranteed to wear out in half the time."

Bass relaxed, sweating harder, having managed to finish punching the code just as Leggett ended his sentence. The customer stared timidly at the flimsy, bright-pink garment that was now displayed on the screen, and said something totally inaudible.

"You'll take it, then," said Leggett. "Splendid. Bass, if you please—"

"No," the customer said in a louder voice, "I *can't*, Salesman. I just can't. 'V go m' worshipping-machine payments to make, and m' house-rent's due, and m' husband's been crippled up with's back all this month. And I *can't*."

Leggett achieved a noteworthy sneer simply by exposing an additional eighth of an inch of his rabbit incisors. "I understand perfectly, madam," he said. "There is no need to explain to *me*." His cold eye raked her and passed on. "Next!"

Crushed, the little woman turned away without seeing the tab and credit card that Bass held out to her, and he had to lean down from his platform and press them into her hand. In the process, as stole and jacket swung away from his body, he plunged his free hand under them and raked his nails across his short ribs, once, twice, before he straightened again.

The relief was exquisite.

The next customer was a stout man in a plain unquilted jacket and breeches, with not more than a half-dozen bangles at his wrist. Beside him, as he climbed up to the dais below Leggett, was a moon-faced boy of about eleven, dressed in blouse and knee-breeches so much too small for him that he could barely move.

"Onward, Salesman," the fat man wheezed. "It's my boy Tom, come to get his first suit of man's clothes."

"Onward. High time, too, I should say," Leggett rejoined frostily. "How old is the boy?"

"Just ten, Salesman. Big for his age." Leggett's glance visibly congealed. "How long since his

birthday?"

"He's just ten, Salesman, hardly past it."

"How long?"

The fat man blinked uneasily. "Just a few weeks, Salesman. It's the first chance I've had to bring him in, Sales-man, I swear to you."

Leggett made a sound of disgust and glanced at Bass. "Seventeen-eight-oh--one," he said.

BASS, who knew his superior, had the number almost before Leggett finished. The item which now appeared on the screen was the most ex-pensive boys' intermediate suit the Store carried; the fabric showed wear readily, the dye was light in color and not fast, and the stitching was treated to disinte-grate after four months, rendering the garments completely useless.

Leggett stared at the man, silently daring him to object.

The customer read the price and licked his lips. "Yes, Salesman," he said miserably. "That'll do main well."

Bass entered the item.

"Ninety-one-two-seven-three," said Leggett. That was overshirts, of the same quality, in lots of five.

The next item was undershirts, in lots of ten. Then underpants; then socks; then neckscarves; then shoes.

"Step down, Tom," said the fat man at last, wearily. "Onward, Salesman."

"A moment," said Leggett. He leaned forward in his pulpit and affected to peer with sudden interest at the fat man's magenta overshirt.

"Your shirt, man, is fading," he said. "You had better have a dozen new ones.

Fifty-three-one-oh-nine, Bass."

" 'Scuse me, Salesman," the fat man said jerkily, "that'll better wait till next time. I've bought so much for the boy, I've nothing left to buy for myself."

Leggett raised one gray eyebrow. "You surprise me," he said. "Bass, what is the man's credit balance?"

Bass tapped keys. "One hundred nine-ty point fifty-three, Salesman Leggett," he said.

Leggett stared down his nose at the customer. " 'Nothing left,' you said."

"Two hundred's legal," the fat man said, his jowls quivering, "and it's not even the end of the month yet. I know my rights—you can't intimidate me—I need that money for expenses. C'mon, Tom."

A murmur of outrage arose from the crowd. Peering down slantwise without moving his head, Bass could see the fat man and his son descending into a bar-rage of angry stares.

Despite himself, Bass too was trem-bling with disgust. The very fatness of the two was unspeakably offensive—the greasy swollen jowls, the necks folding over collars, the barrel thighs. How any-one could get himself into that condition on an orthodox diet, Bass was unable to imagine. They must gorge themselves like squirrels, eating till they choked, storing their wealth up under their skins because they could express their selfish-ness in no other way. Who did they think they were—Stockholders, perhaps, or Executives?

Leggett was silent, hands folded across his red-and-silver stole, staring down at the two through half-closed eyes. Here and there in the first ranks of the crowd, Bass saw a man or a woman surge abruptly forward with red face and uplifted fist, and as suddenly fall back, listening to angelic voices audible to them alone. *If this were the bad old days*, he thought, *there would be a riot*.

The fat man turned at the foot of the dais. "I know my rights," he said angrily, and held up a balloon-fingered hand. "Give me my card."

Bass stood motionless, waiting.

Leggett said expressionlessly, "You know your rights, man, but you have not yet learnt your duties. I therefore offer you a choice. Will you appear in Sumptuary Court with your boy and his birth certificate—and explain why you did not equip him with intermediate clothing until he had all but burst out of his last primaries—or will you make this additional purchase for the benefit of your soul?

Eleven-five-two- six, Bass."

The item that appeared on the screen was a complete costume in black pliovel, from turkey-feathered hat to buckled sandals—gala clothing, designed to be worn once, on an important occasion, and to fall apart after. The price was Cr. 190.50.

Someone shouted, "Good for old Leggett!" A whisper of laughter swelled to a roar.

Only Leggett did not smile. He stared down with the faintest expression of boredom and disdain as the fat man, legs planted, bracing himself against the laughter that swept round his ears, raised his fists to the level of his scarlet jowls and then dashed them down again.

His expression did not change until the fat man, two tears of rage squeezed out of his eyes by the swelling of his cheeks, opened a shapeless mouth and bellowed: "Die of a disease, y' rotted vice-eaten mud-lick'n dogson!"

The crowd's voice died as if cold water had been flung in its collective face. With no more sound than the scrape of one shoe, it moved back radially in every direction.

Into the silence that followed Leggett's voice dropped and burst

"A demon!"

Next instant, Leggett's hand slapped the panel in front of him, and a fiendish clangor burst out to drown the crowd's noises as it surged away in panic. Bass saw clumps of people go down at either end of the hall as force-screens sealed the doorways. He saw the fat man; fists still clenched at his sides, crouching a little, face all awry and as pale as a flour-sack. He saw the moon-faced boy, mouth open to howl.

Then came a crackle aft flash at the nearer doorway; and the crowd split; turning away in redoubled terror, as three horrid black-masked men came bounding across, truncheons in their fists, lightnings at their heels.

Bass turned his head aside automati-cally, as from a blow: The last thing he saw was a glimpse of the fat man between two uniformed backs, pale face upturned in a desperate question; before they bore him away.

IN A few moments came the rustle of turning bodies and the gathering murmur that meant the Guardsmen and their prisoners were gone. Bass turned to face the room again, and saw that the pulpit above him was vacant. Leggett had retired to make his report to the Guard.

The customers were clotting at four or five points where, apparently, people had fainted or been injured by the clos-ing of the force-screens. A white-robed medic came in, made a circuit of the room and left. A few minutes later he was back with two assistants and an emergency cart, around which the crowd eddied briefly until the bodies were loaded aboard and carried out. The murmur of talk had increased to a loud, steady drone.

Someone at the back of the room be-gan to sing a hymn. Others took it up, and it contended for a while with the crowd-noise but finally sank, defeated: More people were entering constantly from both doorways. The sluggish flow past the platform gradually stopped; there was no longer any room to move.

Bass felt a trifle sick. He had heard tales of demonic possession ever since he could remember; cases were reported al-most daily on the news channels; but that was not the same thing as witnessing one.

Hearing that man curse a Salesman—and knowing that if his guardian angel had not been driven out, he could no more have uttered a word of that anathe-ma than he could have committed murder—was like seeing an ordinary door suddenly flung open to show a coal-black fiend grinning and posturing inside..

What had gone wrong? Every Child, when he was four and again at ten, was taken to the Confirmation Chambers in the Store, where an angel entered his soul through the sacred machines; and from then on, whenever he stretched out his hand to do a wrong thing, the angel appeared to him; so that no man could sin. But sometimes the angels were driv-en out, and demons took their places.

Why? How did it begin?

And how did he feel—the man himself, not his possessing demon—knowing that he was cut off from all human joy, here and hereafter; an object of loathing and fear in this world, a sentient cinder in the next?

Bass shuddered.

The door behind the pulpit opened and Leggett stepped through. Bass stiffened his already rigid spine.

SILENCE rippled back from the platform to the farthest corners of the room. Here, Bass knew, was a ready-made opportunity for an impromptu sermon, one that nine out of ten Salesmen would have seized. He felt a flush of reluctant admiration, then, as Leggett simply stared down at the front row of the crowd and said dryly, "Next!"

It was more effective than an hour's oratory. The incident had told its own story, pointed its own moral; there was nothing more to be said.

And every customer in the room, unwilling to admit that he had waited not to buy but to hear a lurid tale of hellfire, stood submissively till his turn came, then took without argument whatever Leggett chose to give him.

The code numbers Bass punched were all in the first-quality group now; not a garment among them that would not dis-integrate after the fifth wearing. Again and again, he had to announce that a bemused customer's credit card was sub-zeroed. By midafternoon he realized that Leggett was piling up a sales total un-precedented in the history of the clothing department.

At three o'clock, the hall still more than three-quarters filled, Leggett stopped in the middle of a sale and said crisply, "Bass."

"Yes, Salesman Leggett."

To Bass's astonishment, Leggett turned his back, opened the door behind the pulpit and stepped through. Bass followed.

Leggett was waiting in the corridor a pace beyond the doorway. Bass shut the door behind him.

"Bass," said the Salesman coldly, "you are ordered to report to the chambers of Personnel Manager Wooten, in Block Eighteen, Level Thirty-five, at exactly three-twenty. It is now three o'clock. Before you go, since I probably shall not have a further opportunity, I wish to inform you that your demeanor and deportment today have been unspeakable. Five times, in the past hour alone, I have had to wait for you to punch a code number. You have slumped. You have shuffled your feet. You have *scratched* your-self when you supposed that I could not see you."

Stunned, Bass opened his mouth.

"I do not wish to hear your excuses, Bass," said Leggett. "Attend me. If you still retain any ambition to become a Salesman—an office for which you are grossly unfitted—let me advise you to remember this: a Salesman is the direct representative of his Store's President, who in turn represents his District Executive, and so by an unbroken chain of authority to the Chairman himself, who is the direct representative of the Infinite on this Earth. A Salesman is and must be the living symbol of rectitude, an example for others to follow to the measure of their abilities. *Not* a callow, fidgeting jackanapes." He turned abruptly. "Onward, Bass."

"Onward," croaked Bass automatically. He choked, and found his voice. "Salesman Leggett—"  
Leggett stopped at the door. "Well? Be quick."

"They're going to send someone to fill in for me, aren't they? I mean, Salesman, if they don't, you'll lose your record."

"That," said Leggett acidly, "is no concern of yours," and he showed Bass a rapidly diminishing strip of his back through the closing door.

After a dazed moment Bass walked slowly down the corridor to the robing room. It was empty, the long ranks of open closets dimly gaping. Unwillingly, Bass removed his stole and cap, folded them carefully and put them away. With equal deliberation he put on his surcoat, hat, pouch, wrist-bangles and rings. Then he walked forlornly out of the room and down the long echoing corridor to the stair.

Two levels below, he crossed a ramp into the Block Nine concourse and boarded the northbound slideway. It was not crowded; few people came to Store at this hour, for fear of using up their time before they ever got to a Salesman. And then there was Sunday dinner to be gotten over with in time to come back for evening services. . . . Bass caught himself. Already, he thought with a pang of bitterness,

he was thinking like a Consumer again. He might as well be-gin unlearning his painfully-acquired Mercantile diction, too; it would not be appreciated in a factory, or on a farm . . .

Beyond that his mind refused to go. Dismissal from the Store was an incom-prehensible, alien idea. It was like a huge object of unheard-of shapes and colors, set down before him with a "Well—what do you think of that?" He could only gape at it numbly.

Curiously, the image that came to him now was not of himself, or of anyone he loved or hated, but of the possessed fat man, in that instant's glimpse before he had looked away: the fat man's anguished face, turned up in a silent ap-peal.

## II

BASS."

The dun-robed secretary, with hair and face both so pale that they seemed one pasty, incongruous mass, opened her mouth for the single syllable and then shut it again, like a trap. Her myopic eyes looked not at him, or even through him, but beyond, at something indescrib-able in an undefined direction and at an unguessable distance.

Twice, in the half-hour Bass had been waiting, she had stood up, walked direct-ly to the single window that opened on an airshaft, lifted her hand to open it, and then frozen there, listening, before she turned and walked mechanically back. A suicidal type, evidently; in the bad old days she would have jumped out.

Bass stood up, numb from the hard-ness of the long bench. Murmuring ex-cuses, he worked his way past his neigh-bors' knees to the end of the row. His legs carried him up the aisle.

The door slid open at his approach, and closed smoothly behind him.

The inner office was paneled in white oak and ebony. Facing Bass as he en-tered, behind the desk, were three tall casement windows through which he could see the sunlit Glenbrook hills; the hangings on either side of them were of green-flushed silver damask. On the walls, in ornate ebony frames, were hung a few of the usual mottoes:

THE CUSTOMER IS ALWAYS WRONG  
PARSIMONY IS THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL  
A MORTIFIED CUSTOMER IS OUR BEST ADVERTISEMENT  
WEAR IT OUT; TRADE IT IN; USE IT UP; START AGAIN

Behind the desk, watching him ex-pressionlessly as he advanced, were two men. One, with a round, pink face that would have been cherubic except for the hardness of the slitted eyes, wore the white-bordered black robes of Manager's rank. That would be Wooten; but he was standing at the desk, leaning the heels of his hands upon it. The lean, white-haired old man who sat beside him, fingering a sheaf of red file folders, wore the ruffles and scarlet lace of an Archdeputy.

"This is Bass, Your Excellency," said the man in the black robe. "Bass, I am Manager Wooten. This is Archdeputy Laudermilk, who will interview you."

"Onward, Your Excellency, Your Worship," Bass said.

"Onward," Laudermilk answered in a surprisingly deep and resonant voice. "Sit down, Bass. Now, let's see. . . ." He lifted a page of the dossier before him, glanced at the one under it, and went back to the first page. "You're twenty-one," he said. "Eyes brown, hair black, complexion fair, build medium, no scars or distinguishing marks. Yes. Both par-ents Consumers; both dead. Nothing extraordinary in your lineage; well, that's as often good as bad. No surviving brothers or sisters, I see. Well. You've lived with an aunt and uncle since you were quite young, is that so, Bass?"

"Yes, Your Excellency. My parents, and my brothers and sisters were all killed in an accident when I was ten. I'm the only one left."

"Yes, I see. Now, Bass, tell me some-thing about yourself. Not this sort of statistics—" he closed the folder and leaned his forearms on it—"but just anything at all that occurs to you. What you like; what you don't like. What you think about things." He stared across the desk with an expression of rapt in-terest.

Bass cleared his throat nervously. "Well, Your Excellency—I like most things. I like my work. That is, I liked—"

Laudermilk nodded, smiling and squinting his eyes sympathetically. "What else? What do you do when you're not in Store?"

"I have classes, four hours a day, at the University—"

"Yes, that's right; I have that here. What do you study there?"

"It's the usual course, Your Excellen-cy I mean, I haven't got a dispensation. Mercantile history, logic, rhetoric, phil-osophy, religious economics and Con-sumer psychology."

"And do you like studying that?"

What was he getting at? "Yes, Your Excellency, I like it main we—I like if very much."

Laudermilk ignored the slip. "Which study do you like best?"

Bass hesitated. "Well, they're all in-teresting, Your Excellency, but I guess —economics and psychology. I like them a little better than the others."

LAUDERMILK nodded. "A leaning toward the scientific," he said. "Yes. Your Dean tells me that you have distinguished yourself in those two studies, although you have fallen somewhat behind in rhetoric and philosophy. That's quite understandable. Yes, Bass, I have a feeling that you weren't meant for a Salesman." He pursed his lips, tapping a long, exquisitely manicured middle fin-ger against the desk-top.

Something in Bass's chest suddenly lost its buoyancy and sank to the bottom without a bubble. He had been trying hard not to allow himself to hope for anything other than dismissal, and had ignorantly believed that he was succeed-ing; now he knew better.

"Now, tell me something, Bass," said Laudermilk, animated again. "Suppose you had an opportunity to study other things—things that aren't in the ordi-nary curriculum—would you like that? Think it over. Do you think you would be interested enough—could you make a vocation of it?"

Bass stopped breathing for a mo-ment. The sunken organ, whatever it was, suddenly dropped its ballast and leaped to the surface, choking him. To study the Mysteries—if, incredibly, that was what Laudermilk meant—to become a lay Doctor of Science or a Store Dea-con! He would give his soul for that.

"Physics," said Laudermilk. "Elec-tronic engineering. That sort of thing, was what I had in mind. Take all the time you want to answer."

Bass managed, "I'd like that more than anything in the world, Your Excel-lency."

"Good. Good. I believe you would. Well, now I'd better explain what this is all about. Every year at this time, Bass, the various institutions of restricted learning have to recruit a whole new class of scholars. That's why I'm here. We usually do most of our looking among the newer candidates for Sales-manship and other Mercantile ranks, be-cause the type of young person we need generally does go into the Store on his own initiative. Now, the quota I happen to be filling is that of the College of Re-ligious Sciences of California Mercantile University in Pasadena, It's a seven-year course, leading to a degree of S. R. D., and, as a rule, an immediate Deputy Assistant Deaconship. Now, let me warn you before I arouse your en-thusiasm too much—it's a long, hard course. It has other disadvantages, too; you'll be confined to the campus for the entire seven years, and if you marry, your wife will have to undergo the same confinement. Neither of you will see any-one not connected with the College until you graduate—if you do, of course. Not everyone succeeds. And afterwards, nat-urally, you'll find yourself rather cut off from the sort of people you used to know, even your own family. I must warn you, it isn't a thing to go into lightly."

"I know that, your excellency," Bass said as solemnly as he could. "I'm cer-tain I won't change my



mind."

"Good. Very good. Now, let's see. . . ." He flipped the pages of the dossier, one after another, studied something on the last one, folded them down again. "Tell me, Bass, how do you get along with your angel?"

BASS had half-expected the question, but he felt his ears growing red. "I—haven't seen him for years, Your Ex-cellency."

"H-m. Yes. Well, that's nothing to be ashamed of, Bass. You're what is known as an 'inherently stable' type: It's rather rare, though not as much so as it used to be, but it isn't anything that need interfere with your career. On the contrary, we're always on the lookout for person-alities of your type, I'll tell you in con-fidence; they do very well in the restrict-ed sciences.

"Well—" the Archdeputy leaned over, picked up something from the floor be-side him and put it carefully on the desk: it was an oblong box-shape, a foot high, draped in a yellow cloth.

"Stand up, Bass ... come a little near-er. That's it. Now don't be frightened. Do just as I tell you, and we'll be all right."

Without warning, Lauder milk whipped the yellow cloth free of the box. It was frontless.

Inside, vivid against the black-enameled metal, stood a red plastic bag, la-beled in yellow:

MARMON'S BEST  
SEEDLESS HYBRID RAISINS  
1 POUND  
Cr./45

But in the upper right-hand corner, instead of the familiar red and white "GP" for "General Products," was an obscenity: a yellow circle with a spidery black "U/M" inside it.

"Pick it up!" said the Archdeputy sharply.

Bass's head felt suddenly very large and light; his lips and tongue, especially, felt impossibly enlarged, as if they were balloons that somebody had blown up. His feet were a long way away. He swayed, and righted himself with diffi-culty. "Pick it up!" said the Archdep-uty again.

Bass stretched out his hand to the red bag: It seemed to take a long time, and yet he wished passionately that he dared make it go more slowly. His fin-gers were within an inch of the thing; half an inch—

He screamed and snatched his hand back.

He was groveling on the floor in an ecstasy of fear, blubbering and sobbing, tears leaking between the fingers he had clamped over his eyes.

"No!" he shouted. "I never will. I never will again!"

"There, son, there. It's all right." Hands were under his armpits, lifting him; he groped behind him for the chair and slumped down with his face in his hands.

"Take your time."

Bass scrubbed his face with the palms of his hands and sat up straight again. He was still shaking; his eyelids were swollen and his vision blurred.

"Tell me what he said to you, son."

Bass swallowed heavily. Thoughts were swirling in his hands like trails of phosphorescence in dark water; they moved too quickly to follow, and yet he knew that he had to speak.

The words came. "He—he had a sword that was all dripping with fire," he said. "But it was his face that was the worst. He said, '*If you ever do that again, Arthur Bass, I will kill you.*'"

"How many times did he say it?"

How many . . . ? "Three times. Then he went away." Bass shuddered and low-ered his head again for an instant.

"All right. Now, I'm sorry I had to put you through that, but we have to be sure. You'll do, Bass. Let's see, where—yes, here's the list. Bass, Arthur D. Dossier TD03080510."

Then there was something about ter-mination pay, and plane reservations, and the Archdeputy shaking his hand; and then he was walking out past the paste-headed secretary and the rows of people in

the outer office, blind to their stares.

IT WAS still early in the afternoon I when he emerged from the colossal northern face of the Stamford Store; the lesser buildings that clustered around it, pebbles beside a boulder, were joined by short, violet-tinged shadows, harshly outlined on the clean glitter of vitrin and stone.

He turned up the High Street, past a row of lumpish service shops and offices, past the County Bakery, poisoning the air with freshness; past the Guard station and the cinema, into the residential area: two- and three-story frame houses, for the most part, gleaming with new paint but sagging out of plumb. Old houses—two hundred years old, many of them. They had a faint smell that no amount of deodorant could eradicate—a mustiness, a smell of memories and decay.

The quality of the light changed imperceptibly as he walked; from blue the sky turned golden, outlines softened and blurred, the shadows became mere rudely smudges. Everything was bright, hazy and depthless, like the golden landscapes in old paintings; the few people in the streets walked with bright haloes around them.

Rain began to fall in the full sunlight, so thin and gentle that Bass was scarcely aware of it until the moisture began to drip from his hat-brim.

He opened his pouch automatically and took out his raincoat; he pulled its folds apart awkwardly, so that it tore at the shoulder seam. He put it on any-how. *Better to be seen with a cheap coat than a torn one. Better to be seen with a torn coat than with none at all. . . .*

HE PASSED through the ring of new apartment houses that surrounded what was left of the park, and walked up one of the curving paths until he reached the bench, screened by a clump of alders, where he sometimes met Gloria on her way home from the bakery. There was no use waiting for her now; she wasn't on the Sunday crew. She'd be in Store now, or helping with Sunday dinner, like everybody else—but the bench was sheltered by the trees' overhang, and fairly dry, and he sat on it.

He tried to think about it clearly.

Incredible, incredible . . . he had put out his hand to the bag, thinking about nothing but the effort it took, watching for his angel to appear—and then suddenly, without any transition, he had known:

There was no angel.

*The Man Without an Angel*—the book they had studied in the fourth year, in Miss Davenport's class. She had a brown mole on her cheek, with two hairs growing out of it.

*No angel.*

But until that instant, even though he hadn't seen his angel since he was nine or ten, he'd believed that was simply because he'd never tried to do anything wrong—*hadn't he?* And yet something in his mind, something of which he was not even conscious, had taken over then, smoothly, without hesitating a second—had sent him back screaming and wallowing on the floor—and when he was questioned, had put the words into his mouth: words from an old book he'd found in his father's study, dusty years ago—*The Detection of Demons*. Something in his mind. . . .

A demon!

So this is what it feels like, he told himself numbly. But he felt no difference: no unholy ecstasy, no thrill of evil along his nerves. He looked at his hands, pinched his cheeks. They were the same.

But there must be some mistake! If he had waited an instant longer; if his hand had come a fraction of an inch closer to the bag—

Well, that could be tested.

Uneasily, Bass looked around him. No one was near; no one on the path or the lawns; nothing but the luminous pearl-gray curtain of rain.

He clenched his jaws. Unwillingly forcing the words, he ground out: "General Products . . . are no good."

It was true, then. He could say the hideous words again, he knew he could say worse things; he could do worse things; no angel would stop him.

He could kill. He could strip himself in public. He could expose himself needlessly to danger. He

could make love to a woman without marrying her first. He could insult a Salesman, or even an Ex-ecutive or a Stockholder.

If another bag of raisins, or a pair of gloves, or a package of cigarettes, with that label on it, were offered to him-, he could buy it.

He could eat the raisins, smoke the cigarettes, wear the gloves. . .

*Well*, an insistent voice in his mind kept repeating, *what are you going to do about it?*

Unfortunately, the question had only one obvious answer—he would have to go back down the hill to the Guard station, and give himself up.

He had known that from the beginn-ing, but he hadn't done it. Even now, he could imagine himself walking into ate Guard station, saying to the black-masked desk sergeant, "Arrest me. I have a demon." But the instant he pre-pared to get up, his legs refused to obey him; the whole idea became incredible. All his life he had been afraid of those silent men, whose faces were masked be-cause they were too frightful to be seen: they were the faces of half-souled men, men whose angels permitted them to do violence, even to kill.

Miserably, he fell back an another question:

*Why?*

Why had it happened to him? What monstrous thing could he possibly have done without knowing it, to deserve the worst thing that could happen to a hu-man being?

Perhaps if he understood that, then it would be easier; he could resign him-self . . . and at the worst, it would be less painful to turn himself over to a friend than to a Guardsman.

It would be no use going to his aunt and uncle; they were fine people, but Consumers, with no more grasp of the finer points of theology than Consumers generally had. There would be nobody at the Store with time to advise him, not on a Sunday, but there was Dean Horrock, a fine scholar, who was always ready to listen to anybody's troubles, and who, besides, could make the knot-tiest doctrines clearer than many a Salesman.

As he walked up the hill, a thin trickle of hope began to rise in him. It was pure self-deception, he knew perfectly well; but it was better than nothing.

### III

FROM the next room came the heady smell of boiling cabbage and pork and the clattering of cookery, punctuated by the voices of Dean Horrock's wife and daughters. The Dean himself was dressed in his best, pinkly clean and reeking of Sunday cologne, but his man-ner was as unhurried and courteous as always.

"Take your time," he said comforta-bly. He filled the pipe whose stench a campus tradition, tamped it with care, puffed it alight. His gray eyes, alert behind their bulwark of pouches and wrinkles, looked at Bass candidly.

Everyone liked and respected the Dean. It was not easy to maintain the appearance his rank demanded on a pedagogue's salary; most of the Univer-sity staff were a little shabby, and no one thought the worse of them for it, but the Dean was always immaculate. He had eight children, too; and over twenty grandchildren: a good man.

"Whatever it is," he added, "if I can help you—um, um—you know I'd like nothing better. But if you decided you'd rather not tell me—um— after all, why, I'll understand that too."

Bass began haltingly, "In Store to-day I saw a possessed man, Dean. He cursed Salesman Leggett. The Guard came and took him away."

Horrock nodded. "An upsetting ex-perience," he suggested quietly.

"Yes. Dean—"

Horrock waited attentively.

"Can you tell me why the Infinite lets people be possessed'?"

Horrock's face writhed and twisted. A sudden spurt of meaningless syllables came out between his

clenched teeth; then it cut off short. His features smoothed out; he stared upward past Bass's shoulder, listening to an angelic voice. In a moment the fit was over, and Horrock was blinking calmly at his pipe-stem.

"That's a question," he said slowly, "that has, tormented men of compassion for centuries, Arthur. Why does infinite good permit the existence of evil? Mm. I'm not surprised that you feel so strongly about it. At your—um—at your age, if one has any sensitivity at all, one does . . . um . . . and even beyond your age, for the matter of that. Some very great and good men—um, um—have spent their lives in the study of that question, and without reaching any answer, um, that will satisfy everyone. In a sense, it's the core of the religious problem. . . .

"Let me put it this way," he continued. "Can either of us say that, if it weren't for the few men—um, um—and women whom the Infinite allows to be possessed, human vanity—um—and willfulness might not grow so strong, um, that we'd *all* cast out our angels?"

Bass was silent:

"A little evil, um, prevents a greater," Horrock said. The tic in his left cheek pulsed slowly, regularly. "That's only a suggestion, Arthur, a speculation. Mm., The only final answer, I'm afraid, um, is that we can't know the answer. The ways of the Infinite are not our ways. How can we judge, who are judged?" His pipe had gone out; he lit it again with tremulous fingers.

"Yes, I see that," Bass said stiffly, "I mean, it isn't the general problem that bothers me so much as—that man Store today, for instance. What did he do to deserve what happened to him?"

"Well—" Horrock smiled a lopsided smile. "Who can say? A sin of omission here, um, another there—perhaps, um, um, over the course of years, they added up—um, um—on the Infinite's balance-sheet, to—" He shrugged.

Bass said thoughtfully, "Yes, that's right, he was a miser." But not me, he thought unhappily; I never grudged the Store a credit, or even had an unorthodox thought, until this happened. What about me?

"Dean," he said suddenly, "there are people who want to do worse things than that, but their angels stop them—they aren't punished." He stopped a moment, wrestling to express the unfamiliar thought. "What I mean is, why can't the angels make people do the things they should, not only stop them from doing the things they shouldn't?"

HORROCK smiled gently. "Well I can answer that in two ways, Arthur. Taking it on the—um—mundane level, there are certain purely technical difficulties in the way of it. The Mysteries are, um, beyond my sphere, of course, but my understanding is that the sacred machines can only give us a certain limited capacity for perceiving our angels, which — um — would be burned out, so to speak, if our contact with them were too frequent, um, um, or prolonged. On the spiritual level, where the true answer is generally to be found—um, you remember your nursery prayers, Arthur.

*"If a sin I would commit,  
Angels stand 'twixt me and it.  
If I would a duty shirk,  
Conscience guide me to the work.*

"We're prevented from committing, um, positive sins—first because they tend to be so final—killing a man, for example—um—and second, paradoxically enough, because they're relatively unimportant. If I want to cut someone's throat every evening—um, I *do*, by the way—that's a trivial matter, really, because the impulse has no duration and therefore no—ahem—no effect on my character. But if I want to buy less than I should, that's a serious thing. It affects not one person a day, but all of us every day: through me, um, it strikes at the very foundations of society.

"The point is, Arthur, that the Infinite is not—ahem—profoundly interested in our, our transient passions. Um, our angels stand 'twixt us and sin, just as a mother might stand between her child and—a pot that was about to fall off a shelf. The pot has nothing to do, um, with the child's development, as long as it doesn't hit him on the head. Moreover, the child—can't be expected to guard himself against the

danger; he's too young.

"But the child *is* expected to learn to perform his, um, household duties, and the mother can't very well stand over him every minute to see that he does them. Mm. Do you see? If the child wants to shirk his duties, conscience—ahem—must guide him to the work—or he'll, um, go without his supper. Conscience must guide the adult to his responsibilities, too—or he'll go without salvation. And salvation, unearned, would be, um, to say the least, tasteless stuff, Arthur."

"I think I understand now," said Bass with a dry throat. "Thank you, Dean."

BASS was a proper young man, with no previous experience of any but proper thoughts; but he was learning the other kind, now, with a facility that surprised him.

"Salvation," the Dean had said, "would be tasteless stuff, unearned...." And damnation, unearned? Was that supposed to have a pleasant taste?

He had searched his memory, again and again, for any sin of omission, and found nothing in his whole adult life. Until he was ten, of course, he had been a child, and had committed childish errors. Was he being condemned for those? It was unreasonable; Bass had heard stories of saintly children who walked the road of righteousness before they could toddle, and communed with their angels only to receive praise, but he had never met one—they must be ex-tremely rare.

Clearly, then, the Infinite had with-drawn its grace from him simply to make him serve as an example, so that "human vanity and wilfulness might not grow so strong that we'd *all* cast out our angels." He had been, chosen at ran-dom, as an orchardman might prune one branch from a tree.

Something, he felt vaguely, was wrong with the notion of an Infinite power without justice . . . and he could not follow up that thought ; there were frightening implications beyond it—but he had made a discovery about himself, and that, at least, he clung to.

Bass did not want to die, not even to please the Infinite or edify his fellow-men.

His plans were made. Beyond the Pa-cific were the picturesque lands, dotted here and there on the map, where brown- or yellow-skinned men still lived in a state of nature. The Store was always asking for contributions for its missionary work there; but there must be some places left where even the mis-sionaries had not gone.

And Bass had plane reservations for Pasadena, which—as he had verified by looking it up in his grade-school geography—was a part of Los Angeles, which was a seaport. He couldn't go to the College; he had fooled Lauder milk, but he couldn't hope to fool the examiners there, the very place where Deacons were made. Neither could he stay in Glenbrook after being chosen for the College. But he could go to Pasadena, slip away quietly at the airport, and get aboard a ship bound for Thailand or Timbuctoo. With any luck, he would be clear off the map long before the chase caught up with him; he could spend the rest of his life hunting wild boars and drinking coconut milk.

He had called up the airport, verified his reservation, and had the date moved back to today. He had gone home, an-nounced that he was leaving, and suf-fered through a half-hour's leave-tak-ing: his aunt's tears, his uncle's inco-herent pride, his cousin's excitement. It had been hard to lie to them, but not half so hard as it would have been if he had waited the full week. He had packed three trunks which he would abandon in Pasadena, and one light grip to take with him, and seen them carted off to the airport. Now there was only one thing left to do.

He crossed the yard, skirting the mas-sive old elm, and walked back along the side of the house to the kitchen window. Inside, Gloria Andresson was stirring something in a bowl, flushed and vigor-ous, tendrils of golden hair loosed at her temples. On the far side of the room Mrs. Andresson was icing a cake, and the two younger daughters were watch-ing her.

Bass scratched gently on the window-screen. Gloria looked up abstractedly, raising a round arm to brush the hair-back from her forehead. Then she saw him; her eyes widened: She glanced behind her, put down her mixing spoon and left the room. A moment later she was with him under the elm.

"Don't you want to come in, Arthur?" she murmured.

"I can't—I haven't got time. I came to say good-by."

Her lips shaped the word silently after him, her brows drawn down in puzzlement and dismay.

"I've been picked to go to Cal Mere," he said. "I have to leave today—half an hour from now."

"Oh," she said slowly. "That's wonderful for you, Arthur, but— How long will you be gone?"

"A long time. Seven years. And," he lied harshly, "they won't let me marry until I graduate."

"Oh, *Arthur!*"

"I know. I'd rather stay here, even: if I had to go back to common labor, but there wasn't anything I could do."

She clenched her fists at her sides, then opened them again. "You mustn't say that," she said in a strained voice. "It's a—wonderful opportunity."

Her head was lowered, her eyes half-closed; he could see her dark lashes tangled with tears. He moved a step closer, involuntarily, and found himself breathing her perfume. He could see a tiny pulse beating in the hollow of her throat. Her breasts swelled against the dark wool, drew back, swelled again.

...

"I'll write to you," she said faintly.

"No. It wouldn't be any good. No for seven years. . . I'd better say good-by now."

She turned her face up and made sudden convulsive motion toward him checked it as suddenly, while her eyes turned to look at something invisible over his shoulder. She stood listening—listening, Bass realized bitterly, to the angel telling her she mustn't touch him because they weren't married.

"Oh, please," she said to that invisible shape. "Just this once—"

Bass made a strangling noise in his throat and stepped forward as if he had been shoved. For an instant his arms were around her; he bumped her nose with his, and their teeth grated jarringly. Then his arms were empty.

She was standing a yard away from him, jaw hanging open, eyes staring through a curtain of disordered hair. He took a step after her. "Gloria—"

"*Get away from me,*" she said breathlessly. She gulped, filled her lungs, and let out a healthy scream. Then she turned and ran.

Standing where she had left him, Bass listened to the slamming of the back door, the commotion inside the house, and Gloria's voice overriding it, loud, excited and dramatic. She was telling her family all about it.

Ten minutes later, running along a back street, startled faces popping out of doors to watch him, he heard the sirens climbing the hill behind him.

## IV

HE STOOD, panting a little, with his back to a wall. It was a six-foot wall, stuccoed on the other side, raw brick on this. He had crawled the last thirty yards, along a hedge that grew between two houses, before he could reach it and climb over.

Now he was safe, because he was dead. On the other side of that wall he had a name and a place, relationships, duties, obligations and rewards. On this side, he was nothing: so far as Glenbrook was concerned, he did not exist. In effect, he had committed suicide by climbing the wall. There had been nothing else he could do; he had left himself no other way.

He thought of the single moment when he had Gloria in his arms. That had probably been the world's least satisfactory kiss, he thought bitterly, and he had given his life for it. His lips tightened. What was it about the world that made it possible for such cruelty to explode in a moment out of tenderness?

She wasn't to blame for screaming when he kissed her; anyone would have done the same—but what about the gusto in her voice when she was telling her parents to call the Guard quickly, because poor Arthur was possessed?

Bass turned and slammed his knotted fist against the wall. The pain helped. Massaging his bruised knuckles, he turned again and looked around him.

Beginning where he stood, a bleak wasteland stretched for fifty yards ahead—a wilderness of hummocks and boulders, furred over with the brittle black skeletons of burnt underbrush. At his feet, and

all along the wall in either direction, lay a sparse litter: soaked and wadded papers, a faded rubber ball, the fragments of a kite, broken glass, broken wood, broken plastic. There was even, Bass saw with a queer absence of shock, an occasional reclaimable article—a tin can, a spike, a tangled mass of wire. Children below the wall must have done that.

The wasteland ended at another wall, convex as the first one was concave. To right and left, the burnt strip disappeared around the curve, but Bass knew that if he set out along it in either direction, the curve would turn the other way after a mile or so, and eventually he would come back to his starting point. Glenbrook was an island.

Beyond the second wall was—terra in-cognita.

On the maps, Glenbrook and its sub-urbs were enclosed in a wavering outline, shaped roughly like a lopsided kidney bean, or a fat boomerang. Around it was a blank area approximately three times as large; then, to the northeast, came Norwalk, minutely detailed, with all its rivers and roads; and to the west, White Plains. The whole map of the continent was like that: islands of civilization in an ocean of blankness, or in some places, large civilized tracts with blobs of white in them, like the spots of leprosy. To north and south, civilization dwindled away; the map became all white.

It was disconcerting to see the other wall so near. Somewhere, long ago, he had heard a story passed on from someone who had glanced through when a section of the Glenbrook wall was being repaired; and the story was that the wasteland went on and on, indefinitely.

But of course it couldn't be so; now that he thought of it, Bass realized that he had often looked over from the top of the hill, and seen the Others' phantom rooftops, looking almost near enough to touch. Anyhow, Glenbrook was larger now than it had been when he was a child; three or four new streets had been added on the periphery to house the growing population. Perhaps the Others had been doing the same on their side; until now there was hardly room left in between for one more block of houses.

The Others: the bat-winged monsters, who dressed in clothes of iron that never wore out; and ate their own children; and lived in caves that they scraped out of rock with the tines of their terrible hands . . .

Bass hesitated, suspended between one motion and the next. For a moment it seemed incredible that he was here at all; what was the known terror of the Guard compared to the marrow-chilling emptiness that lay ahead of him?

His body had tensed itself, as if he were standing at the edge of an abyss, nerving himself to jump. Deliberately, he took the first step forward. Then the next. Gray flaky ash puffed up around his feet as he walked; black char grimed his shoes and the cuffs of his trousers.

HALFWAY across the ground began to slope upwards as he climbed, a gray triangle appeared over the wall ahead. More and more of the thing rose into view as he approached it; he was watching it so intently that he did not notice the other things to right and left of it until he had almost reached the wall. They were tilted brown planes—like the roofs of houses. The triangle in the middle might easily be another house, seen end-on; but Bass was not deceived.

These appearances were part of the screen of illusion the Others had set up; evidently they were not simply pictures painted on a roof of canvas, as Bass had always half-consciously assumed; they might be wickerwork structures; painted to resemble houses from a distance; but that was not important. In a moment he would be over the wall, *under* that screen, however it was made; and he would see things that men were never meant to see.

The base of this wall, too, was strewn with discarded objects. Bass did not let himself hesitate again. He climbed recklessly onto the sagging ruin of a barrel hoisted himself to the top of the wall and dropped over.

He was in a yard.

Yellowed grass straggled over bare earth, worn hard and smooth under the clothesline. Beyond that, a house: screened back porch with hoe- and rake-handles leaning against it, blank upper story—no windows facing the Wall—garden hose coiled around a standpipe at the corner.

It was a replica, in all but the smallest details, of the house it faced across the Wall in Glenbrook. To

left and right across the low hedges, Bass saw other houses, equally prosaic, equally familiar.

An orange tiger-striped cat got up from under a bush, stretching lazily, Bass started convulsively and backed up against the Wall. The cat hesitated a moment, one forepaw lifted, then came over and rubbed itself against his legs, purring raucously.

Bass stared at it. Cats, he realized abruptly, had no angels; and it was a poor tom that couldn't leap a six-foot wall. It was odd to think that he might have seen this very animal in the streets of Glenbrook, never dreaming where it had come from. . . .

*Or was it a cat?*

If that house was not a house, then the garden hose might be a serpent, and the cat might be—

He backed away from it cautiously. It followed him for a couple of steps, then sat down and began licking its chest.

Bass worked his way out to the front of the house, pausing after every step to listen. He heard nothing. Through a kitchen window he saw a long bare table with chairs of a vaguely disturbing pattern ranked around it. In the dark room were the angular bulks of a sofa and easy chairs, the pale gleam of a mounted picture on the wall. There was no footfall or murmur of voices; the house was empty.

So was the street. House after identical house, down the long declining perspective into the last sunlight in one direction, the gathering twilight in the other.

Bass turned left and followed his end-less shadow toward the darkness. It seemed incredible, but, if it was going to be like this all the way, why couldn't he work his way around Glenbrook to the eastward and then head north up the coast—stealing food, sleeping in ditches—until he reached Boston? It wouldn't be as good as Los Angeles, of course, but surely he could find a ship bound for some Central American port, then cross the Isthmus to the Pacific.

In his excitement, Bass forgot that there would be no food to steal in the Others' territory—that the Others, being demons incarnate, ate nothing but dirt, rusty iron, stones and their own offspring. He strode along faster and faster down the empty street; the darkness and the silence and the unburdened motion of his own body made him feel so secure that, by the time he reached the end of the street, where it ran into the curving wall, he had lost all caution.

He turned to his right up another dim, vacant street. He was actually whistling when, just before he reached the fifth corner, two things happened simultaneously:

The street lights flared up.

Three grotesque travesties of human beings walked into view from the cross-street, looked over their shoulders, and saw him. . . .

THERE was an unmeasured, and, for Bass, immeasurable period of time when he couldn't move. He saw the goggle-eyed parchment faces of the three etched sharply under the street-lamp. He saw their mouths bulge into tall black O's; he heard their screams. Then, unaccountably, two of them were running away—jumping-jack figures trailing their oval black shadows far down the street—and the third was lying quietly on the pavement at the corner.

The two running figures were gone. Bass heard their shrieks, faint and fainter down the street, then silence.

He didn't understand. He stood there transfixed, feeling the automatic unreasoning urge to turn and run the other way, but still aware enough to wonder: *why should demons run from him?*

The third demon still lay where it had fallen. Warily, one step at a time, Bass approached it.

It was dressed, like the other two, in fantastic garments—a fringed green cape, shoes with calf-high tops, a bulky thing like a purple shirt worn outside the green-and-saffron-striped trousers. A crutch with a heavily padded top lay on the pavement a foot away from one outstretched hand.

The shape of the thing was almost human. A fold of the cape was tossed over the side of the head, shadowing the face, but Bass could make out the arched, old-man shape of the nose, and the pinched mouth. The eyes were squeezed tight shut.

It was breathing; Bass could hear the noisy, whistling insufflations, each followed by a long pause and then a gasp as the thing let out its breath again. Cautiously, he poked it with his foot.



The thing squeaked and flinched away. Bass saw the gleam of its eyes as they flickered open for an instant. It was awake, then.

Poised, ready to run, Bass waited for a long count of five; then he nudged it again, harder. The thing flinched again and a weak old-man's voice came out of it. He couldn't make out the words.

He leaned over. "What?"

The voice came again, and this time Bass thought he understood. In a hide-ously slurred and distorted parody of Glenbrook Consumer dialect, the demon was saying, "Oh Inf'nite help us . . . I can't stand it ... don't let the dirty thing touch me."

The more he thought about that, the less sense it made. He felt a prickling along his spine, and the impulse to run came back, stronger than before. He fought it down. His intuition of danger was inarguable—as specific and mean-ingful as the perception of heat or pres-sure—but the obvious, automatic answer might be the wrong one. You can run away from a fire or a blow, but not from a paradox.

And, Bass realized abruptly, this sense of danger that he felt was twenty years late. He had been like a blindfolded man on a tightrope all his life, and he was just finding it out.

Deliberately, with a gigantic effort, he put aside all his preconceptions. He was standing on a sidewalk under a street-lamp, and at his feet there was a—man—who gave every evidence of being half-paralyzed with shock and fear. He bent over the sprawled figure again.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

The weak voice piped, "Oh Inf'nite, oh Infinite, I can't—"

"Answer my questions," Bass said sharply, "and I won't hurt you. Who are you?"

There was a long pause. "Only old George Parsons," said the voice hesi-tantly, "who never hurt anybody. Only old George—"

"Why are you afraid of me?"

The creature's eyes blinked open in-credulously, then squeezed shut again. "You're a demon," he said faintly.

Bass felt as if his head were about to explode. "How do you know?"

The creature began babbling again. Bass nudged him sharply with his foot. "How do you know?"

The old man shrieked. "By your clo'es," he said, "By your clo'es. Oh Inf'nite in Heaven help us . . ."

Time slowed to a trickle as Bass stared down at the cringing body. You shall know a demon incarnate by his clothing. . . Bass leaned down and care-fully, hesitantly, took a fold of the old man's cape between his finger and thumb. It was not iron, it was soft fibrous cloth. *To you I am a demon to me*—he thought wildly.

When he heard the sirens begin, faint and far down the way the other two had gone, it was almost an anticlimax. Dan-ger was not an event, it was a medium ; it spread out all around him, a still cur-rent, a silent scream, to the farthest limits of his universe.

BASS had nothing to do with it; his body moved all by itself. He watched with a curious sort of detached interest as his fingers' stripped off the old man's fringed green cape, worked at the lacings of the calf-high shoes, tugged at the green and saffron trousers, while the old man squeaked and shud-dered:

The sirens were nearer—too near. Bass rolled the garments together into a bundle that he tucked under his arm, and then he was running headlong down the street to the right, away from the sirens that howled in crescendo behind him.

Halfway down the block, he turned abruptly and hurtled across a lawn into the darkness between two houses. He kept going, around the back of the house to the right, across a dark yard, through a hedge and another and another until the glare of a street-light stopped him: he was at the end of the block.

He paused an instant to listen. Behind him the sirens had stopped; to his left, far away, he thought he could hear oth-ers wailing up out of a confused murmur of other sounds. He took a wary step for-ward, peering to left and right. He was about to take another when a blur of metallic scarlet whirled into view around the corner.

He leaped back and flattened himself against the wall of the house. The red car rushed silently past and was gone.

Somewhere behind him, down the long row of hedges, there was a faint sibilant sound and then the unmistakable snap of a twig.

Bass's heart was trying to shake it-self loose inside his ribs. He edged around the house-corner, careful even his terror to make no more silhouette an he could help against the streetlight, made two leaping strides to the right and then ran for all he was worth straight across the frighteningly empty street.

Relief weakened his knees when he reached the other side safely; but two minutes later there was another street cross, and after that another. Just before he reached the third street, one of the red cars whisked across the light-gap ahead:

The question was, he thought as he started across the street a moment later—the question was, when would it be safe to stop running long enough to put on the "demon's" clothes ? And, conversely, how long did he dare to wait?

He crossed two hedges, carefully, try-ing not to make a sound; then he stopped and listened for a long count of ten, holding his breath. There was noth-ing closer than the faint sirens and the ether mingled sounds far to the east.

He dropped his bundle to the ground and, working feverishly, pulled off his pouch, surcoat and jacket, his bangles and rings, and finally, with ineffable shame, his trousers. He put on the old man's baggy pants hurriedly, fighting down the queasiness their touch gave him, and then the cape. He picked up one shoe and knelt, groping for the othe-r. It wasn't there—he must have dropped it somewhere without realizing it. Never mind; the intricate lacings would definitely have taken too long, anyhow.

As an afterthought, he pulled out the tail of his overshirt and let it hang over his trousers: it was a poor imitation of the loose purple garment the old man had worn, but it would have to do.

He gathered up his discarded jewelry, stuffed it into the pouch, and rolled the pouch up in the surcoat, jacket and trou-sers. He moved along the rear wall of the nearby house, found an open window, and dumped the bundle through. So far, so good.

After a moment's hesitation, he turned and pushed through the hedge to his left. His instinct was to keep on in his original direction, but if he did that he'd be heading straight into the wall again. He had to work his way east, out of this pocket of demon terri-tory that was surrounded on three sides by Glenbrook. But that was the direction the sirens had come from. . . .

Suddenly sick with apprehension, he lengthened his stride as much as he dared in the half-light. The next street was empty, but he waited, pulse pound-ing heavily in his throat, for a long mo-ment before he started across.

As he crossed the curb, a man in a red uniform stepped out of the shadows across the street.

Bass jolted to a halt, hearing the man's unintelligible shout, seeing the glint of metal in his raised fist. He half-whirled toward the shelter of the houses behind him, then stopped, hopelessly. It was too far.

He was fairly caught. He'd have to stand where he was and hope that bluff, and his demon clothing, would save him.

The red-uniformed man came for-ward, moving with an odd stiffness. He held the gun rigidly trained on Bass's body. With the other hand he took a tiny instrument from his belt, spoke a few words into it and put it back again, all without shifting his glance from Bass for an instant.

Two yards away, he stopped.

Except for its revolting color, his uni-form was an almost-exact duplicate of a Guardsman's, from the flat, visored cap to the polished shin-guards and heavy boots. Bass's heart leaped pain-fully as he saw one of the differences: in each of the mirror-bright buttons, in-stead of the familiar "GP," was another insigne—the same one he had seen once before, in Manager Wooten's office—U/M.

He wanted to digest the implications of that, but there was no time. His per-ception of danger, already at an unbear-able intensity, had risen to a shrieking crescendo—and after an instant he understood why.

The pseudo-Guardsman had not asked him a single question.

Under the red half-mask, the man's lips were thinned to a pale line. His whole body was tense, his right fore-finger white-knuckled behind the trigger-guard.

Desperately, Bass concentrated on the remembered sound of the old man's voice—the elided vowels, the harsh consonants, the rhythm of his speech. Re-producing them as well as he could, he said, "Please, sir, what've I done? I'm George Parsons, everybody knows me—"

The Guard made a sharp, jerky motion with his gun-barrel. "Shut *up*!" he said.

A red car whirled silently around the corner, hurtled to within a dozen yards of them and stopped. Almost instantly, another appeared from the opposite direction. Red-uniformed men poured out of them and moved forward with exaggerated caution, guns in their fists. Every one of them stared at Bass unblinkingly, not glancing aside even when they spoke to one another.

"Any trouble?" called one. Like the others, he spoke in a flat brogue that gave Bass no difficulty; he had heard it often enough from the Guardsmen in Glenbrook.

"Not so far, sir," said the first Guardsman. "It tried to talk to me, but I soon shut its mouth for it."

The ring of men closed in a little. "What'd it say?" one of them asked.

The first man shuddered. "Tried to tell me it was a man."

A ripple of disgust swayed the circle.

Bass's mind was turning frantically, trying to discover how he had betrayed himself. They didn't suspect, they knew he was the "demon" they were after. But how? His shirt was well covered by the green cape; his shoes were alien, but surely the difference was not so obvious as that under his cuffs

"With *that hat* on the filthy head of it!" said the first man in a strained voice.

Bass's hands lifted automatically toward his head, a fraction of an inch then dropped. Of course, he thought sickly, that was it. The old man had not been wearing a hat; he had not even thought of a hat—but he remembered now that the other two, the ones who had run when they saw him, had been wearing tall peaked constructions of their heads. And he himself was still wearing his flat, eight-segmented Glenbrook cap—so used to the touch of it that he'd been no more conscious of it than of part of his own body.

Another red car pulled up, and then another. More men joined the ring.

"All right, we can start now," said one. "McGovern, we'll use your car. You and Clintock ride back with somebody else."

A lane formed, leading to the open rear door of a car... Hopelessly, following the nearest Guardsman's gesture Bass began to walk down it.

## V

THREE men climbed into the front seat; two of them immediately turned to face the rear. Each of these rested the slim blue-steel barrel of a weapon on the top of the seat, aiming squarely at Bass.

A fourth man got into the rear compartment on the right side and settled himself carefully with his back against the side-cushions. His weapon, unlike the others, was a familiar one—a gas-pellet pistol, with its short barrel sprouting from a fat ovoid casing.

All four had clipped tiny respirator cartridges into their nostrils.

They were taking no chances what ever, Bass realized vaguely. The two in front beside the driver had something more deadly than gas-pistols, probably solid-projectile guns, perhaps; he had heard that the Glenbrook Guard had such things, though he had never seen one.

Even if he should somehow be able to overpower the man in the back—the only one within reach—and take his gun away, it would do him no good. If he made any hostile move toward the driver, or the other two in front, the man in back would gas him.

A Guardsman outside took a key from the driver and stepped back to lock the door through which Bass had entered. Bass turned his head to watch.

"Eyes front!" snapped the man with the gas-pistol. "Hands in your lap, and don't move!"

Bass obeyed. No chances at all, he thought. Three men with guns . . . door locked on my side . . . they daren't even let me turn my head, or move my hands.

*They're afraid.*

The thought was oddly exhilarating. The fear and respect of the three men with guns, surrounding him as he sat unarmed and defenseless, was an al-most palpable flow. Half-consciously at first, then with deliberate purpose, Bass reacted to it: he sat up straighter, feel-ing his muscles loose and ready from calf to shoulder; he stared back at the fixed, stony glitter of their eyes behind the masks. His own eyes narrowed slightly and he let his lip curl slightly, as if in malicious amusement.

They reacted as if they had been struck, flinching perceptibly, fingers tensing on triggers—and at that realiza-tion, despair washed over Bass again. *It didn't matter what they thought*: the actuality was that he was hopelessly trapped, alone, unarmed, friendless—and he was on his way to be killed.

The car began to move. To his right, out of the corner of his eye, Bass could see another keeping pace with it; in front was still another. That made three. The fourth, presumably, was bringing up the rear. Again: no chances.

They turned south, then east again at the next corner. The land rose imperceptibly as they went, until they were climbing a steep hill, the Guardsmen front looking down on Bass as if they were on stepladders. Five blocks; ten; fifteen.

The noises Bass had heard before were nearer now: shouts, screams, tat-ters of music, all blended into a single cacophonous roar. One of the men in the front seat made a sound of annoy-ance. "Go up DuPont to Hoyle," he said to the driver. "See can you get around it."

The driver punched a series of studs on the control board and repeated the instructions. Obediently, the lead car swung right around the next corner.

WITH an effort that shook him with its intensity, Bass forced his mind free of its numb paralysis. There had to be something he could do—now, while he still had some freedom to act. There *had* to be . . . if only because these men thought there was.

He had two facts to work with. One: incredibly, this world and the one he knew were like mirror twins. The peo-ple who had fled in terror at sight of him had acted just as he would have done himself, if he had seen them in Glen-brook. The common people of each world believed the other to be inhabited by monsters; and each side was horribly, tragically wrong.

The common people—not the Execu-tives or Stockholders. It could not con-ceivably be coincidence that Laudermilk, in Glenbrook, had showed him the same trademark that he saw in use here on the other side. The double deception had been deliberately established, was being deliberately maintained with all the elaborate mechanism of store and state, for some purpose Bass could not imagine.

Two: The Guardsmen, despite their immense power, were as ignorant as the Consumers. That was logical, even if it made the Guard less efficient in deal-ing with people like Bass—and such cases must be rare; no "demon" had crossed the wall into Glenbrook in the memory of any man living. A secret like this one must be well kept, or it could never have been kept at all.

Less efficient. . . .

That was the clue, Bass realized, with sudden, mounting excitement. Less effi-cient how—and why?

The obvious answer was: because they were afraid of him. But a moment's thought was enough to show him that it was no answer at all. Certainly they were afraid . . . just as a lion-hunter might be afraid of a lion. They were courageous, trained men, proud of their hereditary calling, hardened to violence. If he attacked them, if he made a single threatening gesture, they might be terri-fied, but they would shoot him just the same.

What else?

Abruptly Bass found himself remem-bering the way they had acted after his capture—not one of them had ap-proached him nearer than two yards un-til he was in the car; and after that, the one Guardsman who shared the rear seat with him had kept as far away as he could get. Caution, or—necessary ineffi-ciency?

Not caution.

They could have manacled his hands behind his back. They could have knocked him unconscious, tied his arms and legs with enough wire to hold an elephant. They could have searched him for weapons

and evidence.

All of these would have been reasonable and proper things to do; they had not done one; and why? Because every act involved touching him or his clothing—his Glenbrook clothing; his hat for instance, with its label, "GP," woven into the fabric.

And that, Bass realized, remembering a certain red-plastic bag, would have been impossible.

His heart was beating painfully fast. If he could somehow manage to touch all three of them with some article of his clothing—swiftly, and simultaneously—then shock might delay their reaction for the second he would need to leap past the man with the gas-gun, reach the unlocked right-hand door and get away.

They turned another corner, heading eastward again, up another hill. The crowd-noises grew louder.

There were two things wrong with that program, Bass thought frenziedly. One: Was the right-hand door really unlocked? He thought so—he couldn't believe he had failed to notice anything so important, and it made a distorted kind of sense: one rear door had to be left unlocked so that the men in the other car could get at him if he overpowered the four in this one. But if he was wrong—

Two: The three Guardsmen would have to be immobilized at the same instant—an obvious impossibility. Even they would allow him time to disrobe at leisure and select his weapons, he didn't have three arms. . . .

The thought ended as they topped the rise and headed into a blast of sound. At the end of the next block a kaleidoscope mass of singing, shouting, screaming humanity filled the street solidly.

Bass swallowed hard. The cars would have to slow down to get through the crowd, he told himself numbly, and the Guardsmen's attention would be divided. It wasn't much help, but it was all he was likely to get.

There was no more time for deliberation. Within seconds, he would have to act.

THE lead car's siren groaned tentatively, then burst into a full-throated scream; after a moment the other three joined it. As the lead car nosed into the crowd, Bass saw that the one to his right was falling back.

Then they were in the crowd, that had parted sluggishly to let the first car through, then flowed together again, and now, with equal slowness, was opening the lane once more. Flushed, staring faces bobbed past the windows; raised arms flourished a forest of crazily tilted banners; mouths gaped wetly. The din was no longer even perceptible as sound. Bass felt it as a heavy, maddening vibration submerged by the sirens' howling.

Tension plucked fiendishly at his nerves. It was the same with the Guardsmen; their bodies were unnaturally rigid, eyes glittering fixedly through their masks, lips taut and bloodless. An intolerable pressure was building, building. . . .

Bass moved. His body was already tilting forward and to the right, his thigh-muscles bunching to take his weight, as his right hand darted up to his cap, seized it and swept it in the same motion at the full length of his arm straight across the faces of the two gunmen in the front seat.

Time froze. Bass saw the two gun-muzzles belch flame, and felt a clublike blow in his right side that spun him around, half-erect, facing the third man. A sudden expanding haze of grayness blurred his vision for an instant, but he saw the third man's face, teeth gleaming in the startled mouth, before the flung cap eclipsed it. Then he was hurling himself at the door, his fist slamming the catch. The door melted away in front of him and he tumbled out onto the street.

A blast of sound struck him; and a blur of color; and a dizzying wave of pain. Coughing and retching, vainly trying to keep his balance, he lurched forward into the crowd. He caromed off one dimly-seen body and into another; his fingers caught a handful of fabric and clutched it desperately for an instant until momentum sent him staggering in a new direction.

Behind him a flat, echoing roar cut across the bedlam. A chorus of screams rocketed up: screams of genuine fear and agony, not hysteria.

Bass kept going blindly, clutching at the packed bodies that impeded him, forcing them apart, swinging himself around them. The pain in his side was no more than a dull, distant ache, but his eyes

were swimming with tears, and his coughing choked him so that he could hardly breathe.

Something struck him a stunning blow on the forehead and he fell, scraping his fingernails down a flat, rough surface that could only be a brick wall. He lay there, head ringing, his mind stupidly fumbling the tiny circle of his weariness and his pain, until some remembered urgency drove him to his feet again. He leaned against the wall, straining for breath, until nausea bent him double and he vomited.

When he straightened, wiping the tears out of his eyes, his head was clearer and he could see again. He had been hit twice, he realized; once with a gas pellet, once with a solid projectile. But he had been moving too fast to get more than a whiff of the gas, and the wound in his side must be a slight one; he had barely felt it. He had been lucky....

But he had to keep moving, or his luck would run out.

The crowd swirled around him: men in peaked hats and women in square ones; fringed and beaded capes, green, rose, orange, lavender . . . flushed shiny faces and blind eyes . . . a banner swayed past, and he caught the letters "VE NOT, WANT"; his mind supplied the rest of the familiar motto: "Save not, want not."

NOW suddenly he knew what his crowd was. It hadn't occurred to him before, although he should have known from the sound alone—he'd had enough else to think about, Infinite knew, and besides that, there was no Founder's Day this month. But this could be nothing else than the procession that climaxed a Founder's Day celebration—the disorganized, miles-long rout that followed the procession, rather. Every able-bodied man and woman in the district would be here, shouting drunk on sacramental wines, sermons, singing, dancing, mock-fights and exhortation—the only release they had, the only time they could let themselves go, year after year, as long as they lived.

He moved up the street away from the intersection, keeping as close to the wall as he could. So long as he stayed well buried in the crowd, he thought, he was reasonably safe. If he staggered, so did the celebrants: if he stared wildly, so did they; if his clothing was stained and disordered, so was theirs. But his hatlessness could betray him....

He remedied that by plucking a hat from the nearest male head. Before the man had time to turn, Bass was out of sight in the crowd. He thought he heard a dismayed shout rise up behind him, but in the clamor he couldn't be sure.

He couldn't, of course, stay in the crowd forever; he had to get out before the Guard set up a cordon around the whole area and trapped him. Neither could he afford to risk leaving the crowd at either of the nearest intersections. Almost certainly the Guard had had time to post men there. But there was another way.

This was a business district. Some of the ground-floor shops might still be staffed—dispensing sacramental wine and liquor, trademark-pendants and other holy articles—but the majority would be deserted, and, of course, unlocked. Only the Guard needed locks in a world where angels enforced the law.

There was a metal signboard, fastened just above the bobbing heads of the crowd; steeply angled from his view-point, but almost legible. S, T, A— He circled toward it, and in another moment was able to make out the rest.

STAMFORD BOOK OUTLET. Underneath, in smaller lettering, U/M LICENSE NO. 8402331.

A book shop—perfect. Who would buy a book on a Founder's Day? Bass edged around a wild-haired woman who stood swaying and singing to herself in the doorway, turned the knob and slipped into the shadowed interior.

Light from the street penetrated only as far as the first row of tables. Bass paused a moment beyond that point, waiting for his eyes to adjust to the gloom. Beside him, gold-lettered titles gleamed up at him from a table-load of stacked, identical books. The many--times-repeated phrase caught his attention as he was about to move on:

“. . . With Security and Abundance For All ...”

He stared at it incredulously. An identically-titled book was on sale in Glenbrook, had been for years; it was required reading in the schools. The binding was different, of course, and—he bent closer—the

authors' names. That settled it: a coincidence. But—

He wavered and gave in. Common sense told him that every second of unnecessary delay was dangerous; but he couldn't leave that question unanswered behind him. He snatched up one of the volumes and shoved it, with some difficulty, into the wide pocket on the inside of his stolen cape.

Near the low doorway at the rear of the shop, another title gleamed at him from a shelf: POCKET ATLAS OF THE WORLD. His fingers twitched for it, but he shook his head and plunged on, through the curtain, into an unlight-ed back room.

The simplest decisions, he thought dizzily, as he groped his way between a table and a mass of piled books, seemed to have become unaccountably difficult. He had a curious disembodied feeling, and his mind kept drifting stubbornly off into fantasy: a swift glimpse of Gloria, flushed and beautiful; Dean Horrock's blunt, palsied fingers, tamping tobacco into his pipe; his father's heavy, black-browed face, seen more distinctly than he had remembered it for years.

He realized that his wound must be more serious than he had thought; and that, if this went on, his recapture was certain. But it didn't seem to matter.

HE WAS in a hallway, clearly enough—he had been following a wall in the same direction interminably — but he had no idea how he had got there or which way he ought to go next. His mind was lucid but still very detached; a cool, tenuous cloud of intelligence withdrawn into a corner of his skull; if it hadn't been for the knot of pain in his side, he would have been able to ignore his bodily sensations altogether.

He stopped in the darkness and tried to orient himself. Which way had he turned when he'd first got into the hallway? The knowledge simply wasn't there. Blankness, from the time he was halfway across the room behind the bookshop until a few moments ago.

A new, fiercer spasm of pain ...

When he could think again, he pushed himself away from the wall and moved forward cautiously, hands outstretched. The first thing to do was to make sure he was in a corridor. He might have been walking around and around a room, endlessly following four walls that he couldn't distinguish from one.

Four steps, and his fingers touched another wall. He moved to the right, feeling his way. Three steps, and a moulding slid under his fingers. Beyond it was a narrow vertical opening, with a faint current of air breathing through it. He groped for the doorknob, found it.

Dim gray light from two windows struck his eyes when he opened the door. There were three small desks, their varnish glinting faintly; filing cabinets, swivel chairs, a curling glossy-paper calendar on the wall. There didn't seem to be any exit. Puzzled, he moved forward.

The gray light turned yellowish as he advanced until, a few paces from the windows, two incandescent globes rose into view. Streetlights. He was on the second floor; sometime during that blank period he must have stumbled onto a stairway and, senselessly, climbed it.

At any rate, he was on the right side of the building. Peering down warily from the side of a window, he could see that the street beneath was utterly deserted. A sheet of newspaper, turning and twisting like a live thing, swam halfway up across the face of the building opposite, then dived abruptly out of sight.

... Something was wrong. There was elusive, indefinable menace in what he saw in the deserted street, or the vacant windows of the building across the way, or in the brooding, angular shapes of chimney-pots and wind-vanes dimly outlined against the sky.

Was that it, the sky? *How long had he been unconscious?*

He stared at it. No; it hadn't darkened perceptibly since he'd last seen it. His blackout, probably, had lasted only a few minutes—just long enough to reach the stairway, climb it, and wander a few yards down the second-floor corridor.

But his heart was thudding painfully against his ribs, moments later, as he descended the ink-black staircase toward the street.

He groped his way along the hall, through a cluttered back room, into a larger chamber and a glare of light from the street-lamps outside. Along two walls of the room stood rows of belt-driven machinery; in the center was a long, low table that bore rows and heaps and windrows of shoes.

Bass hesitated a moment, thinking, *I could easily find a pair to fit me, and it would be worth the delay, because*— But it wouldn't, he knew. If his face, or his gait or his physique didn't betray him, his shoes wouldn't. He was stalling de-liberately, afraid to go out into that lighted, empty street.

Keeping in shadow as much as he could, he edged forward to the doorway. He stared through the grimy pane: Nothing. No one on the street in either direction, as far as he could see; no movement but the tumbling dance of pa-per scraps along the gutter. No one in the shadowed doorways across the street.

The brass doorknob was slick against his sweaty palm. He eased it around, opened the door inchmeal. Wind flut-tered through the opening, bringing a muted echo of the noise from the next street. Grinding his teeth, Bass stepped out onto the sidewalk.

Nothing.

Nothing but fear, so thick he could al-most taste it.

He was wounded, he told himself; wounded and tired and sick. That was the reason he felt like this, it had to be. And in any case, nothing could be more dangerous than going back, unless it was standing here like a fool, waiting for the Guard to come and find him.

He moved forward, one step, two, three. With each step the sense of dan-ger grew stronger. In spite of himself he came to a halt, staring around him. The vacant, windy street—the darkened windows—above him, the broken silhou-ette of wind-vanes and chimney-pots....

REALIZATION came, explosively. He saw those enigmatic shapes, not as they appeared now, half blotted out by the street lamps' glare, but as he had seen them from the window above. Cylinders, T-shapes, cubes—and a wide-angled, tapering V.

The blades of a copter!

In Glenbrook, no one was allowed to land a copter on a rooftop—no one ex-cept the Guard.

And if the Guard had had time to put a copter there, then there would be Guardsmen concealed on the street as well. . . .

The whole chain of reasoning occu-pied a fraction of a second; to Bass, there was no interval between the first step and the last. He whirled and leaped back toward the shelter of the doorway.

In the middle of that leap, Bass heard a shout: "*Get it!*"

As his foot struck the pavement, bed-lam fountained behind him. The sharp, slapping echoes blended one explosion into the next to make one single mar-row-shaking roar. Something slapped the pavement viciously to Bass's left; something else chewed a fan-shaped wad of splinters from the frame of the en-tranceway ahead. A round tiny hole, ra-diating hairline cracks, appeared low in the display window to the right.

Bass did not strictly speaking leap again; his momentum carried him for-ward over his leg's leverage. When he came down the second time, he was eight feet away from the recessed door.

And the door vanished behind a roil-ing cloud of gray-white gas that filled the entranceway brim-full. Tendrils of it curled off around the frame-edge, whipped by the wind—too slowly.

Bass rocked violently to a stop . . . stood hesitating for a moment during which something struck his right shoe a wrenching blow . . . and dived head-first through the cracked glass of the display window.

Footsteps echoed behind him down the lightless corridor.

Winded, staggering, the pain in his side stabbing him fiercely at every move-ment, Bass emerged from the bookshop doorway and hurled himself into the crowd again. Twice, in the first ten yards, he caught a glimpse of a scarlet uniform and. had to angle off in a new direction. When he slowed down and let himself be carried along by the crowd's eddying movement, it was only because his overtaxed muscles refused to carry him any farther at a faster pace.

The character of the crowd had changed somehow, he realized vaguely; its blended shriek and roar were as rau-cous as ever, but under them was a muted, persistent humming. And here and there, isolated in the restless flow, were motionless clots of people with their heads bent together. He passed close to several of these groupings, and caught meaningless scraps of conversa-tion that penetrated the uproar: "... pushed 'em with 'is ..." "*Told 'em I got to find my daughter . . .*" ". . .call to be feared unless . . ."

The clots broke up and reformed, but always, it seemed to Bass, they grew larger and more



frequent. He edged his way into one as it grew into being around a large, self-important-looking man in a sky-blue cape. He heard:

"S matter up there, man? What's happenin'?"

"Don't know n'more than you, friends. They're stoppin' ever'body at the corner —won't let nobody through."

"*Other* corner, too!". cried a gnomelike little man. "*Told* 'em I had to find my daughter, but they wouldn't ..."

Bass turned back into the current, shaken. Either the Guard had acted more swiftly and efficiently after his escape than he would have believed possible, or his period of blankness had lasted just long enough to give them the time they needed. At any rate they had effectively trapped him, with a cordon at each end of the block, and—undoubtedly—men posted on each of the adjoining streets.

He saw another red uniform, and dodged deeper into the crowd. Their only problem now, he thought feverishly, was to dip the one fish they wanted out of the pool. They might bring up a hundred men, or two hundred, but only—how many? Four cars, with perhaps as many as six men in each. Only twenty-four Guardsmen, at most, had actually seen him, not counting the ones who had fired at him, a few minutes ago, across the full width of the street ....

He stumbled, and, looking downward, saw that a long, curling strip of plastic had been ploughed up from the sole of his right shoe. He stooped painfully and tore it loose, knowing at the same in-stant that the action was futile. He could steal a complete set of new clothing, put on spectacles, somehow contrive a false mustache, alter his appearance com-pletely ... and still they would only have to look for a man with a gunshot wound.

Bass put his fingers tentatively to the warm stickiness at his side. Incredible that he had been shot ... most of the red stain wiped off against his overshirt, but a little remained, buried in the grooves between the tiny ridges of his finger-tips. . . .

They still wanted him alive. That must be the reason they had done nothing un-til he had turned to run back into the building: they had wanted him to get far enough out into the street so that they could cut him off and capture him. And then, when they had fired, they had aimed low, at his legs. Another paradox: believing him to be a fiendishly powerful monster, the Guard treated him as if he were made of ordinary mortal flesh.

That, he thought dizzily, could be re-solved by thinking of the Guard in two parts—the lower ranks, who were bound by superstition, and the high officials, who weren't—but it led immediately to still another: His knowledge made him dangerous, clearly, but it couldn't be of any interest in itself to the Guard or any other organ of the state. Unless—

Unless the two co-existing mercantile states were in competition, as one li-censed craftsman might compete with another, and sometimes sent spies or troublemakers into each other's terri-tory?

The notion of the Glenbrook Store competing with anyone made Bass's head swim, and yet he sensed dimly that it might explain a great many things—things that he had never before thought needed any explanation. The insistence on a high birth-rate, and the consequent overcrowding. The very structure of society itself, the Wall, the false stories of iron-fleshed demons. . . .

NOW he had to get out, he thought, with sudden, desperate clarity. If they recaptured him and took him to Guard headquarters, there would be no question of simply interrogating him and then killing him. They would want information about Glenbrook's espionage system, and they could not afford to believe that he didn't have it. They would keep him alive, and in pain, as long as they could.

"*Commoners of Stamford, attention!*" an enormous voice blared suddenly. Bass stopped, quivering. Around him he saw heads turn toward the invisible loud-speaker; the roar of the crowd began to diminish. "*Among you is a man who by accident has exceeded his capacity for alcohol. This man is temporarily beyond the control of his angel and is not re-sponsible for his actions. I repeat, his condition is temporary. This man is not possessed, but he is dangerous to himself and others.*"

A hum of interested, curious or dis-mayed voices arose, to subside as the loudspeaker bellowed: "*All persons in this block, between Dine and Kusko Streets, will move in an orderly manner toward the*

*sound of my voice. You will each be examined individually by the Guard, after which you will be free to continue the celebration."*

The clamor of the mob burst forth again, more deafening than before; but the huge, packed mass slowly began to move down the street. Bass hung back until wide patches of confetti-strewn pavement began to appear behind him; then the crowd forced him to move.

His mind was spinning frantically, finding a grip nowhere. The fishermen were emptying their net; it would be a slow process, but infallible. There was no way he could escape it. In a few minutes, half an hour at most—

But why had the Guard told that clumsy lie? The question and the answer came almost simultaneously. Remembering the fat man in the Glenbrook Store, Bass thought: *They don't want to start a panic.*

There was no time to reason out his chances. Bass turned to the nearest citizen—a dropsical dull-eyed man with pendulous nose and lips—and blurted: "They're not telling the truth—they don't want to alarm us. There's a *demon* loose in the crowd!"

The man stared at him for a moment and said, "You're drunk, man. Forget it."

Bass said desperately, "Look!" Seizing the man's cape in one hand, with the other he flung his own cape open to show the blood-stained overshirt with its damning, plainly visible "GP."

The man pulled away calmly. His eyes, Bass saw now, barely focused: it was unlikely that he could see the overshirt, let alone the trademark on it.

He tried a woman, and then an acne-scarred boy, with the same result. The crowd moved on. Bass found himself near the loose-lipped man again. Suddenly inspired, he grasped the fellow's cape in both hands and swung him around to face him. "Y' drunk," said the man, and gurgled a parody of laughter.

"Listen," said Bass. "U/M products are no good. The Stockholders all have bad breath. The Executives eat dirt. The Salesmen—"

The man had staggered back, his eyes goggling in sudden sobriety. Halfway through Bass's third sentence, he violently wrenched himself free and darted with loud bellowings into the crowd.

Bass pushed his way a dozen steps to the right, seized a nervous-looking woman and repeated his blasphemy. Her shrieks were gratifyingly audible as she ran. By the time Bass found his fourth customer, the word had spread; he could hear it echoing shrilly from every side: "*A demon!*" The crowd was beginning to move faster.

Despairing of making himself heard any longer, Bass resorted to pinching everyone within reach. The crowd's forward motion accelerated to a fast walk, to a run, to a stampede.

He saw the wreckage of a wooden barricade, flanked by shouting, impotent Guardsmen, as the flood swept past the intersection.

In spite of the pulsing pain in his side, Bass kept up with a segment of the crowd that fled eastward, straight up the hill. Sirens were howling again, from every direction—the most beautiful sound he had ever heard, because it meant that his enemies no longer knew where to look for him.

But half a mile further on, the first dozen or so of the scattered crowd began to stream past him, running in the other direction as if salvation depended on it. Dropping out, Bass saw why.

At the crest of the hill was a barricade—a real one, this time, with swinging searchlights, massed cars and cop-ters, and an army of men with bulky weapons.

## VI

BASS stood with one shoulder against the rough clapboards of a house, half-supporting himself against it, and stared down the long slope at the lights of the city. Behind him, in the darkness, the rising wind howled through the dry sorted house. The air was chill on his sweaty skin, and his hurt side was one solid, throbbing pain from chest to groin but he did not move.

He had paralleled the barricade for eight blocks, all the way to the Wall. The Guard was there, too—one man every hundred and fifty yards, standing atop the Wall itself, with a searchlight aimed down

into no man's land.

From where he stood he could see a part of that chain of light, tiny with distance. First came the street-lights of the residential area, dipping in precise converging lines to the cubical bulk of the Store. The top of the building was lost against the sky, but the doorways along its base, like the gaps between the teeth of a jack-o'-lantern, spilled wedges of orange radiance.

Beyond, clear and perfect, other rows of street lights marched up the gentle counter-slope. Then came the Guard's Winking search beams, outlining the long catenary curve of the Wall; and beyond that Bass could see a wan glow rising from the other side.

The glow was Glenbrook. How often, Bass thought, had he looked at another ghostly light in the sky from the other side of that hill—the glow that was Stamford?

And how often, from the high ground, had he looked over on a clear day and seen the checker-work pattern that looked like rooftops—seen the shapes that looked like copters rising, the crawling dots that counterfeited trucks and buses, all the evidences of ordinary human activity—and seen them only as illusions?

He turned wearily and looked up the slope. Lights were there, too, a long straight line of them—tiny points blink-jaw from the next hill. The line was nearer than it had been half an hour ago.

The Guard was working slowly west-ward across the city, searching each block in turn, moving the barricade up to the next street, searching again. They were being very slow, very careful. He had perhaps an hour and a half or two hours before they drove him down into the business section again.

The Store's bell had begun to toll half an hour ago; by now everyone in the city except Bass and the Guardsmen would be inside that enormous building. Once they had contracted their circle to the business area, the rest of their work would be easy.

He was going to die. That was a surprising thing, still; but his fatigue-numbed mind could accept it. The intolerable thing was that he couldn't strike back; he couldn't leave any memory of himself behind, even in the minds of his persecutors. Over there in Glenbrook there might be—there must be—others like himself. One after another, they might be thrust into the same grim comedy that he had been acting out; there was nothing he could do to prevent it. The Juggernaut would roll over him, erase him, and move on.

He thought of Consumers and Sales-men, Deacons and Deputies, Executives and Stockholders. He thought of the house he had grown up in—flimsy and rotten, because house-building took too many man-hours, was not profitable enough to the Store—crowded, because it was a sin to curb the size of Consumer families; the Store must have customers. He thought of his father, old at forty; of his mother, who had borne ten children before she died.

He thought of the scanty meals that had been set on their table, and the thin edge of hunger that was never quite worn away; because gluttony was a sin; because a Consumer didn't need fat, only muscle, to be an efficient worker; because there were too many mouths, and more every year.

All of it fell into one huge, simple pattern—the walls around men's cities, and the walls around their minds.

The pressure of the book in the pocket of his cape reminded him of the other book which he had not taken, though it would have been a hundred times more useful if he had got away—the atlas. He felt no curiosity about it now; he knew what he would have seen if he had opened it to the map of the continent.

LINE for line, area for area, the map would have been the same as the one he knew, except that the blank areas would have been filled in, and the filled-in ones blank. Like two parts of an interlocking puzzle, he thought: if you put the two maps together they would make one continuous chart of information, one solid, enormously comforting chart of a world totally inhabited, totally civilized, without fear.

That knowledge was the most important in the world—and there was no way you could communicate it. Even if he had got free of the Stamford Guard, nothing he could conceivably have done would have convinced a single other person of the truth.

If you kidnaped one person a day and *showed* him the truth, and if one out of a hundred, knowing

the truth, could stand up against his angel—which was unlikely—and if each of those kidnaped one person a day in his turn . . . Bass groaned abruptly and tugged at his hair. There had to be a way; there had to be something he could still do.

Sneak into the Confirmation Rooms, sabotage the machines? They'd fly new ones in the next day, and how often could he do that before he was caught?

Break the Walls down, somehow ... no use, the Walls were only a symbol; it was the angels that kept men from cross-ing over.

Bass started, and went over that thought again carefully. If that was true —and it was—why had the Walls been built of brick when boards would do?

For one thing, he realized; they were afraid of fires starting in the wasteland. It had happened already, or else the wasteland had been burnt deliberately, to prevent it. . . .

The wind was still rising. It pressed solidly against his back, flapped his cape and his trouser-cuffs around him.

. . . But the wasteland was too narrow now, he thought. A really big fire would jump the gap.

If a man, Bass asked himself slowly, stood facing that Wall, with an angel's fiery sword in front of him and a burn-ing city behind—which way would he jump?

For an instant a heart-quicken-ing, vision rose up before him; then it van-ished. There was just one thing wrong with it: the citizens of Stamford were all inside the massive, modern, fireproof Store, and would still be there, in all probability, an hour after Bass was dead. . .

Bass lurched through the doorway of the empty filling station, caught himself by grasping the edge of a desk, and let himself slide down into its shadow. He sat there, head down, until his laboring breath began to come more evenly. It had taken him what seemed like almost an hour, running when he could, forcing his stiff muscles into a fast walk when he couldn't, to find this place:

It was hard to get up again, but he did it. He picked up the phone, pressed the stud marked "Operator," and waited, trying to control his breathing.

"Operator," said a woman's voice. Bass said, "Get me Guard Headquar-ters."

"Your credit card number, please."

"This is an emergency call," Bass said. "Put it through, Operator."

"Yes, sir."

A pause; a hum. Then: "Guard H. Q., Sergeant Santos. Go ahead."

Bass took a deep breath. "Listen to me carefully," he said. "I'm the demon you're looking for. I've—"

The Guardsman's voice blurted some-thing incomprehensible, tremulously. "Listen, you fool!" Bass said sharply. "*I've planted an explosive device in the Store.* It's set to go off exactly thirty minutes from now. If you agree to let me go back across the Wall, I'll tell you where it is. Tell your—"

Another voice broke in. "What's that? Say that again."

Bass repeated it. He finished, "It will take me ten minutes to get to another telephone. At the end of that time, if I see that you're withdrawing your men from the Wall, I'll tell you where the explosive is hidden. If not, you won't hear from me again." He put down the phone, cutting off the man's voice in mid-syllable.

OUTSIDE, he picked up the five-gallon can he had filled at the pump. The wind was still growing, roaring down to meet him as he climbed the hill again. A ruder gust came as he reached the crest, nearly knocking him off his feet; his hat lifted from his head and went bounding away into darkness.

Back at his starting point, Bass set the can down—its weight had grown fantastically with every step he took—and leaned against a tree until the worst of his weakness and nausea passed. To the east, the winking lights of the advancing barricade had vanished; the Guardsmen were out of sight in the hol-low between the two hills. In the other direction, as he watched, the lights along the Wall began to blink out. Bass turned his attention to the orange wedges of light that spilled from the doorways of the Store.

After a moment, they began to flicker.

The Guardsmen were falling back from the Wall—no doubt to form an-other, less conspicuous line a block or two away—but they were also evacu-ating the Store.

Bass lifted the can and carried it into the nearest house. In the darkness, he felt his way around the crouching bulks of tables, the spidery traps of tubular-metal chairs; passed through a doorway and went straight to the huge wardrobe closet, crammed with dresses, capes, trousers, so tightly pressed that they were like one solid mass. He pulled out an armload of them, carried them back into the living room, heaped them against an inner wall. He splashed them sparingly with gasoline from the can.

Before he left, he raised a window in the front room and another in the kitchen, and propped open the door between.

At the next house but one he did the same, and so on down the deserted street, working his way southward, until his gasoline was gone. He stood panting rag-gedly in the living room of the last one; it had taken him a long time, and he had not dared stop to rest. By now more than half of the congregation would be out-side the Store, spreading out, filling the streets. There was little time left.

He struck a match from the box he'd found in the kitchen, dropped it onto the piled garments, watched them flare up. He waited until he was sure the flame had caught, then hurried out, down the street, into the next house with an open window. Another match; another pale blossom of fire.

When he came out of the eighth house, he saw a golden tongue of flame rise over the rooftops, down the way he had come.

Coming out of the fourteenth, he heard the faint wail of a siren; then an-other. Too soon! He had hoped that the choked streets would delay them longer. He ran on grimly, the pavement jolt-ing his body from feet to skull, breath burning his throat; into a house, light-ing the match, dropping it, out again without waiting to see that it caught, on to the next.

Three-quarters of the way back to his starting-point, the matches gave out. Bass groped wildly in the dark kitchen for another box, gave it up, snatched the book out of the pocket in his cape, wrenched out a handful of pages before he realized that he could never keep them alight in the gale outside—dropped them and the remainder of the book, mumbling absurdly, "*Now I'll never know if it's the same text*"—plucked a blazing, gasoline-soaked vest out of the fire and ran with it down to the next house.

It worked, but it delayed him. When he came out of the last house, the sirens were very near. Also, a copter was parked in the middle of the street. Two red-masked men were climbing out of it, running toward him.

## VII

BASS whirled and ran back into the house, past the flames that were beginning to curl up the wall, through the dark kitchen. Footsteps pounded after him.

He burst through the outside door, crossed the yard in three strides, and heard the door slam again as he leaped the hedge into the yard behind. He swerved to the right, barely avoiding a child's wagon that lay upturned on the ground, then forward again into the deep shadow along the side of the next house. Behind him he heard a crash and an explosive curse.

Chest straining, Bass reached the front of the house, turned left to the door, opened and closed it soundlessly after him. The desperate energy of the last few moments was already fading; he knew he was no match for anyone in an open chase. He mounted the dark stairs, keeping close to the bannister. He paused at the top, listened, heard nothing but the wild pounding of his own heart.

Light flared in the room below an in-stant after he stepped away from the landing.

They knew he was in the house. One of them must have circled it the other way, and they had met in front. . . .

Footsteps thudded faintly in the rooms below; he heard a door open and shut directly below him, then another far-ther away.

Bass took off his shoes. Carrying them, he moved cautiously into the front bedroom and closed the door. He put the shoes under the bed. The left-hand win-dow was stuck, and he dared not force it. He pushed carefully at the other one, forcing it up a fraction of an inch at a time, dreading the shriek of wood on wood. Finally the space was high enough to let him out.

He looked down at the empty yard, then sat on the windowsill and swung his legs over.

Below him the door slammed and a red-uniformed man stepped out onto awl Walk. He glanced up, nodded, and spoke into the instrument in his hand, "He's here, Harry. In the second-floor front." Bass, with his legs half drawn inside the window again, heard brisk footsteps crossing the room below.

"Stay where y'are," the man outside said pleasantly.

Desperately, Bass glanced up. The roof was just above him, an iron-gray blur against the sky. He gathered his legs under him, eased his head and shoulders out and stood up precariously, facing the house, fingers gripping the underside of the raised window. He shifted one hand to the top of the sash, leaned backward and reached up, with his free hand. His fingers closed over the rough, dry edges of the shingles. He gripped them convulsively, brought up his other hand to catch the roof, and swung out into space.

"Hurry it," said the man below, urgently. Inside, the bedroom door was flung open with a crash.

With a lurch that nearly tore loose his grip on the roof-edge, Bass got one stockinged foot over the top, then his knee.

"Hell," said the man below. There was a *ping*, and something shattered against the house-wall under Bass's head. White vapor swirled around his face for an instant, blinding him; then the wind had whirled it away. Suddenly dizzy, with a gigantic effort he hoisted himself up and over.

He was lying halfway down the shallow pitch of the roof; it was rolling vertiginously under him, and he felt as if he were going to be sick again.

A voice drifted up to him: "Gas didn' work, too much wind, Harry. Better go up after him."

A hand appeared on the roof-edge, then another. Bass flung himself at them dizzily, seized the fingers, pried them away from the room.

"Look out below," said a resigned voice; then the fingers disappeared. Bass heard a thud.

He stood up carefully, hair flying in the wind, bending his knees to keep his balance on the slope. Across the ridge of the roof, the sky was one gigantic gold-wild-pink glare.

In the other direction was the roof of the adjoining house. The gap between the two looked to be no more than four feet.

"Bass," called a voice. One of the Guardsmen had backed into view down the lawn. "C'mon down, boy. We won't hurt you."

Bass moved down to the edge of the roof. Another gas-capsule burst at his feet, but the vapor whipped away instantly. He gathered himself and leaped across, clutching frantically as he landed to keep from slipping off the edge. He scrambled up again with his palms full of splinters and climbed to the ridge.

ONE Guardsman, limping, was head-ing around the corner of the first rouse; the other was still on the front lawn. Bass turned, straddling the center line, and moved back until he was out of sight from either direction before he clambered down the opposite slope.

One of the Guardsmen was standing between the houses, looking up at him. "Be reasonable, will ya?" he said. Bass jumped across to the next roof.

It was harder to keep from sliding off this time, and harder to get up, but he managed it. He was very tired, and his mind was sluggish, but he knew they could never catch him. He would keep on walking across these roofs forever, if necessary, and by that time the whole city would have burned down. Then they would have to go away and leave him alone.

Here he was at the ridge again. "Bass," called the Guardsman's voice from somewhere to his left. "Lissen to me, Bass! Can ya hear me? It's importa-nt, Bass! Lissen, we'll make a deal 'th ya—you come down, and we'll leave ya family alone! Y'understand?"

His family . . . Bass's mind snapped to clarity for a moment. How did they know who his family was? *How did they know his name?* Bewildered, he turned and walked a few steps toward the front of the house.

. . . But how did he know the Guard would keep its word to a "demon"? And anyhow, curse it, these weren't Glenbrook Guardsmen. It didn't make any sense. If they were *Stamford* Guards-men, how could they hurt his family in Glenbrook? And if they weren't, how did they know his name?

Too late, he heard the roaring swell up behind him and felt the wind suddenly blowing straight down along his body. Flailing his arms desperately to keep his balance, he turned to see a metal-and-glass monster looming over him—a copter, its undercarriage almost brushing the ridge.

He had just time to see the head framed in the open doorway, the white hair, whipping wildly, orange-tinted in the glare. The face, contorted in a fear-ful scowl, was that of His Excellency, the Archdeputy Lauder milk.

"*Hang on!*" shouted the old man. Then the undercarriage touched Bass's chest; he clutched it automati-cally as he felt himself being shoved backwards; and then he was dangling while the roof moved out from under him and the street gently rose.

When his feet touched, the Guards-man was there to seize his arms and hustle him into the copter's open door-way. Bass made no resistance.

Someone closed the door and pushed him into a seat, and the copter rose again.

"Now," said Lauder milk severely, "do you see how much trouble you've caused?"

Bass stared down through the cop-ter's transparent wall. They were cruis-ing high over Stamford's business dis-trict; he could see the fire from one end to the other. It stretched in a blazing arc halfway down the slope, the flames shooting forward at an acute angle, five-times the height of the buildings, sparks fountaining upward as if from a battery of titanic Roman candles. But it had not reached the wall at either end.

At the west end, the nearer one, Bass could see that the streets were clogged by streams of cars and people moving out of the danger area. Here and there, clumps of tiny green fire-engines were playing threads of water against the buildings in the fire's path.

Bass could not see much of what was going on in the center, there was too much smoke. But he saw the white clouds that came billowing up out of the sepia: first one, then two together, then a whole row. Buildings were being dyna-mited to clear a firebreak.

That in itself, it occurred to Bass, must mean that most of the crowds had been evacuated already.

"The people in Glenbrook," he said bitterly, "will see the red light and the smoke, and hear the explosions, and tell each other the demons are having a par-ty."

"Yes," Lauder milk agreed, "and the Stamford people will think the demons in Glenbrook caused the fire. What did you expect?"

"It doesn't matter what I expected," Bass said.

"No, it doesn't, unfortunately. You see, Arthur, it wouldn't have done any good even if you had succeeded ... yes, I know what you wanted to do. You want-ed to drive the two peoples together, and make them see the truth about each other. As it is, I'm afraid you've only managed to remind the authorities once more what a dangerous thing a pos-sessed man can be . . . and you've killed a few people, no doubt, not to speak of the property damage."

"I'm not sorry I did it," said Bass.

"No, neither am I, as a matter of fact," Lauder milk said good-humoredly. "If you hadn't, we might never have found you. That would have been a great pity."

HE WASN'T making sense, Bass thought confusedly. They'd had him surrounded—his setting the fire had only helped them capture him a little sooner, that was all.

"Are you wounded?" Lauder milk asked abruptly. Fingers , probed under his shirts, rolling them back, turning him gently to examine the other side. "That's not too bad—it went straight through. Hold still." Something cool and gelatinous was smeared over the painful area; then an adhesive bandage, tight around his ribs.

"But don't you suppose," Lauder milk said, "that there have been catastrophes in the world before this? Not only local fires, but real catastrophes, that dislo-cated millions of people at a time. The great Missouri flood, for example, in 2097. The G.P.'s and the U.M.'s were mingled then, so thoroughly that it took five months to get them all sorted out. Or the powerplant explosion in the Urals in 2081. The Obprods and the Luchuvels both shot a great many of their own people then—there was a great stench about it in the World Court afterwards—but it really wasn't at all necessary."

Bass stared at him. "Why not?" he demanded.

"Because people looked at each other, and saw what they had been taught to see, plus a good deal that they made up themselves on the spot. And the stories grew in the telling. In Kentucky, for example, they don't say that the Others have bat wings and fingers like pitch-forks, or anything so tame and ordinary as that . . . they say that the Others are fifty feet tall, with heads that are all bones and teeth, and that worms crawl in and out of their eyes."

Bass put his head in his hands. "We'd better move along now, Davy," Laudermilk said to the pilot. "We're very late."

"Right."

Bass felt the copter shudder and dip as the vanes were retracted; then the jets fired, the back-rest shoved hard against him, and the landscape below began to unreel majestically, carrying the fire, and Stamford, and all the scur-rying little people in it out of sight.

"No," said Laudermilk, "what you did was justified only because it helped us find you before the Stamford Guard did. And at that, Arthur, I doubt if you can appreciate now what a difficult situation you put us in. I had to disrupt my schedule with a very flimsy excuse, which will take weeks of work to cover up—and then when we did locate you, of course, we had to broadcast misdirections to the Stamford Guard units in order to give ourselves time to work. The consequences of that could be very serious indeed. You can consider yourself very fortunate, young man, that you're as valuable to us as you are. I mean by that, of course, your genes. Yes. A very important strain. We thought it was lost."

Bass chose one question at random out of the dozens that were crowding his mind. "Where are you taking me?"

"To Pasadena, Arthur."

"Why?"

"To enroll you in the College. Not as Arthur Bass, of course—you've spoilt that name, I'm afraid. How would you like to be called Martyn? That's an old and honorable name. Arthur Martyn. Yes. Rather too euphonious, if anything, but if you don't mind—"

The submersible organ, whatever it was, that had choked Bass during his first interview with Laudermilk, was throttling him again now. "I don't understand," he managed.

"Arthur," said the old man gently, "the people at the College are all like us—all sane. Faculty and students. There isn't an angel-ridden person among them."

Bass clutched the seat-arms fiercely, as if to make sure they were still there.

"Then," he said desperately, "you mean that if I'd stayed in Glenbrook- and not talked to anybody, or any-thing—"

"Yes," said Laudermilk. "I'm afraid I must take the blame for that, Arthur. When I gave you the test this afternoon, your response was so well-acted that I wasn't sure of you. And I assumed that was my error—that if you were acting, then your father must have told you about yourself, taught you to counterfeit the angel-reaction. He would have done so, of course, if he had lived. He was one of us, you know; so was your mother. I've checked the available records; there's no doubt of it."

Bass gaped at him. All at once things he had half-forgotten were coming back into focus. That book in his father's study; a way both his parents had of looking at him sometimes, as if they knew a delightful secret that they mustn't tell him just yet . . . and he had never, he realized abruptly, seen his angel outside the house they lived in. "I never had an angel at all," he said aloud.

"No. Your parents, I rather think, persuaded you that you had by using a training film in darkened rooms—very difficult, and risky, but there's no other way—people like us can't be hypnotized. They kept you away from the cinema, I suppose, so that you wouldn't realize you were being tricked."

"I never saw a movie until I was ten."

"Yes. You see, Arthur, twenty years ago we weren't as well organized as we are now—we could neither support any great part of our numbers in hiding, as we do now in the College and other places, nor could we protect them adequately among ordinary people. So a great many of us—your parents included—had to sever their connections with us completely, and live just as if they were ordinary, orthodox citizens. We're making up for that now; we're gathering in their children."



"You see, those who pass the test I gave you are sent on to the College, where they're given more thorough tests, and if they pass those, somehow or other they always fail their scholastic examinations, and we send them home. On the other hand, those who fail the first test are the ones we're really after. We put them under immediate confinement, so they can't betray themselves, ship them off to the College—and they stay. That was what I should have done with you."

"But I still don't understand," said Bass. "You control the College of Religious Sciences—that must mean the Deacons are all your people—"

"Not all," the Archdeputy corrected him. "Only a little more than thirty per-cent, and it's taken us a long time to get that far. In another fifty years we'll have complete control of the analogue machines—that's their proper name, by the way—and something like half the Executive group will be our people, and perhaps thirty or forty percent of the Guard—like the two gentlemen who helped me coax you down off that roof."

"And then," said Bass, "you'll stop all this—this—"

"Tyranny is the word, Arthur. It isn't in any of the dictionaries you've seen, but you'll learn it at the College, along with a lot of other old words. Politics. Democracy. Freedom ... but the answer to your question is no. I'll explain why, but first let me ask you a question. If we could somehow take Dean Horrock's angel away from him tomorrow, would he be able to go on doing his job?"

"No. He wants to kill people."

"Exactly. The group that you belong to now, Arthur, differs from the rest of the world's population in two ways, not one. We're immune to all forms of psychic compulsion—we owe that to a mutation—and we're *sane*. That's another word you'll learn: the Mercantile jargon for it is 'inherently stable.'

"Now do you begin to see? The analogue treatment was originally developed as a control for dangerously unstable persons—like your Dean. It worked so well that in the hundred and fifty years since then, mental instability has become the norm . . . we can't get adequate figures, but we have good reason to believe that three people out of ten would be hopelessly insane without their 'angels.'

"So all we can do is increase our own numbers as fast as we can, protect ourselves, consolidate our position, and try to keep the Mercantile system from smashing itself apart before we're ready to take over. You know, there are some things even an 'angel' can't do. It can't keep a District Executive from making an irrational decision, for instance. You recall the protein-concentrate shortage last year? The man who made that mistake was replaced, naturally, but the man who replaced him isn't much better. The angels can't do anything about catatonia or epilepsy, either. More than three-quarters of the cases of 'possession' you hear about aren't people like ourselves being caught, but normal people, so-called, collapsing into insanity. "The world our descendants will build eventually will be a good one, Arthur —no more hypnotism, in the analogue rooms or on the air or in the papers . . . and, I think, little insanity of any kind. But when the crash comes, it isn't going to be pretty—that reminds me. I meant to show you these." He handed Bass a half-dozen photographs. Bass examined them; they were not scenes of disaster, but pictures of girls about his own age. "Pretty" was evidently the word that had made Lauder milk think of them.

"Some of your fellow-students. All unmarried, so far. You have no objection to marriage, have you, Arthur?"

Bass was staring at the picture of a slender girl with smooth dark hair there was something intriguing about her smile and the way she stood. For an instant Gloria Andresson's image rose up in his mind, looking oddly overfleshed and stupid; then it vanished. "No," he said abstractedly.

"Or children? But that comes a little later; I mustn't rush you. Well. I'm going to catch a few winks of sleep now, I believe; it's been a busy day." He tilted his seat back and closed his eyes in repose, his face fell into tired lines but there was the suggestion of a benign smile among the wrinkles.

The plane droned on, past a final tendril of cloud, into the depthless night and the stars.