

DREAM OF VICTORY

Algis Budrys

PART I

FUOSS CRACKED his knuckles and pushed the empty glass across the bar. He took a pull on his cigarette, driving the smoke into his lungs as hard as he could. He exhaled a doughnut-shaped cloud that broke against the bartender's stomach.

"Want another one, Mister?" the bartender asked.

Fuoss bit down hard, enjoying the pressure on his teeth. "I'll take one."

The bartender picked up the glass. "I don't think she's coming in tonight."

"Who?"

"Carol. It's a little late for her to be in."

"Carol who?"

"You kidding, Mister?"

Fuoss pushed the stub of his cigarette into an ashtray, took out another one and waited for it to light. "I never knew a Carol in my life. You trying to sell me on a friend named Carol?"

"You know how many of these you've had, Mister?" The bartender held the glass up.

Fuoss bit down again. "You keeping tab?"

"Sure I am. I was just wondering if you knew." The bartender poured a finger of lemon juice into his mixer. "You're an android, aren't you?"

"What's that got to do with it?" Fuoss cracked his knuckles in the opposite direction.

The bartender added gin. "Carol's human. Grew up on the block. I remember the first time she came in here, with this look on her face daring me to say she wasn't old enough." The bartender, who was a bulky man, was apparently used to having globules of sweat tremble on his forehead. "Carol's human," he repeated, without raising his glance from the mixer.

Fuoss's stool clattered on the floor.

The bartender looked up. The door shut loudly. The bartender ducked under the bar and ran to the door. He looked through the glass but couldn't see anything, so he opened the door and stuck his head outside. A sound of footsteps came from down the street, but the street lamp in front of the bar cut off his vision.

The bartender quirked his mouth up at the corners. He went back inside the bar, set the

stool up, and drank the Tom Collins himself.

In sleep, the conscious mind--that cohabitant collection of mix-directed clockwork--is quiescent, and the dramatic subconscious is free of its restraints.

Seven-thirty.

Fuoss's day began. Usually, the shift from subconsciousness back to conscious thought was so precise that he was able to believe that he never dreamt, but this morning the fatigue of the previous day's unusually hard work held him on the borderline.

Seven-thirty, then, in the clock's modulated voice, and Fuoss let the end of a snore trickle out of his nostrils, closed his mouth, and scratched a buttock, but was not yet completely awake.

Seven-thirty and a half. Recall the length and complexity of the dream that comes between the first alarm and the subsequent feel of the bedside carpeting under your feet as you gather your pajama bottom back up to your waist. Mohammed knocked a glass from a table, bent, caught it, and dreamed a lifetime in the interval.

Fuoss pushed the clock's cutoff and walked to the bathroom, skirting his wife's bed. He shaved and showered, walking back into the bedroom with his pajamas over his arm. He went to the night table between the twin beds, picked up a cigarette, then sat down on his bed instead of taking fresh underwear out of the bureau and dressing.

"Stac?"

His wife had awakened. She turned her head and looked at him, raising a hand to brush the hair out of her eyes. "You're not getting dressed. What's the matter?"

Fuoss widened his eyes and relaxed them, trying to come fully awake. "I don't know," he said. "I had this dream just before I woke, and I'll be damned if I can remember it. Guess I just sat down for a minute trying to remember it."

"Is that all?" Lisa smiled. "Why let a dream bother you?" She stretched her arms at her sides, bending them upward at the elbows. "Kiss me good morning."

Fuoss smiled, threw the cigarette into an ashtray, and bent over the bed. "Does sound silly, doesn't it? Can't get the idea out of my head that it's important, though."

Lisa raised her lips. Her swollen eyes and mouth were crusted at the corners. Fuoss kissed her absently.

"Stac! What in the devil's the matter with you this morning?"

Fuoss shook his head. "I don't know. It's that damned dream. I haven't felt right since I woke up. Can't pin it down."

Lisa frowned. "Whatever it was, I don't like it. From the way you kissed me, you'd think it was about another woman."

Fuoss felt a jab of guilt. He got up from Lisa's bed and walked over to the bureau. The taste

of Lisa's unwashed mouth was on his lips, and he yanked at the top drawer.

"If I knew I wouldn't be bothered about it, would I?" He dressed rapidly. "Do I have to kiss you like Don Juan every morning?" He went to the night table and picked up his watch and keys. "Haven't got time for breakfast, now. I hope Brownfield's wife finally had her kid, so Tom can get back to the office. I'm getting sick of doing his work overtime without getting paid for it."

Lisa made an impatient sound, got up and walked toward the bathroom. She slept naked. Fuoss watched her.

"Arms and legs," he said. "Two of each, perfectly molded, attached with correct smoothness, and equally smoothly articulated and muscled. Breasts and hips--also two of each--and superbly useless for anything but play. All this equipment joined to a sculptured torso, and the entire work of the designer's art surmounted by a face with just enough deliberate irregularities to make it appealing."

Lisa turned, a half-frightened look on her face. "What did you say?"

Fuoss smiled with restrained bitterness. "That was just Culture S, Table C Fuoss reading specification on Culture L, Table S ditto. My wife, by the grace of Section IV, Paragraph 12 of the Humanoids Act of 1973, and the General Aniline Company, Humanoids Division. Good morning, Mrs. Mannikin--"

Whatever it was that had been fermenting in him suddenly came to a head. "Why the hell don't you buy a hairnet?" he said, and slammed the bedroom door behind him.

Fuoss stepped out of the Up chute into the office a few minutes before nine. He went to his desk and sat down, staring at the In basket which the file clerks had already filled with folders and correspondence. He ran a thumb along the edge of a batch of files.

Blue Tabs. McMillin. First Brownfield's stuff and now McMillin's, too. There wasn't anything wrong with Mac's wife. Why should he be doing part of his stuff?

He wiped his forearm over his eyes. He'd tried to explain this morning's outburst to himself during the drive to the office. It couldn't be the dream. He was tired. Work had been piling up on his desk during the past month, and he'd had to do overtime. Brownfield had been out lately, with his wife's pregnancy developing complications at term. That meant more work to be done. More reading, more dictation, more interviews. His nerves were strained.

He remembered some of the other jobs he'd worked at. Doing rewrites for the Times, for instance. He'd liked it, been good at it. He'd saved enough from that so the extra money he'd picked up free-lancing had paid for the destruction and replacement of the unmaturing remainder of Lisa's culture. At that time, the thought of being married to a true individual had seemed important.

After the newspaper business got a little tight, he'd tried his hand at managing a chain store, and when that petered out he'd done any number of other things, until he'd finally landed this insurance claim adjusting job. Come to think of it, he'd held a lot of jobs.

Guess I'm the restless type, he decided.

"...and thank you for your kind cooperation," he dictated an hour later. "Rush that out, will you, Ruthie?"

He looked up from the file and saw Brownfield come in.

"Thank God!" he said. Brownfield was carrying a box of cigars and wearing the smile of a new father. "Look who's here."

"Why, it's Mr. Brownfield! He called this morning and said he might be in," the stenographer said.

But they figured I might as well do his work anyway, huh? Fuoss thought. "What's the news on his wife?" he asked.

"Oh, she's fine. They had a baby boy." Ruth smiled enviously.

Brownfield came across the office to his desk. Fuoss got up. "Well, hell, Tom, congratulations!" he said, slapping Brownfield on the back. "Boy, huh? Bet he looks like his mother. Most boys do, I hear."

"Little early to tell yet, Stac," Brownfield said happily. "Might be, though. He's got blue eyes like Marion."

"Well, all babies have blue eyes at first," Fuoss said. The thought struck him that young Brownfield probably resembled nothing so much as he did a slightly boiled marmoset.

"All babies do?" Brownfield said. "I didn't know that. How come you did?"

Meaning "What does an android know about children," huh? You smug son of a bitch. "Don't know. Most have read it somewhere, I guess," he said.

"Guess so. Have a cigar?"

"Thanks. Say, these are good."

"Nothing but the best for the first-born, I always say."

Fuoss hid a grimace. "What're you going to call him, Tom--Junior?" he asked unnecessarily.

"What else? Have to carry on the family names, you know."

In a pig's left nostril, I know!

Brownfield looked over his desk. "Looks like all my work's been done for me while I was gone. You do it?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well, boy, I owe you a drink don't I? What say we drop in some place after work? I sure appreciate you doing this for me."

Why not?

"Sure. I'll see you at five."

"Sure thing." Brownfield walked away, the open box of cigars in his hand.

Fuoss threw the cigar into the back of his desk drawer and picked up another file.

Carol had short, dusty-black hair. Her blue eyes were wide. They were accented by sweeping brows and outlined by coalblack lashes. Her nose was short, flat, turned up at the end. Her lips were small and thin. They twisted nervously whenever she forgot to control them. Her face was round, suntanned, and slightly flat.

Fuoss waved at the waitress and silently pointed to the three empty glasses. The girl put the glasses on her tray and moved off.

Brownfield shifted awkwardly in his chair. "I've got to go home, Stac," he said petulantly. "It's getting late. I've got to call the hospital and talk to my wife."

Fuoss looked at him from under his lowered eyebrows, his eyes a dark mud color. "You can call her from here."

"I'm hungry, too. I've got to go home and eat."

"You can order a sandwich here, you know." Fuoss took a pack of cigarettes out of his shirt pocket and held it out to Carol.

"Light it for me, will you?" she said.

Fuoss grinned. He put the two cigarettes in his mouth until they lit, and handed one over. "Tommie boy, here, gave me a cigar today," he said. "Good cigar. Too bad I hate cigars." He turned to Brownfield, smiling. "Don't get me wrong, Tommie. You're a hell of a good joe. I just don't like cigars." He leaned across the table and laid his hand on Carol's arm.

"Tommie sure did me a big favor today," he said emphatically. "He brought me in here, didn't he? Introduced me to one of the really nicest people I ever met. Even if I don't like cigars. Was that Tommie's fault? Good cigar. Did his best." He laughed. "Sure did his best. Mr. Brownfield has fathered a son. Ever hear of a better best than that?"

Carol shook her head. "Never did. That's really something."

Brownfield pushed his chair back. "I've got to go."

Fuoss narrowed his eyes and stared at him. He looked at Carol with a sidewise swing of his eyes and then looked back at Brownfield. "All right. 'F I was you I'd be celebrating the blessed event, but I guess you know what you're doing. Thanks for the drink. And thanks for introducing me to Carol. Goodbye."

Brownfield grinned uncomfortably and raised his hand awkwardly. "I'll see you." He turned his awkward smile in Carol's direction. "I'll see you, too."

"Won't wifey mind?" Carol answered, puffing on the cigarette. "It's been fun and all that, but you're a proud papa now."

Brownfield put his hand on the back of his chair and opened his mouth, but closed it again and then said something else instead: "Yeah. I guess so. I--I'll see you." He turned and walked out.

Carol broke into a laugh. "Ever see an expression like that on anybody's face before?"

Fuoss guffawed. "Not once. Never." The waitress had brought three fresh drinks, and he picked up Brownfield's. "Brownie's a good guy, though. Never thought a bird like him knew about a place like this. Damnedest thing."

"The place isn't really much. It's too quiet usually. I like it to rest up in until the bigger places open."

Fuoss looked around and nodded. "Yeah, come to think of it, you're right. The place would be dead if I hadn't run into you. I guess it's the company that gives any place its atmosphere."

He finished Brownfield's drink and started on his own. "Damnedest thing, us just walking in here and finding you."

Carol smiled. "Oh, I'm usually in here. It's awfully dull, usually."

Fuoss nodded. "Come to think of it," he said abruptly, "Brownie was right. It is time to eat. You hungry?"

Carol nodded, wrinkling her nose. "Uh-huh."

"Okay. Order something. You know the food in here. Order for both of us."

"Oh, the food stinks in this place. Tell you what..." Carol smiled, dimpling sweetly. "Why don't we go up to my place? I'll cook something up for us and we can go out someplace later. How's that?"

Fuoss's eyes glittered. "Sounds good," he said, and waved to the waitress for their check.

There was no point to going all the way back to the carport to pick up Fuoss's Buick, so they took a cab to Carol's apartment. Fuoss helped her out of the cab and held her coat while she unlocked the door.

She opened the door and swayed against him. "Whew! I didn't know I was that high," she murmured. She laughed, a low chuckling laugh and leaned forward.

"S all right," Fuoss said. "'S all right. We'll be okay when we get some food down."

"Sure we will," Carol said, and laughed again. "Mix yourself a drink while I go find the kitchen."

Fuoss was recording impressions on his senses. There were a lot of them. They wheeled by; sight, hearing, smell, taste, feel, all reeling by. He had no means of slowing them down or cutting them off, so he simply recorded, letting them run into his mental tape recorder, not analyzing, not examining, just letting them spin, stopping once in a while to drive his fingernails into his forearm when the fog became too pervasive.

Slap! His head recoiled. *Slap!* Other direction. He was leaning against the flexible bathroom wall, facing the mirror. He slapped himself again. And again, trying to drive some of the fuzz out from around his senses. The air was tight, squeezing against him from all directions,

compressing.

There was just too much of it. Too much going on, going by. He opened his eyes and the spinning stopped. No, not quite. But it did slow down considerably.

Carol's arm was around his neck. "Hi," she said, wrinkling her nose.

"Hi." He pouted a smile in return.

"I don't think we're going out after supper." She giggled.

"Why not?"

"It's two o'clock in the morning and we haven't had supper yet."

Fuoss looked down at a coffee table covered with bottles. Most of them had been sampled. "Well, let's eat, then." He was having real trouble focusing his eyes.

Carol put her other arm around his neck. "In a minute, honey. Let's have one more drink. We haven't tried the Cherry Heering yet." She nuzzled his ear.

Fuoss stifled a belch. "All right."

Just before morning he had the dream again.

He thrashed out in the night, twisting the sheet around his legs and bringing a sleepy protest from Carol. He kicked, but the sheet held. He was soaking in sweat.

He had no clear image of the woman. She remained disembodied. Discarnate, but woman incarnate. He knew only that she was human, and this knowledge brought him a sense of triumph, of victory. He was victorious, glorious.

She came from blackness, and it was into blackness that he went for her.

He rolled and jerked on the bed. Time whinnied by like a silver beast.

The woman was gone, hidden in blackness. His feet moved spasmodically against the sheets.

The blackness parted and the woman returned. There was with her--

His subconscious recoiled. He cried out.

"Stac!"

The infant turned from his mother's breast and stretched out his hands. "Father!"

"Wake up, Stac! Goddamn it, *wake up!*" Carol pounded his shoulder. "Wake up, will you, for Christ's sake! You're bawling like a baby."

Fuoss opened his eyes and looked up into the darkness. He reached out for Woman.

Fuoss stayed behind a pillar, out of sight of the hundreds of arriving commuters, until his car

was driven down the ramp. Then he scrambled inside and drove out of the exit as rapidly as possible. He swung into the Uptown lane and relaxed for the first time since stepping out of the cab at the carport.

A dose of B-1 had calmed his stomach, but his head was still feverish. His hands had a tendency to shake. When he paid his toll at the bridge, he almost dropped the coin. He drove jerkily, tramping down on the accelerator and letting up too fast on the brake.

Despite this, there was a smile of satisfaction on his face.

Lisa met him at the door. "Tal's here," she said.

"The old family legal advisor, huh? Going to get a divorce before you even hear my side of the story?" Fuoss twisted his mouth.

Lisa smiled coldly. "If you're going to go tom-cattin, I can't stop you, but at least get the purr out of your voice when you come back. Tal called up early this morning--wanted to see you. When I told him you weren't in, he came over to wait for you."

"Uh-huh. The office call?"

"Yes. I had to tell them you were sick. I don't think they believed me."

Fuoss grinned sourly. "Not with Brownie running around telling them what a bad boy I've been." He shrugged. "Tel in the living room? I'll go in and talk to him."

He brushed his lips across Lisa's cheek. "Fix me some breakfast, will you, honey?"

Tal Cummins, like most androids, was the next thing to a chain smoker. He opened a gold case as Fuoss came in and threw him a cigarette without asking.

"How are you, Stac?"

Fuoss sat down opposite him. "Fair. What's up?"

Cummins waited until his cigarette had a good light. His black hair had fashionable grey strands in it. His face was lean and aristocratic. His manner matched them. He had bought the hair and face to replace the ordinary undistinguished android features, but the manner had taken a number of years to cultivate. Only with another android did he fail to rise, murmur a greeting, and offer his cigarette case with polite urbanity. "How's your job coming along?" he finally asked.

"Hell of a question after two years."

Cummins tapped his cigarette and watched the ash drift into a tray. "Doing a lot of overtime lately, are you?"

"Sure."

"Getting paid for it?"

"Supper money. Executives don't draw overtime--you know that."

Cummins snorted. "Ever hear of the Junior Executives Union? Don't tell me--the answer's no. It's a part of the dead and glorious Prewar past. The companies beat it by putting everybody from file clerks on up on the private payroll. Bingo, they were ineligible for unionization."

"And I'm that kind of an executive huh?"

"You're in good company." Cummins let some more ash fall. "How about the other fellows in your office? They do a lot of extra work?"

"Not much. I sort of take care of about everything around here."

"I'll bet you do. How's your production record? Handle more cases than anybody else in the office, don't you? Even without the extra work, I mean."

"Sure. It's pretty easy work."

"Getting steady raises, are you?"

"Well--times are a little rough in the insurance game. They promised me one pretty soon, though." Fuoss ran a hand through his hair. "What's all this getting at?"

Cummins doused his cigarette. "Did it ever strike you that you were being put upon, old chum? Don't you think it's kind of funny that a guy with your ability has held so many jobs?"

Fuoss grunted. "Maybe. I was thinking about it yesterday, as a matter of fact." Tal Cummins is a hell of a nice guy, but I'd like him better if he didn't talk in circles. He shifted his feet.

Cummins smiled thinly. "I'll get to the point in a minute."

"Mind reader?" Fuoss growled.

"Lawyer." Cummins let himself smile for a minute more, wasted a little time on a new cigarette, then leaned forward. "Stac, I'll bet you anything you'd care to risk that you'll lose your job within the month."

"Why?"

"May I acquaint you with a little history?"

"If it's got anything to do with me. But cut it short."

"History is never short, my boy." Cummins kicked the end of his cigarette with his thumbnail. "History is extremely complicated, and w--" he gestured from Fuoss to himself, and included Lisa with a wave toward the kitchen, "are one of the prize complications.

"You've heard of the war. You have also heard of the extreme devastation and depopulation. I've done more than that. I've gone through books that describe a complicated civilization from its most revealing angle--its legal structure. I've also studied the 1960 census, and compared it with the emergency figures compiled in '68. Being an android, specializing in the cases covered by the Humanoids Act, I've also built up a better-than-average picture of what shape the humans were in when they finally dropped in their tracks in '67."

The sophisticated mask fell away. "Things were rugged, Stac. Seventy-five per cent of the civilized population was dead. Their technology was either completely wrecked or useless, because some fragment which remained operative depended on another part which hadn't. The humans were headed for the most colossal dark age since the Western Roman Empire collapsed.

"We were the answer. They took their soldier androids, did an extensive revamping and improving, and here we are. Or rather, there we were, because things are different now." The faintest trace of bitterness found an unaccustomed home on the bland features.

"Anyway," he went on, "what they needed in a hurry was a labor force. Not just a bunch of quasi-robots, but intelligent individuals, or near-individuals, who could handle anything a human could. The result was not only android pick-and-shovelers, but android technicians, android scientists, and android teachers. Even--" he smiled--"android lawyers."

"They did a good job. For all practical purposes, androids are duplicates of humanity. The main difference, of course, lies in the fact that androids cannot reproduce themselves by natural means. There, the humans knew they had a problem. If we were comparatively unintelligent, it wouldn't matter too much. But they gave us brains--and the potential for a nasty bundle of neuroses. They gave us android wives to take some of the sting off, but nobody's ever figured out a way to give us a substitute for parenthood. Adoption, unfortunately, is not the answer for the genuine article."

Fuoss looked at Cummins through a screening cloud of cigarette smoke. The lawyer was a smart cookie. Was he smart enough to be hinting around?

"But that's beside the point," Cummins said.

Fuoss relaxed.

"*That* problem is going to be solved as a by-product solution to a much larger problem," the lawyer continued. "In a way, your working overtime is a symptom of that same problem."

"How?"

"Look around you," Cummins said simply. "Any traces of the war left? Any poverty, hardship, devastation? You don't use matches on your cigarettes, you drive a two-hundred mph Buick with an automatic pilot, you never used an elevator in your life, and your alarm clock's been on voice for the last ten years. You, friend, are living in the technology of the late Twentieth Century. The fact that it's fifty years late is unimportant. Another thing--*this* civilization is truly worldwide. There are no 'backward' areas--the day of the ignorant savage gaping before the white man's magic is over."

"We did a good job," Fuoss said.

Cummins laughed, with no trace of humor. "Exactly. We worked ourselves right out of it."

"Now--wait a minute! You don't mean they're going to stop making androids."

"They have stopped."

"What! When? How come nobody knows about it?"

"Relax, Stac." Cummins waved him back into his chair. "There's nothing we can do about it. You'd be surprised how many people have tried." He smiled inscrutably. "I'm one of them, as a matter of fact. But there's more to worry about than that."

"Such as?"

"What's happening to you--and me. Haven't you figured it out yet? The human population's back up to normal. Nobody needs androids any more. They don't want to come right out and say so, and in many cases the humans themselves aren't deliberate in their actions. It's simply a question of an employer hiring humans rather than androids. After all, if you were a human employer, and two applicants, one human and the other android, showed up for the same job, which would you hire?"

"So I'm being eased out of my job?" Fuoss searched his pockets for a cigarette.

"Shows all the signs, doesn't it? Looks to me like they're trying to disgust you into resigning. They might also pick on some pretext--like you being out all night on a bat."

"That was a celebration with Tom Brownfield! He was with me!"

"All night?"

"All right--we split up about eight! So what?"

Cummins made another one of his soothing gestures. "Relax, boy. I'm not accusing you of selling anybody in slavery. I'm just saying your company might decide it was a beautiful opportunity. Insurance companies are pretty stuffy outfits, anyway, you know."

That was what Cummins said, but Fuoss could see the shrewd light in the lawyer's eyes. He'd let a little too much slip about last night. Worst of all, he'd protested too much. Well, there was nothing he could do about it now.

"So there won't be any more androids, huh?" Fuoss said.

"Correct. One of the obscurer subsections of the Humanoids Act covers the case. But why worry? One thing we androids have over the humans is a complete lack of interest in the succeeding generation."

"Don't be so Goddamned smug about it!"

Cummins raised his eyebrows. "Did I touch a sore spot?"

"Never mind what you touched. You've been spreading a lot of stuff around here this morning. I'm not ready to believe all of it. I particularly don't care about you prying into my married and personal life. Got me?"

Cummins got up, the urbane barrister once more. "Well, it seems I share Cassandra's popularity. Prophets without honor and all that. I'll be going."

"Good idea. I need some sleep."

"You do. And Stac..." Cummins paused on his way into the hall, "there's a law clerk's job

open in my office when you need it."

"Go take a flying--"

"Goodbye."

Stac kept his eyes on Cummins until the lawyer had gone out of the door. Then he swung around and went into the kitchen. He stood just inside the door and looked at Lisa. His upper lip twitched.

"Breakfast's ready. Where's Tal?" Lisa said.

"Thanks. Tal's gone."

"What'd he want?"

Fuoss cut into a slice of ham. "Nothing much. Bunch of chatter, is all. Did he say anything to you about it?"

"No."

Fuoss looked up. Lisa was looking at him quietly.

"I was out with Brownie. His wife had a son and we were celebrating. That's all."

"All right, Stac." Lisa smiled. "Did you have that dream again?"

"Goddamn it!" Stac slammed his fist onto the tabletop. "Goddamn it to hell!"

PART II

Fuoss moved down the street. He stayed in the shadows and kept his footsteps light. He crossed the avenue and went into Carol's apartment house. He went into the lobby and pushed Carol's annunciator button.

A note, printed in Carol's handwriting, full of sweepingly crossed T's and curlicued S's, was thrown on the screen beside the button.

Hi, whoever--

Sorry--nobody's home. Don't know when I'll be back, but the lobby chairs are nice and cuddly if you want to wait. Or leave me a note.

See You.

Fuoss grimaced with satisfaction and turned the screen off. He went over to the chute, unlocked it, and rode to Carol's floor. He went down the hall to her apartment and let himself in.

Carol had left the lights on, as usual. He reached up to turn them off, then changed his mind. He went into the kitchen instead and took a can of beer. He removed the top and went into the bedroom, tilting his head back to let the beer slide down his throat.

The bedroom was a lot neater than he had expected it to be. The bedspread was folded

over a chair and one of the vanity drawers was open, but the usual collection of washed but not yet ironed underthings was missing from the top of the bureau.

Fuoss put the beer can down on top of a table, went over to the closet and reached into a back corner. He pulled out his topcoat.

He put his hand in the left side pocket, fumbled around, grunted, tried the other pocket. He couldn't find anything in that one, either. He frowned and got to his hands and knees to search the closet floor. There was nothing there.

He swung the closet door angrily. A negligee that had slipped from its hanger kept it from closing completely. He pushed the negligee farther inside with his foot and slammed the door shut. He walked toward the bed, tangling his feet in the topcoat he had thrown to the floor. He kicked it up into reach and threw it on the bed. He moved over to the closet door angrily. A negligee that had slipped from its hanger kept it from closing completely. He pushed the negligee farther inside with his foot and slammed the door shut. He walked toward the bed, tangling his feet in the topcoat he had thrown to the floor. He kicked it up into reach and threw it on the bed. He moved over to the table, picked up his can of beer and drained it. He stood in front of the open bedroom window, bouncing the can in his hand.

He threw the can out and lay down on the bed. He propped his head up with two pillows so that he could watch the entrance to the apartment through the open bedroom door.

The office boy was about sixteen. He had pimples and an elaborate coiffure that had to be rebuilt by frequent recourse to a men's room washbasin and mirror. He liked to smirk.

"They wanna see you in the V.P.'s office, Mister Fuoss," he said.

"Thanks."

"Right away."

"Thanks."

"There's an awful lot of big shots in there."

"Scram."

"Huh?"

"Whip out of here, punk. If I'm getting the ax, I can at least stop acting like a human fountain pen. Now get going, before I wipe my nose with you." Fuoss stood up, and the boy backed out of the way.

"So Cummins was right," Fuoss muttered. He rummaged quickly through his desk, taking out his fountain pens and a few other items that belonged to him. He ran across Brownfield's cigar, grinned, and put it in his breast pocket.

He walked back between the rows of desks toward the Vice President's office. He had thought he'd be angry, or disappointed, perhaps, if Cummins' prediction actually came true. Instead, he discovered that he was feeling considerable relief. When he walked into the office, there was a slight smile at the corners of his mouth.

The office boy had been right. Aside from the division head, there was a complete representation of section supervisors. Brownfield sat in one corner.

"Good morning, Mr. Crofton, Mr. Mantell. Good morning, John, Harry, George," Fuoss said heartily. "Good morning, Brownie."

Crofton, the V.P., frowned. "Good morning, Fuoss. Sit down."

Fuoss moved into the indicated chair, crossed his legs and sat back. "What's up, W.C.?" One of the section heads snickered.

"I'd regard this occasion in a more serious light if I were you," Crofton said heavily.

Fuoss smiled. "It's a question of relative importance, I imagine," he said. He leaned forward. "Look, Mr. Crofton, let's cut this short. You're a busy man and I've got a new job to look for, so suppose I just have Ruthie run up a letter of resignation and we'll get this thing done right. Will any excuse do, or do you have some particular preference?"

There was an uncomfortable rustling among the section heads, but Crofton took it without any special reaction. "No. Almost anything will do. Make it effective next Wednesday. I'm sorry to see you go, Fuoss. On the other hand, I have no choice. You'll acquaint Mr. Brownfield with the cases you're handling currently." He extended a hand smilingly.

"Oh, I don't think I'll wait that long. Suppose I make it effective at five o'clock yesterday? And as for me acquainting Brownie with my current cases, that's hardly necessary, since most of them were his originally, anyway. Well, so long." He flipped a hand in salute and walked out.

Brownfield caught up with him in the cloakroom. "Say, Stac, I'm sorry this happened," he said, fumbling at Fuoss's sleeve. "It's just that when you didn't show up yesterday, somebody remembered that we went out together the night before and started asking questions."

"Sure, Brownie."

"I'm glad you're taking this so calmly," Brownfield said, his face ineffectual.

"Sure. I'll see you around, huh, Brownie?" He put his jacket on, picked up his briefcase, and took the hand Brownfield extended. "Oh, yeah..." He reached into his breast pocket. "Have a cigar, Brownie."

Fuoss walked jauntily down the sidewalk toward the bar where he had met Carol. He picked up a paper at the corner newsstand, intending to check a few ads for luck. The sun was shining and a cool breeze came off the harbor.

He went into the bar and sat down. "Give me a gin and tonic, will you?" he said to the bartender and settled himself comfortably on the stool. His hands began to tremble, and he broke out in a sweat.

My God, what'm I going to do? I've got bills to pay, a wife to support. The rent's due pretty soon, and the tax installment. What I've got in the bank won't carry me long. Where's it coming from?

He leaned forward and wrapped his fingers over the bar's molding. He began to tremble

violently.

"You all right, buddy?" the bartender asked, setting a shot glass and a glass of quinine water in front of him.

"Fine. Just don't mix that drink, and bring me another shot of gin." He raised the shot glass to his mouth and sucked the gin out jerkily.

Carol came in at about four. Fuoss waved to her from the booth he'd spent the day in. She smiled and went over.

"Hi!"

"Hiya. Real higher. Pull up a drink and sit down," Fuoss said.

Carol laughed.

"Lost my job. Nobody loves androids any more. Rather have people. You rather have people?"

Carol shook her head. "That's too bad. /love androids." She moved her hand over, on top of his. "To hell with people."

Fuoss grinned happily. "You're people. But you're *nice* people. One of nicest people I know." He threw back his head and laughed.

"Say, you *are* packaged. You want to come over to my place and sleep it off."

"Yeah. Yeah, I need it. Thanks, Carol. Thanks a lot. You're one of the best. No, really, you are." He pushed his way out of the booth and stood up weakly.

He had the dream again, that night.

Lisa's eyes were underscored by purple shadows. "Haven't we gone through this before, recently?"

Fuoss shut the door and dropped into a chair. "All right. Who'd you tell this time?"

Lisa's eyes widened with her failure to understand him.

Fuoss snorted. "Cut it out. I haven't known you for these years and not learned anything. Who?"

Lisa kept her eyes from his. "Tal."

"I thought so. Was he here again? To see me, of course."

"God, but you came back in a nasty mood!" Lisa clenched her fists, knuckles forward, woman-fashion.

"Long as I came back. That's all you've got to worry about. What'd you tell Cummins?"

"What do you mean what'd I tell him? I told him the truth."

"What's your version of 'the truth'?"

Lisa advanced toward him fiercely. "Stop it, Stac! I'm warning you--cut it out right now. I don't particularly give a damn if you spent the night in a hotel with some call girl, but don't come back in the morning and get nasty with me!"

Fuoss jumped out of his chair. Lisa's near-guess had come too close. He stood spraddle-legged in front of her, his arms shaking.

"Listen, baby," he said in a cold rage, "you're dead right. What I did last night is my own business." He bounced his palm off his chest. "At most, it's *our* business--yours and mine; not Tal Cummins's, not anybody else's. You've got a hell of a nerve standing there all housewifey, with that Goddamned egg-sucking grin on your face, trying to bull me. And when I catch you lying--" he was breathing in short gasps "you pull off the oldest defensive stunt in the world by flaring up at me!"

His head was pounding. He pulled a cigarette out of his pocket and stuck it in his mouth. "Listen, Lisa-so-ashamed-of-being-an- android, Lisa-who-diddled-her-name-so-it-sounds-human, get me, *List*a, and get me good! If it wasn't for me, you'd still be a sniveling shopgirl, and if it wasn't for me breaking my neck over a typewriter for five years, there'd be a carbon-copy of you on every block, and I'll bet my back teeth most of them wouldn't be too careful how they earned their keep, either. Just remember I set you up to a lifetime of Wednesday Bridge Clubs and Ladies Auxiliaries. Any time you decide you're going to get snotty with me, just run that over in your mind, and remember you're no better than a glorified animal cracker. I bought you, kid, lock, stock, and physiomolded backside. Now, clear out of my way and let me get some sleep."

"You bastard!" Lisa reached out an arm and pawed his face.

Fuoss ducked his head and pushed her away. He broke into short, high-pitched laughter. "Honey, that's one thing I *can't* be!" He turned around and walked toward the bedroom.

Lisa laughed too. "That's right. That's perfectly right. Just you remember that! You're nothing but a Goddamned android yourself."

Fuoss turned around. The blood had gone out of his face. He moved up on Lisa. "Watch yourself, baby. Be very careful what you say to me.

"In fact," he said slowly, "your troubles with me are over. Tal Cummins has clear title to you, at least as far as I'm concerned."

Carol was glad to have him move in with her. They spent the week end in a drunken stupor and he had the dream again.

The personnel manager shook his head. "I'm sorry, Mr. Fuoss. We'd like to have a man of your experience with our organization, but we simply don't have any openings. Thank you for thinking of us, though, and we'd keep your application on file. I'll be sure to let you know if anything comes up."

"All right." Fuoss smiled and shook the man's hand. "Thanks, anyway."

"Certainly."

That night he and Carol got drunk together, and he had the dream again.

The next day a different personnel manager, for a company which would have paid five dollars a week less, was just as polite as the first.

An envelope from Tal Cummins, office had been delivered to him at Carol's apartment.

"How's it feel to be a correspondent, hon?" Fuoss asked her.

Carol shrugged.

They got drunk, Fuoss took some sleeping pills, and they went to bed.

On the following morning, he went down to his bank and discovered that Lisa had drawn out exactly one-half of his account. He sold his car on the way down to the employment agency.

Fuoss noticed an item in a newspaper on the employment agency bench:

ANDROIDS URGED AS IDEAL FOR EXPLO RATION OF SPACE

In a letter released today by the office of the Secretary of Defense, Tal Cummins, prominent android and well-known legal figure, urged the use of androids as crewmen in the projected attempt to put a manned rocket in an orbit around the Earth.

"Authorities agree," Cummins said in his letter, "that there is no sure way of knowing whether human beings can live in deep space under any conditions without actually making the attempt. I submit that androids provide an easy means of practical testing. Moreover, for this and similar projects, such as the proposed Moon rocket and the later expedition to Mars and Venus, specialized androids could be manufactured to meet special conditions, if it should prove that a humanoid organism cannot, for some reason, survive.

"Speaking for most androids, I can say that we would be glad to cooperate in any such program. Our satisfaction would lie in the knowledge that we had been of help in the greatest human undertaking since the dawn of civilization."

The office of the Secretary of Defense declined any official comment on the letter, but informed sources close to the Secretary admit that the proposal is being given serious consideration.

Fuoss's face was half-way between a scowl and a grin. "Half a loaf is better than none, eh, Cassandra?" he muttered. He re-read the story, which had drawn a two-column head on page two, and this time he scowled. He got up, found a nickel in his pocket and went to a pay phone in the corner. He dialed Cummins' number, talked his way past two secretaries, and was connected with the lawyer.

"Hello, Stac! How are you?" Cummins' voice and expression were as urbane as ever.

"Okay. How's Lisa?"

"I--don't know. I haven't seen her." The lawyer's tone was an almost successfully concealed mixture of anger and disappointment.

Fuoss bared his teeth. "If I had time, I'd laugh like hell." He would have, too. "I've been reading about you in the papers, Tall."

"You mean Project Spaceward?"

"Is that what they're calling it? Wouldn't Project Grab be more appropriate?"

"Just what do you mean by that?" Cummins was angry.

"That was a mighty clever piece of work, boy. If I were human, I'd fall for it myself. But I'm not, so I don't go for it." Fuoss chuckled. "Not that I give a damn. In fact, I think it's kind of a good joke on the humans. Boy oh boy, are they in for a shock when your satellite station androids 'prove' that humans can't survive the conditions. But that shock's not going to be anything, is it? Not compared to the one they'll get when they wake up to the fact that space belongs to the androids, and they had better be nice or they'll find themselves living on a second asteroid belt. I have to hand it to you, Cummins."

"All right, Stac. I won't try to kid you. That's exactly what I'm doing. Can you blame me? You, of all people. How many favors have the humans done you? They've fired you out of every job you ever held, and they're making it impossible for you to get another one. Tit for tat, Stac. They don't want us any more. All right--we'll give them Earth. But we'll take the rest of the universe for ourselves."

Fuoss shook his head. "Uh-uh. It might even happen. I hope so. But one thing stinks about this project, and that's you. You told me once that androids have no interest in their succeeding generation, remember? You were wrong. Whenever I see a young kid android, I try to do him all the favors I can. But as far as you're concerned, you were right. You look at life as a sort of Out-of-the-culture-dish, live a while, Into-the-recovery-vat process. As far as you're concerned, android history began on your Awareness Day, and will end with your death. So there's something in this for you, Cummins. There are mighty few drives left to an android. You've got the main one: power. Well, spin your little web. Dream your little dream. I hope you get away with it. Not because I like you. Because I hate humans more."

He laughed. "Just thought I'd let you know how I feel. So long, pal." He cut the connection and watched the lawyer's face dissolve on the screen.

That day he got a job, but he was carrying a bottle around with him by then, so he was paid off at three o'clock.

Carol wasn't there when he reached home, so he got drunk by himself. And that night he had the dream again.

One of the interviewers at the employment agency looked him right in the eye and said, in an impatient tone of voice, "Let's face it, Fuoss. You're not going to get anywhere with trying for white-collar work. Not anymore. There's no point in getting emotional about it; it's a plain fact; it's the way things are today, and you've got to accept it. Why don't you try something like construction work? Your pay'll be a lot bigger than you'll ever get in an office."

Fuoss did a mental run-down on his bank balance. "All right."

But the union just couldn't provide jobs for all its present members, much less take in a new one.

Tal Cummins had a guest appearance on a TV program, and spoke at some length about Project Spaceward. By the time he got to the end of it, Fuoss had gotten tired of waiting for Carol and gone to bed. He had the dream again.

Carol woke him up on Saturday morning and made breakfast.

After breakfast they sat down on the couch and smoked.

"Where were you these last two nights," Fuoss asked.

"Out."

"Where?"

Carol turned her head and faced him. "Look, Stac, you're a nice guy. I like you. But liking you hasn't got much to do with it. You're living here--that's O.K., so far, but you haven't got any strings on me."

Fuoss shrugged. "Okay--if that's how it is."

They spent a pretty miserable week end.

Fuoss now took a job with a landscaping contractor out on Long Island. It paid a dollar and a half an hour, but it involved digging holes through fill that was well interlarded with brick halves, pieces of BX cable, folded lengths of thick tar paper, gravel and cinder block. His muscles weren't used to the job, but the worst strain was on his wrists, which took the shock of pick-swings that ended suddenly in some unseen obstacle. Nevertheless, he managed to last out the day without blistering his palms too badly.

When he rode back to the apartment that night, he felt better than he had in days.

Carol was home. He came in the door and she looked up. "Christ!" She stared at his clothes. "What've you been doing? Digging ditches?"

"That's right--just about, anyway. Digging holes for trees. You get your hands dirty, but you make money. Twelve bucks today." He grinned. He was feeling good.

Carol nodded. "Up-huh. Twelve bucks. Go take a shower, will you?"

When he came out, she was waiting for him. She was walking around in haphazard circles, smoking a cigarette. "Sit down, will you, Stac?"

"Sure. What's cooking?"

"Look--today's the first of the month. Rent's due. You want to pay half of it?"

He frowned. "Christ, I'd like to, Carol. You know that. But I can't. I haven't got any money. I can give it to you in about two weeks."

"Yeah...maybe. And could you raise fifty-five more two weeks after that?"

"Hell, Carol, sure. Twelve bucks a day comes out to sixty a week."

"Before taxes, social security, unemployment insurance, transportation, lunches and cigarettes it does, yeah. Add laundry bills to that, too. What's more, this is August now. How much longer do you think landscaping's going to be open?"

"All right--so it's not the best job in the world!"

"I didn't say that. You should be able to make out pretty well with it, and they'll probably find you a winter job. Or else you can hole up on your unemployment checks. But not here, Stac. Not the way you're living." She flipped the cigarette into the sink.

"What're you trying to say?"

"I'm not trying--I'm saying. It's a matter of simple economics." She sat down beside him and put her hand on his knee. "Look, honey, I've been paying for your food the last two weeks. Some of the liquor we've mopped up you've bought, but most of it was here when you came. Up to now it hasn't cost you a dime to live here--or it wouldn't have, if you weren't a lush."

"Goddamn it! I am not a lush! I come home, we have a couple of drinks after supper, and then we start necking. Next thing we know, we're pie-eyed. But that doesn't make me a lush!" He realized that there were bigger things to argue over, but for some reason he kept pressing this point, as if concentrating on it would make the other problems disappear.

"Okay, honey." Carol stroked his hair. "Okay." She smiled. "You know, a doctor I knew once said that alcohol was an extreme form of sublimation. But I can't imagine what *you* would be sublimating." She grinned, and Fuoss grinned with her.

"Okay. I made a funny," Carol said. "That doesn't change anything. I can't afford to keep you, and you can't afford to stay. It's tough, but it's true." Impulsively, she put her arms around his neck. "Look, you ought to get yourself a room somewhere near where you work. It'll work out fine that way. You can still come and see me."

Fuoss sat stiffly, looking at the opposite wall over her shoulder. "Sure. Sure, Carol. I understand. It'll work out pretty well." He tightened his arms around her. "I'll find a good job for the Winter, and then maybe we can really set up something in style."

"I'd like that, Stac," she murmured in his ear. She drew her head back and kissed him. "I like you, Stac. You know I do. It just doesn't work out right now. You know that."

"Sure."

He moved to a furnished room in New Hyde Park, and rode the bus a mile up to work for ten days. He wrote Carol a few letters, and got a few answers. He read the paper one day and saw that Operation Spaceward had officially begun. Stock in Androids Incorporated, DuPont, and General Aniline went up again. Tal Cummins was getting his, but the androids--*we're getting ours, too.*

On Friday, the fourteenth of August and the thirteenth day of his last two weeks, he went out to Babylon with his crew.

They dug a hole two yards deep and about five across for an oak the owner wanted moved into it. They cut a ramp into one side of the hole, and craned the tree over to the top of the ramp. A bunch of overhead wires that couldn't be cut or moved kept them from dropping the tree in, so they mounted it upright on a skid, lashed the tree firmly, and guyed it to the front bumper of a truck with a couple of lengths of Manila.

Stac was driving the truck. As the rest of the crew manhandled the tree over the lip of the ramp, he was supposed to lower it slowly, keeping the truck in double-low and judging the strain on the Manila.

It didn't work out that way. The Manila snapped, lashed a couple of boys across the face, and fouled the skid. The tree tipped forward, picked up momentum, and toppled over, catching a man under the branches.

Stac got out of the truck and the Boss came over to him.

"You stupid son-of-a-bitch!" the Boss said. "You stupid *android* son-of-a-bitch! I should have had more sense than to hire a--!"

It was the first time Stac had heard the word, but it was self-explanatory. It described in a simple term the substances from which they claimed androids were made.

Fuoss reached out and gathered the Boss's shirt up in his hands. "I ought to hit you," he said. "I ought to rub your face on a macadam road and drive a truck over your crotch."

The Boss turned pale. He saw the look on Fuoss's face. "You're nuts!" he screamed.

Fuoss laughed and pushed him away. "Yeah."

He had done it so many times that the blanket's constriction was nothing new. His arms flailed and his pillow fell to the floor, knocking the bottle over.

Woman.

Stac--little Stac, his firstborn. Have a cigar, Brownie. Have a cigar, you smug bastard. Good cigar, Brownie--nothing's too good for the first born. Have a fat cigar.

Woman. The woman raised her face.

Carol. *Carol!*

The Boss said Get the hell away from her, you secondhand son of a...

Carol said You second-hand son of a...

Little Stac said You second-hand son of a son of a son of a sonofasonofasonofa...

He went out in the morning and bought another bottle. He went into the candy store next door for a pack of cigarettes, and then he went back to the liquor store and bought another bottle to make sure.

PART III

He looked at his watch. 2:30. Sunday morning, but still Saturday night, by almost anybody's definition. He moved his feet impatiently on the bed.

The door to the apartment opened, and Carol came in. There was a man with her.

"Go home, Brownie. Go home to your wife and your firstborn son."

"God! What's keeping him on his feet?"

"Never mind what's keeping me on my feet, Brownie. Go home."

Brownfield left. "I'll call the police for you, Carol."

"Are you crazy? He's all right--he's just packaged. I've seen him like this before. You know--he's right. Go home to your wife. I'll take care of him."

"Well, all right."

"You bet it's all right. Now beat it." Fuoss locked the door behind him, turned around and leaned against it.

"Hi, Carol."

She smiled hesitantly. "Hi, Stac."

"Marry me, Carol?"

"Not right now, Stac. It's kind of late. Why don't you sack out and we can talk about it in the morning."

"Uh-uh. This morning business doesn't go. You gonna marry me?"

"Look Stac, fun's fun, and drinking's drinking, but there's a limit. I'm not sure I even want you to sleep here. There's a hotel down the block. Stay there and I'll see you in the morning."

"Can't stay at any hotel. Haven't got any more money. I had some in my topcoat pocket, but you took it."

"I didn't take it. There wasn't any there. You took every cent you had to the Island with you."

"You took it all right. But that's okay. I'll forgive you. Just marry me."

Carol moved around to the other side of an easy chair. "What are you talking about? Me, marry an android?"

"Listen, Carol. You've got to do it. Nobody's ever tried it before. Maybe there's a chance."

"A chance for what?"

Fuoss spread his arms pleadingly. "For Stac--for little Stac. We've got to try it, Carol. Please. Marry me, Lisa, please."

"My name isn't Lisa! You're crazy, you're raving nuts. Get the hell out of here!" She picked up a bookend. "You're insane!"

Fuoss picked up the Scotch bottle from the table beside the door and broke the end off over the table's corner. He laughed. "Yeah."

Tal Cummins went hurriedly down the corridor between the cells. He was sweating, and his hair was not combed.

"There he is. You want to go in there?" The turnkey had stopped at Fuoss's cell.

"No, thanks." Cummins leaned forward and looked at Fuoss. "Stac?"

Fuoss looked up.

"You realize what you've done?" Cummins was suddenly shouting, waving the full-color newspaper in his hand. "You're all over the papers. The public's going crazy for your blood. You realize what you've done to the whole android re-establishment program?"

Fuoss got up and put his face close to Cummins. He looked into the lawyer's eyes. His hands wrapped around the bars.

"Is she dead?" he asked hopefully.

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