

Algis Budrys - The End of Summer

Illustration by Kandis Elliot



Nothing is forever. Some things, however, last a very long time...

I

Americaport hadn't changed since he'd last seen it, two hundred years before. It was set as far away from any other civilized area as possible, so that no plane, no matter how badly strayed, could possibly miss its landing and crash into a dwelling. Except for the straight-edge swath of the highway leading south, it was completely isolated if you forgot the almost deserted tube station. Its edge was dotted by hangars and a few offices, but the terminal building itself was small, and severely functional. Massive with bare concrete, aseptic with steel and aluminum, it was a gray, bleak place in the wilderness.

Kester Fay was so glad to see it that he jumped impatiently from the big jet's passenger lift. He knew he was getting curious looks from the ground crew clustered around the stainless steel ship, but he would have been stared at in any case, and he had seen the sports car parked and waiting for him beside the Administration Building. He hurried across the field at a pace that attracted still more attention, eager to get his clearance and be off.

He swung his memory vault impatiently by the chain from his wristlet while the Landing Clearance officer checked his passport, but the man was obviously too glad to see someone outside the small circle of airlines personnel. He stalled interminably, and while Fay had no doubt that his life out here bored him to tears, it was becoming harder and harder to submit patiently.

"Christopher Jordan Fay," the man read off, searching for a fresh conversational opening. "Well, Mr. Fay, we haven't seen you here since '753. Enjoy your stay?"

"Yes," he answered as shortly as possible. Enjoyed it? Well, yes, he supposed he had, but it was hard to feel that way since he'd played his old American memories at augmented volume all through the flight across the Atlantic. Lord, but he was tired of Europe at this moment; weary of winding grassy lanes that meandered with classic patience among brooks and along creeks, under old stately trees! "It's good to be back where a man can stretch his legs, though."

The official chuckled politely, stamping forms. "I'll bet it is at that. Planning to stay long?"

Forever, if I can help it, Fay thought. But then he chuckled to himself. Nothing was forever. "I don't know," he said to the official in an offhand tone.

"Shall I arrange for transportation to New York?"

Fay shook his head. "Not for me. But the man who drove my car up might be a customer."

The official's eyebrows rose, and Fay suddenly remembered that America, with its more liberal social attitudes, might tolerate him more than Europe had, but that there were still plenty of conservatives sheltered under the same banner.

As a matter of fact, he should have realized that the official was a Homebody; a Civil Service man, no doubt. Even with a dozen safe places to put it down within easy reach, he still kept his memory vault chained to his wrist. Fay's own eyebrows lifted, and amusement glittered in his eyes.

"Driving down?" The official looked at Fay with a mixture of respect, envy, and disapproval.

"It's only fifteen hundred miles," Fay said with careful nonchalance. Actually, he felt quite sure that he was going to throttle the man if he wasn't let out of here and behind the wheel soon. But it would never do to be anything but bored in front of a Homebody. "I expect to make it in about three days," he added, almost yawning.

"Yes, sir," the man said, instantly wrapping himself in a mantle of aloof politeness, but muttering "Dilly!" almost audibly.

Fay'd hit home with that one, all right! Probably, the man had never set foot in an automobile. Certainly, he considered it a barefaced lie that anyone would undertake to average fifty mph during a driving day. Safe, cushiony pneumocars were his speed--and he an airlines employee!

Fay caught himself hastily. Everybody had a right to live any way he wanted to, he reminded himself.

But he could not restrain an effervescent grin at the man's sudden injured shift to aloofness.

"All right, sir," the official said crisply, returning Fay's passport. "Here you are. No baggage, of course?"

"Of course," Fay said agreeably, and if that had been intended as a slur at people who traveled light and fast, it had fallen exceedingly flat. He waved his hand cheerfully as he turned away, while the official stared at him sourly. "I'll be seeing you again, I imagine."

"I'm afraid not, sir," the man answered with a trace of malevolence. "United States Lines is shutting down passenger service the first of next deokayear."

Momentarily nonplussed, Fay hesitated. "Oh? Too bad. No point to continuing, though, is there?"

"No, sir. I believe you were our first in a hectoyear and a half." Quite obviously, he considered that as much of a mark of Cain as necessary.

"Well, must be dull out here, eh?"

He cocked a satiric eye at the man and was gone, chuckling at that telling blow while the massive exit door swung ponderously shut behind him.

The car's driver was obviously a Worker who'd taken on the job because he needed money for some obscure, Workerish purpose. Fay settled the business in the shortest possible time; counting out hundred-dollar bills with a rapid shuffle. He threw in another for good measure, and waved the man aside, punching the starter vibrantly. He was back, he was home! He inhaled deeply, breathing the untrammelled air.

Curled around mountains and trailed gently through valleys, the road down through New York State was a joy. Fay drove it with a light, appreciative smile, guiding his car exuberantly, his muscles locked into communion with the automobile's grace and power as his body responded to each banked turn, each surge of acceleration below the downward crest of a hill. There was nothing like this in Europe--nothing. Over there, they left no room for his kind among their stately people.

He had almost forgotten what it was like to sit low behind the windscreen of a two-seater and listen to the dancing explosions of the unmuffled engine. It was good to be back, here on this open, magnificent road, with nothing before or behind but satin-smooth ferroconcrete, and heaped green mountains to either side.

He was alone on the road, but thought nothing of it. There were very few who lived his kind of life. Now that his first impatience had passed, he was sorry he hadn't been able to talk to the jet's pilot. But that, of course, had been out of the question. Even with all the safety interlocks, there was the chance that one moment's attention lost would allow an accident to happen.

So, Fay had spent the trip playing his memory on the plane's excellent equipment, alone in the comfortable but small compartment forward of the ship's big cargo cabin.

He shrugged as he nudged the car around a curve in the valley. It couldn't be helped. It was a lonely life, and that was all there was to it. He wished there were more people who understood that it was the only life--the only solution to the problem which had fragmented them into so many social patterns. But there were not. And, he supposed, they were all equally lonely. The Homebodies, the Workers, the Students, and the Teachers. Even, he conceded, the Hoppers. He'd Hopped once himself, as an experiment. It had been a hollow, hysteric experience.

The road straightened, and, some distance ahead, he saw the white surface change to the dark macadam of an urban district. He slowed in response, considering the advisability of switching his safeties in, and decided it was unnecessary as yet. He disliked being no more than a pea in a safetied car's basket, powerless to do anything but sit with his hands and feet off the controls. No; for another moment, he wanted to be free to turn the car nearer the shoulder and drive through the shade of the thick shrubbery and overhanging trees. He breathed deeply of the faint fragrance in the air and once more told himself that this was the only way to live, the only way to find some measure of vitality. A Dilly? Only in the jealous vocabularies of the Homebodies, so long tied to their hutches and routines that the scope of mind and emotion had narrowed to fit their microcosm.

Then, without warning, still well on the white surface of open road, the brown shadow darted out of the bushes and flung itself at his wheels, barking shrilly.

He tried to snap the car out of the way, his face suddenly white, but the dog moved unpredictably, its abrupt yell of pain louder than the scream of Fay's brakes. He felt the soft bump, and then his foot jerked away from the clutch and the car stalled convulsively. Even with his engine dead and the car still, he heard no further sound from the dog.

Then he saw the Homebody boy running toward him up the road, and the expression of his face changed from shocked unpleasantness to remorseful regret. He sighed and climbed out of the car clumsily, trying to think of something to say.

The boy came running up and stopped beside the car, looking up the road with his face drawn into tearful anger.

"You ran over Brownie!"

Fay stared helplessly down at the boy. "I'm sorry, son," he said as gently as he could. He could think of nothing really meaningful to tell him. It was a hopeless situation. "I...I shouldn't have been driving so fast."

The boy ran to the huddled bundle at the shoulder of the road and picked it up in his arms, sobbing. Fay followed him, thinking that ten thousand years of experience were not enough--that a hundred centuries of learning and acquiring superficial maturity were still insufficient to shield the emotions trapped in a young boy's body, at the mercy of his glandular system, under a shock like this.

"Couldn't you see him?" the boy pleaded.

Fay shook his head numbly. "He came out of the shrubs--"

"You shouldn't have been driving so fast. You should have--,"

"I know." He looked uselessly back up the road, the trees bright green in the sunshine, the sky blue.

"I'm sorry," he told the boy again. He searched desperately for something, some way, to make recompense. "I wish it hadn't happened." He thought of something, finally. "I...I know it wouldn't be the same thing, but I've got a dog of my own--a basset hound. He's coming over from Europe on a cargo ship. When he gets here, would you like to have him?"

"Your own dog?" For a moment, the boy's eyes cleared, but then he shook his head hopelessly. "It wouldn't work out," he said simply, and then, as though conscious of guilt at even considering that any other dog could replace his, tightened his arms on the lifeless bundle.

No, it hadn't been such a good idea, Fay realized. If he weren't so snarled up in remorse and confusion, he'd have seen that. Ugly had been his dog and couldn't be separated from him, or he from Ugly. He realized even more strongly just precisely what he had done to the boy.

"Something wrong? Oh--", The Homebody man who had come up the road stopped beside them, his face turning grave. Fay looked at him in relief.

"I had my automatics off," he explained to the man. "I wouldn't have, if I'd known there was a house around here, but I didn't see anything. I'm terribly sorry about the...about Brownie."

The man looked again at the dog in the boy's arms, and winced. Then he sighed and shrugged helplessly. "Guess it was bound to happen sometime. Should have been on a leash. There's still a law of averages."

Fay's fist clenched behind his back, out of sight. The wellworn words bit deep at the very foundation of his vitality, and his mind bridled, but in another moment the spasm of reflexive fear was gone, and he was glad he'd had this harmless outlet for his emotions. Besides, the man was right, and at this moment Fay was forced to be honest enough with himself to admit it. There was still a law of averages, whether Fay and his Dilly kind liked it or not.

"Go on back to the house, son," the man said with another sigh. "There's nothing we can do for Brownie. We'll bury him later. Right now you ought to wash up. I'll be along in a minute."

It was the way he said it--the fatalistic acceptance that no matter what the honest folk did, some blundering, heedless dilettante was going to thwart them--that scored Fay's emotions.

The boy nodded wordlessly, still crying, and began to walk away without looking at Fay again.

But Fay couldn't let him go. Like a man who picks at a splinter, he could not let this pass so simply. "Wait!" he said urgently.

The boy stopped and looked at him woodenly.

"I...I know there's nothing--I mean," Fay stumbled, "Brownie was your dog, and there can't be another one like him. But I do a lot of traveling--" He stopped again, flushing at the Homebody man's knowing look, then pushed on regardless. "I see a lot of people," he went on. "I'll try to find you a dog that hasn't ever belonged to anybody. When I do, I'll bring him to you. I promise."

The boy's lip twitched, suddenly revealing what ten thousand years had taught him. "Thanks, mister," he said half-scornfully, and walked away, cradling his dog.

He hadn't believed him, of course. Fay suddenly realized that no one ever believed a Dilly, whether he was telling the truth or not. He realized, too, that he had done the best he could, and nevertheless failed. He looked regretfully after the boy.

"You didn't have to do that," the man said softly, and Fay noted that some of his reserve and half-contemptuous politeness were gone. "I don't know whether to believe you or not, but you didn't have to do that. Anyway, I'll edit the dog out of his memories tonight. My wife and I'll clean the place up, and he won't notice anything." He paused, reflecting, his eyes dark. "Guess Madge and I'll cut it out of our own minitapes, too."

Fay clenched his teeth in sudden annoyance. Nobody ever believed a Dilly. "No," he said. "I wish you wouldn't do that. I meant what I said." He shook his head again. "I don't like editing. There's always a slip somewhere, and then you know you've got a hole in your memory, but you can never remember what it was."

The man looked at him curiously. "Funny thing for one of you people to say. I always heard you went for editing in a big way."

Fay kept his face from showing his thoughts. There it was again--that basic lack of understanding and a complete unwillingness to check secondhand tales. The very essence of his kind of life was that no

memory, no experience, not be lived and preserved. Besides, he'd always heard that it was the Homebodies who had to edit whole hectoyears to keep from going mad with boredom.

"No," he contented himself with saying. "You're confusing us with the Hoppers. They'll try anything."

The man curled his lip at the mention, and Fay reflected that the introduction of a common outsider seemed helpful in circumstances like this.

"Well...maybe you're right," the man said, still not completely trustful, but willing to take the chance. He gave Fay his name, Arnold Riker, and his address. Fay put the slip of paper carefully in his memory vault.

"Anytime I lose that, I'll have lost my memory, too," he commented.

The man grinned wryly. "More likely, you'll remember to forget it tonight," he said, some of his distrust returning at the sight of the spooled tapes.

Fay took that without protest. He supposed Riker had a right to feel that way. "Can I drive you down to your house?"

The man flicked an expressive glance along the car's length and shook his head. "Thanks. I'll walk. There's still a law of averages."

And you can take that phrase and carve it on Humanity's headstone, Fay thought bitterly, but did not reply.

He climbed into the car, flicked on the automatics, and froze, completely immobile from sharply ingrained habit that was the only way to avoid the careless move that just might open the safety switch. He did not even turn his head to look at the man he left behind as the car started itself slowly away, nor did he catch more than a passing glimpse of the house where the boy and his dog had lived together for ten kiloyears.

We guard our immortality so carefully, he thought. So very, very carefully. But there's still a law of averages.

II

Perversely, he drove more rapidly than normal for the rest of the trip. Perhaps he was trying to reaffirm his vitality. Perhaps he was running away. Perhaps he was trying to cut down the elapsed time between towns, where his automatics threaded him through the light pedestrian traffic and sent him farther down the road, with each new danger-spot safely behind him. At any rate, he arrived at his Manhattan apartment while it was still daylight, stepping off the continuous impulse elevator with some satisfaction. But his were eyes discontented.

The apartment, of course, was just as he had left it two hectoyears ago. The semirobots had kept it sealed and germicidal until the arrival of his return message yesterday.

He could imagine the activity that had followed, as books and music tapes were broken out of their helium-flooded vaults, rugs and furnishings were stripped of their cocoons, aerated, and put in place. From somewhere, new plants had come and been set in the old containers, and fresh liquor put in the

cabinet. There would be food in the kitchen, clothes in the wardrobes--the latest styles, of course, purchased with credits against the left-behind apparel of two hectoyears before--and there were the same, old, familiar paintings on the walls. Really old, not just By-Product stuff.

He smiled warmly as he looked around him, enjoying the swell of emotion at the apartment's comfortable familiarity. He smiled once more, briefly, at the thought that he must some day devise a means of staying in a sealed apartment--wearing something like a fishing lung, perhaps--and watch the semirobots at their refurbishing process. It must be a fascinating spectacle.

But his glance had fallen on the memory vault which he had unchained and put on a coffee table. It faced him with the ageless, silent injunction painted on each of its faces: PLAY ME, and underneath this the block of smaller lettering that he, like everyone else, knew by heart:

If your surroundings seem unfamiliar, or you have any other reason to suspect that your environment and situation are not usual, request immediate assistance from any other individual. He is obligated by strict law to direct you to the nearest free public playback booth, where you will find further instructions. Do not be alarmed, and follow these directions without anxiety, even if they seem strange to you. In extreme situations, stand still and do not move. Hold this box in front of you with both hands. This is a universally recognized signal of distress. Do not let anyone take this box away from you, no matter what the excuse offered.

He wondered momentarily what had made him notice it; he knew it so well that the pattern of type had long ago become no more than a half-seen design with a recognition value so high that it had lost all verbal significance.

Was it some sort of subconscious warning? He checked his memory hastily, but relaxed when he found none of the tell-tale vagueness of detail that meant it was time to let everything else wait and get to a playback as fast as possible. He had refreshed his memory early this morning, before starting the last leg of his trip, and it seemed to be good for several more hours, at least.

What was it, then?

He frowned and went to the liquor cabinet, wondering if some train of thought had been triggered off by the accident and was trying to call attention to himself. And when he dropped into an easy-chair a few minutes later, a drink in his hand and his eyes still brooding over the vault's legend, he realized that his second guess had been the right one. As usual, one level of his mind had been busy digesting while the surface churned in seeming confusion.

He smiled ruefully. Maybe he wasn't quite as much of a Dilly as he looked and would have liked to believe. Still, a man couldn't live ten thousand years and not put a few things together in his head. He took a sip of his drink and stared out over the city in the gathering twilight. Somewhere in the graceful furniture behind him, a photoelectric relay clicked, and his high-fidelity set began to play the Karinius Missa. The apartment had not forgotten his moods.

No, he thought, the machines never forgot. Only men forgot, and depended on machines to help them remember. He stared at the vault, and a familiar sophistry occurred to him. "Well," he asked the box labeled PLAY ME, "which is my brain--you or the gray lump in my head?"

The answer depended on his moods, and on his various audiences. Tonight, alone, in an uncertain mood, he had no answer

He took another drink and sat back, frowning.

At best, he'd offered the boy a shoddy substitute. Even presuming that the passage of ten kiloyears had somehow still left room for a dog without a master, the animal would have to be re-familiarized with the boy at least once or twice a day.

Why? Why did dogs who had always had the same master remember him without any difficulty, even though they seemed to have to reinvestigate their surroundings periodically? Why would Ugly, for instance, remember him joyfully when his ship came? And why would Ugly have to be re-familiarized with this apartment, in which he'd lived with Fay, off and on, for all this time?

The Kinnard dog, whose master insisted on building each new house in a carbon-copy of the previous, didn't have anywhere near as much trouble. Why?

He'd heard rumors that some people were recording canine memories on minitape, but that sort of story was generally classified along with the jokes about the old virgin who switched vaults with her nubile young niece.

Still and all, there might be something in that. He'd have to ask Monkreeve. Monkreeve was the Grand Old Man of the crowd. He had memories the rest of them hadn't even thought of yet.

Fay emptied his glass and got up to mix another drink. He was thinking harder than he had for a long time--and he could not help feeling that he was making a fool of himself. Nobody else had ever asked questions like this. Not where others could hear them, at any rate.

He sat back down in his chair, fingers laced around the glass while the Missa ended and the Lieutenant Kije suite caught up the tempo of the city as it quickened beneath showers of neon.

PLAY ME. Like a music tape, the memory vault held his life tightly knit in the nested spindles of bright, imperishable minitape.

What, he suddenly asked himself, would happen if he didn't play it tonight?

"If your surroundings seem unfamiliar, or you have any other reason to suspect your environment and situation are not usual...

"Obligated by strict law to direct you...

"Do not be alarmed..."

What? What was behind the whispered stories, the jokes:

"What did the girl in the playback booth say to the young man who walked in by mistake?"

"Man, this has been the busiest Twenty-seventh of July!" (Laughter)

The thought struck him that there might be all sorts of information concealed in his fund of party conversation.

"If you wish to get to heaven,

Stay away from twenty-seven."

And there it was again. Twenty-seven. July Twenty-seventh, this time conglomerated with a hangover reference to religion. And that was interesting, too. Man had religions, of course--schismatic trace sects

that offered no universally appealing reward to make them really popular. But they must have been really big once, judging by the stamp they'd left on oaths and idiomatic expressions. Why? What did they have? Why had two billion people integrated words like "Heaven," "Lord God," and "Christ" into the language so thoroughly that they had endured ten kiloyears?

July Twenty-seventh when? What year?

What would happen to him if he ignored PLAY ME just this once?

He had the feeling that he knew all this; that he had learned it at the same time that he had learned to comb his hair and cut his fingernails, take showers and brush his teeth. But he did all that more or less automatically now.

Maybe it was time he thought about it.

But nobody else did. Not even Monkreeve.

So what? Who was Monkreeve, really? Didn't the very fact that he had thought of it make it all right? That was the basis on which they judged everything else, wasn't it?

That boy and his dog had really started something.

He realized several things simultaneously, and set his glass down with a quick thump. He couldn't remember the dog's name. And he was definitely letting the simple problem of following his conscience--and his wounded pride--lead him into far deeper intellectual waters than any boy and his dog had a right.

His cheeks went cold as he tried to remember the name of this morning's hotel, and he shivered violently. He looked at the box labeled PLAY ME.

"Yes," he told it. "Yes, definitely."

III

Fay awoke to a bright, sunny morning. The date on his calendar clock was April 16, 11958, and he grinned at it while he removed the vault's contacts from the bare places on his scalp. He noted that all the memories he had brought back from Europe had been re-recorded for the apartment's spare vault, and that the current minitape had advanced the shining notch necessary to record yesterday.

He looked at that notch and frowned. It looked like an editing scratch, and was. It was always there, every morning, but he knew it covered nothing more than the normal Traumatic Pause between recording and playback. He'd been told that it was the one memory nobody wanted to keep, and certainly he'd never missed editing it--or, of course, remembered doing it. It was a normal part of the hypnotic action pattern set by the recorder to guide him when he switched over from record to playback, his mind practically blank by that time.

He'd never seen a tape, no matter whose, that did not bear that one scratch to mark each day. He took pride in the fact that a good many tapes were so hashed out and romanticized as to be almost pure fiction. He hadn't been lying to the boy's father--and he noted the presence of that memory with the

utmost satisfaction--he had a driving basic need to see everything, hear everything, sense each day and its events to their fullest, and to remember them with sharp perfect clarity.

He laughed at the vault as he kicked it shut on his way to the bathroom. "Not until tonight," he said to PLAY ME, and then teetered for a breathless moment as he struggled to regain his balance. He set his foot down with a laugh, his eyes sparkling.

"Who needs a car to live dangerously?" he asked himself. But that brought back the memory of the boy, and his lips straightened. Nevertheless, it was a beautiful day, and the basic depression of yesterday was gone. He thought of all the people he knew in the city, one of whom, at least, would be sure to have a contact somewhere or the other that would solve his problem for him.

He ate his breakfast heartily, soaking for an hour in the sensual grip of his bathtub's safety slinging while he spooned the vitalizing porridge, then shrugged into a violent bathrobe and began calling people on the telephone.

He hadn't realized how long he'd been gone, he reflected, after Vera, his welcome to her apartment finished, had left him with a drink while she changed. It was, of course, only natural that some of the old crowd had changed their habits or themselves gone traveling in his absence. Nevertheless, he still felt a little taken aback at the old phone numbers that were no longer valid, or the really astonishing amount of people who seemed to have edited him out of their memories. Kinnard, of all people! And Lorraine.

Somehow he'd never thought Lorraine would go editor.

"Ready, Kes?"

Vera was wearing a really amazing dress. Apparently, America had gone back toward conservatism, as he might have guessed from his own wardrobe.

Vera, too, had changed somehow--too subtly for him to detect, here in surroundings where he had never seen her before. Hadn't she always been resistant to the fad of completely doing apartments over every seventy years? He seemed to remember it that way, but even with minitapes, the evidence of the eye always took precedence over the nudge of memory. Still, she at least knew where Monkreeve was, which was something he hadn't been able to find out for himself.

"Uh-huh. Where're we going?"

She smiled and kissed the tip of his nose. "Relax, Kes. Let it happen."

Um.

"Grasshoppers as distinct from ants, people given to dancing and similar gay pursuits, or devotees to stimulants," Monkreeve babbled, gesturing extravagantly. "Take your pick of derivations." He washed down a pill of some sort and braced himself theatrically. "I've given up on the etymology. What'd you say your name was?"

Fay grimaced. He disliked Hoppers and Hopper parties--particularly in this instance. He wished heartily that Vera had told him what had happened to Monkreeve before she brought him here.

He caught a glimpse of her in the center of an hysterical knot of people, dancing with her seven petticoats held high.

"Whoee!" Monkreeve burst out, detecting the effects of the pill among the other explosions in his system. Fay gave him a searching look, and decided, from the size of his pupils, that he could probably convince himself into an identical state on bread pills, and more than likely was.

"Got a problem, hey, Lad?" Monkreeve asked wildly. "Got a dog problem." He put his finger in his mouth and burlesqued Thought. "Got a dog, got a problem, got a problem, got a dog," he chanted. "Hell!" he exploded, "go see old Williamson. Old Williamson knows everything. Ask him anything. Sure," he snickered, "ask him anything."

"Thanks, Monk," Fay said. "Glad to've met you," he added in the accepted polite form with editors, and moved toward Vera.

"Sure, sure, Kid. Ditto and check. Whatcha say your name was?"

Fay pretended to be out of earshot, brushed by a couple who were dancing in a tight circle to no music at all, and delved into the crowd around Vera.

"Hi, Kest," Vera exclaimed, looking up and laughing. "Did Monk give yo"Hi, Kest," Vera exclaimed, looking up and laughing. "Did Monk give you any leads?"

"Monk has a monkey on his back, he thinks," Fay said shortly, a queasy feeling in his throat.

"Well, why not try that on the kid? He might like a change." Vera broke into fresh laughter. Suddenly an inspiration came to her, and she began to sing.

"Oh where, oh where, has my little dog gone? Oh where, oh where can he be?"

The rest of the crowd picked it up. Vera must have told them about his search, for they sang it with uproarious gusto.

Fay turned on his heel and walked out.

The halls of the University library were dim gray, padded with plastic sponge, curving gently with no sharp corners. Doorways slid into walls, the sponge muffled sound, and he wore issued clothes into which he had been allowed to transfer only those personal items which could not possibly cut or pry. Even his vault had been encased in a ball of cellular sponge plastic, and his guide stayed carefully away from him, in case he should fall or stumble. The guide carried a first-aid kit, and like all the library staff, was a certified Doctor of Theoretical Medicine.

"This is Dr. Williamson's interview chamber," the guide told him softly, and pressed a button concealed under the sponge. The door slid back, and Fay stepped into the padded interior of the chamber, divided down the middle by a sheet of clear, thick plastic. There was no furniture to bump into, of course. The guide made sure he was safely in, out of the door's track, and closed it carefully after he had stepped out.

Fay sat down on the soft floor and waited. He started wondering what had happened to the old crowd, but he had barely found time to begin when the door on the other side of the partition opened and Dr. Williamson came in. Oddly enough, his physiological age was less than Fay's, but he carried himself like an old man, and his entire manner radiated the same feeling.

He looked at Fay distastefully. "Hopper, isn't it? What're you doing here?"

Fay got to his feet. "No, sir. Dilly, if you will, but not a Hopper." Coming so soon after the party, Williamson's remark bit deep.

"Six of one, half a dozen of the other, in time," Williamson said curtly. "Sit down." He lowered himself slowly, testing each new adjustment of his muscles and bones before he made the next. He winced faintly when Fay dropped to the floor with defiant overcarelessness. "Well--go on. You wouldn't be here if the front desk didn't think your research was at least interesting."

Fay surveyed him carefully before he answered. Then he sighed, shrugged mentally, and began. "I want to find a dog for a little boy," he said, feeling more than foolish.

Williamson snorted: "What leads you to believe this is the ASPCA?"

"ASPCA, sir?"

Williamson threw his hands carefully up to heaven and snorted again. Apparently, everything Fay said served to confirm some judgment of mankind on his part.

He did not explain, and Fay finally decided he was waiting. There was a minute's pause, and then Fay said awkwardly: "I assume that's some kind of animal shelter. But that wouldn't serve my purpose. I need a dog that...that remembers."

Williamson put the tips of his fingers together and pursed his lips. "So. A dog that remembers, eh?" He looked at Fay with considerably more interest, the look in his eyes sharpening.

"You look like any other brainless jackanapes," he mused, "but apparently there's some gray matter left in your artfully coiffed skull after all." Williamson was partially bald.

"What would you say," Williamson continued, "if I offered to let you enroll here as an Apprentice Liberator?"

"Would I find out how to get that kind of dog?"

A flicker of impatience crossed Williamson's face. "In time, in time. But that's beside the point."

"I...I haven't got much time, sir," Fay said haltingly. Obviously, Williamson had the answer to his question. But would he part with it, and if he was going to, why this rigmarole?

Williamson gestured with careful impatience. "Time is unimportant. And especially here, where we avoid the law of averages almost entirely. But there are various uses for time, and I have better ones than this. Will you enroll? Quick, man!"

"I--Dr. Williamson, I'm grateful for your offer, but right now all I'd like to know is how to get a dog." Fay was conscious of a mounting impatience of his own.

Williamson got carefully to his feet and looked at Fay with barely suppressed anger.

"Young man, you're living proof that our basic policy is right. I wouldn't trust an ignoramus like you with the information required to cut his throat.

"Do you realize where you are?" He gestured at the walls. "In this building is the world's greatest repository of knowledge. For ten thousand years we have been accumulating opinion and further theoretical data on every known scientific and artistic theory extant in 2013. We have data that will enable Man to go to the stars, travel ocean bottoms, and explore Jupiter. We have here the raw material of symphonies and sonatas that make your current addictions sound like a tincup beggar's fiddle. We have the seed of paintings that would make you spatter whitewash over the daubs you treasure, and verse that would drive you mad. And you want me to find you a dog!"

Fay had gotten to his own feet. Williamson's anger washed over him in battering waves, but one thing remained clear, and he kept to it stubbornly.

"Then you won't tell me."

"No, I will not tell you! I thought for a moment that you had actually managed to perceive something of your environment, but you have demonstrated my error. You are dismissed." Williamson turned and stamped carefully out of his half of the interview chamber, and the door slid open behind Fay.

Still and all, he had learned something. He had learned that there was something important about dogs not remembering, and he had a date: 2013.

He sat in his apartment, his eyes once more fixed on PLAY ME, and tried a thought on for size: July 27, 2013.

It made more sense that way than it did when the two parts were separated--which could mean nothing, of course. Dates were like the jigsaw puzzles that were manufactured for physiological four-year-olds: they fit together no matter how the pieces were matched.

When had the human race stopped having children?

The thought smashed him bolt upright in his chair, spilling his drink.

He had never thought of that. Never once had he questioned the fact that everyone was frozen at some apparently arbitrary physiological age. He had learned that such-and-such combined anatomical and psychological configuration was indicative of one physiological age, that a different configuration indicated another. Or had he? Couldn't he tell instinctively--or, rather, couldn't he tell as though the word "age" were applicable to humans as well as inanimate objects?

A lesser thought followed close on the heels of the first: exactly the same thing could be said of dogs, or canaries or parakeets, as well as the occasional cat that hadn't gone wild.

"Gone wild? " Hadn't most cats always been wild?

Just exactly what memories were buried in his mind, in hiding--or rather, since he was basically honest with himself, what memories had he taught himself to ignore? And why?

His skin crawled. Suddenly, his careful, flower-to-flower world was tinged with frost around him, and brown, bare and sharply ragged stumps were left standing. The boy and his dog had been deep water indeed--for his tentative toe had baited a monster of continuous and expanding questions to fang him with rows of dangerous answers.

He shook himself and took another drink. He looked at PLAY ME, and knew where the worst answers must be.

IV

He awoke, and there were things stuck to his temples. He pulled them loose and sat up, staring at the furnishings and the machine that sat beside his bed, trailing wires.

The lights were on, but the illumination was so thoroughly diffused that he could not find its source. The furniture was just short of the radical in design, and he had certainly never worn pajamas to bed. He looked down at them and grunted. He looked at the machine again, and felt his temples where the contacts had rested. His fingers came away sticky, and he frowned. Was it some sort of encephalograph? Why?

He looked around again. There was a faint possibility that he was recovering from psychiatric treatment, but this was certainly no sanatorium room.

There was a white placard across the room, with some sort of printing on it. Since it offered the only possible source of information, he got off the bed cautiously and, when he encountered no dizziness or weakness, crossed over to it. He stood looking at it, lips pursed and brow furrowed, while he picked his way through the rather simplified orthography.

Christopher Jordan Fay:

If your surroundings seem unfamiliar, or you have any other reason to suspect that your environment and situation are unusual, do not be alarmed, and follow these directions without anxiety, even if they seem strange to you. If you find yourself unable to do so, for any reason whatsoever, please return to the bed and read the instructions printed on the machine beside it. In this case, the nearest "free public playback booth" is the supplementary cabinet you see built into the head of the bed. Open the doors and read the supplementary instructions printed inside. In any case, do not be alarmed, and if you are unable or unwilling to perform any of the actions requested above, simply dial "O" on the telephone you see across the room.

Fay looked around once more, identified the various objects, and read on.

The operator, like all citizens, is required by strict law to furnish you with assistance.

If, on the other hand, you feel sufficiently calm or are commensurately curious, please follow these directions:

Return to the bed and restore the contacts to the places where they were attached. Switch the dial marked "Record-Playback-Auxiliary Record" to the "Auxiliary Record" position. You will then have three minutes to place your right forearm on the grooved portion atop the machine. Make certain your arm fits snugly--the groove is custom-molded to accept your arm perfectly in one position only.

Finally, lie back and relax. All other actions are automatic.

For your information, you have suffered from loss of memory, and this device will restore it to you.

Should you be willing to follow the above directions, please accept our thanks.

Fay's tongue bulged his left cheek, and he restrained a grin. Apparently, his generator had been an unqualified success. He looked at the printing again, just to be certain, and confirmed the suspicion that it

had been done by his own hand. Then, as a conclusive check, he prowled the apartment in search of a calendar. He finally located the calendar-clock, inexpertly concealed in a bureau drawer, and looked at the date.

That was his only true surprise. He whistled shrilly at the date, but finally shrugged and put the clock back. He sat down in a convenient chair, and pondered.

The generator was working just as he'd expected, the signal bouncing off the Heaviside layer without perceptible loss of strength, covering the Earth. As to what could happen when it exhausted its radioactive fuel in another five thousand years, he had no idea, but he suspected that he would simply refuel it. Apparently, he still had plenty of money, or whatever medium of exchange existed now. Well, he'd provided for it.

Interesting, how his mind kept insisting it was July 27, 2013. This tendency to think of the actual date as "the future" could be confusing if he didn't allow for it.

Actually, he was some ten-thousand-and-thirty-eight years old, rather than the thirty-seven his mind insisted on. But his memories carried him only to 2013, while, he strongly suspected, the Kester Fay who had written that naive message had memories that began shortly thereafter.

The generator broadcast a signal which enabled body cells to repair themselves with one hundred per cent perfection, rather than the usual less-than-perfect of living organisms. The result was that none of the higher organisms aged, in any respect. Just the higher ones, fortunately, or there wouldn't even be yeast derivatives to eat.

But, of course, that included brain cells, too. Memory was a process of damaging brain cells much as a phonograph recording head damaged a blank record disk. In order to relive the memory, the organism had only to play it back, as a record is played. Except that, so long as the generator continued to put out the signal brain cells, too, repaired themselves completely. Not immediately, of course, for the body took a little time to act. But no one could possibly sleep through a night and remember anything about the day before. Amnesia was the price of immortality.

He stood up, went to the liquor cabinet he'd located in his search, and mixed himself a drink, noticing again how little, actually, the world had progressed in ten thousand years. Cultural paralysis, more than likely, under the impact of six billion individuals each trying to make his compromise with the essential boredom of eternal life.

The drink was very good, the whiskey better than any he was used to. He envied himself.

They'd finally beaten amnesia, as he suspected the human race would. Probably by writing notes to themselves at first, while panic and hysteria cloaked the world and July 27th marched down through the seasons and astronomers went mad.

The stimulated cells, of course, did not repair the damage done to them before the generator went into operation. They took what they already had as a model, and clung to it fiercely.

He grimaced. Their improved encephalograph probably rammed in so much information so fast that their artificial memories blanketed the comparatively small amount of information which they had acquired up to the 27th. Or, somewhat more likely, the period of panic had been so bad that they refused to probe beyond it. If that was a tape-recording encephalograph, editing should be easily possible.

"I suspect," he said aloud, "that what I am remembering now is part of a large suppressed area in my own memory." He chuckled at the thought that his entire life had been a blank to himself, and finished the drink.

And what he was experiencing now was an attempt on his own part to get that blank period on tape, circumventing the censors that kept him from doing it when he had his entire memory.

And that took courage. He mixed another drink and toasted himself. "Here's to you, Kester Fay +. I'm glad to learn I've got guts."

The whiskey was extremely good.

And the fact that Kester Fay had survived the traumatic hiatus between the Twenty-seventh and the time when he had his artificial memory was proof that They hadn't gotten to him before the smash-up.

Paranoid, was he?

He'd stopped the accelerating race toward Tee-Total War, hadn't he?

They hadn't been able to stop him, that was certain. He'd preserved the race of Man, hadn't he?

Psychotic? He finished the drink and chuckled. Intellectually, he had to admit that anyone who imposed immortality on all his fellow beings without asking their permission was begging for the label.

But, of course, he knew he wasn't psychotic. If he were, he wouldn't be so insistent on the English "Kester" for a nickname rather than the American "Chris."

He put the glass down regretfully. Ah, well--time to give himself all his memories back. Why was his right arm so strong?

He lay down on the bed, replaced the contacts, and felt the needle slip out of its recess in the forearm trough and slide into a vein.

Scopolamine derivative of some sort, he decided. Machinery hummed and clicked in the cabinets at the head of the bed, and a blank tape spindle popped into position in the vault, which rested on a specially-built stand beside the bed.

Complicated, he thought dimly as he felt the drug pumping into his system. I could probably streamline it down considerably.

He found time to think once more of his basic courage. Kester Fay must still be a rampant individual, even in his stagnant, conservative, ten-thousand-year-weighty civilization.

Apparently, nothing could change his fundamental character.

He sank into a coma with a faint smile.

The vault's volume control in the playback cycle was set to "Emergency Overload." Memories hammered at him ruthlessly, ravaging brain tissue, carving new channels through the packed silt of repair, foaming, bubbling, hissing with voracious energy and shattering impetus.

His face ran through agonized changes in his sleep. He pawed uncertainly and feebly at the contacts on his scalp, but the vital conditioning held. He never reached them, though he tried, and, failing, tried, and tried through the long night, while sweat poured down his face and soaked into his pillow, and he moaned, while the minitapes clicked and spun, one after the other, and gave him back the past.

It was July 27, 2013, and he shivered with cold, uncomprehendingly staring at the frost on the windows, with the note dated 7/27/13 in his hand.

It was July 27, 2013, and he was faint with hunger as he tried to get the lights to work. Apparently, the power was off. He struck a match and stared down at the series of notes, some of them smudged with much unremembered handling, all dated July 27, 2013.

It was July 27, 2013, and the men who tried to tell him it was really Fall in 2019, clustered around his bed in the crowded hospital ward, were lying. But they told him his basic patents on controlled artificial radioactivity had made it possible to power the complicated machinery they were teaching him to use. And though, for some reason, money as an interest-gathering medium was no longer valid, they told him that in his special case, in gratitude, they'd arranged things so there'd be a series of royalties and licensing fees, which would be paid into his accounts automatically. He wouldn't even have to check on them, or know specifically where they came from. But the important part came when they assured him that the machinery--the "vault," and the "minitapes," whatever they were, would cure his trouble.

He was grateful for that, because he'd been afraid for a long time that he was going insane. Now he could forget his troubles.

Kester Fay pulled the vault contacts off his forehead and sat up to see if there was an editing scratch on the tape.

But, of course, there wasn't. He knew it before he'd raised his head an inch, and he almost collapsed, sitting on the edge of the bed with his head in his hands.

He was his own monster. He had no idea of what most of the words he'd used in those memories had meant, but even as he sat there, he could feel his mind hesitatingly making the linkages and assigning tags to the jumbled concepts and frightening rationalizations he'd already remembered.

He got up gingerly, and wandered about the apartment, straightening out the drawers he'd upset during his amnesiac period. He came to the empty glass, frowned at it, shrugged, and mixed a drink.

He felt better afterwards, the glow of 100 proof working itself into his system. The effects wouldn't last, of course--intoxication was a result of damage to the brain cells--but the first kick was real enough. Moreover, it was all he'd gotten accustomed to, during the past ten kiloyears, just as the Hoppers could drug themselves eternally.

Ten thousand years of having a new personality seemed to have cured the psychosis he'd had with his old one. He felt absolutely no desire to change the world singlehanded.

Had it, now? Had it? Wasn't being a dilettante the result of an inner conviction that you were too good for routine living?

And didn't he want to turn the generator off, now that he knew what it did and where it was?

He finished the drink and bounced the glass in his palm. There was nothing that said he had to reach a

decision right this minute. He'd had ten kiloyears. It could wait a little longer.

He bathed to the accompaniment of thoughts he'd always ignored before--thoughts about things that weren't his problem, then. Like incubators full of babies ten kiloyears old, and pregnant women, and paralytics.

He balanced that against hydrogen bombs, and still the scales did not tip.

Then he added something he had never known before, but that he had now, and understood why no one ever ventured to cross Twenty-seven, or to remember it if he had. For one instant, he, too, stopped still at his bath and considered ripping the memory out of his minitapes.

He added Death.

But he knew he was lost, now. For better or worse, the water had closed over his head, and if he edited the memory now, he would seek it out again some day. For a moment, he wondered if that was precisely what he had done, countless times before.

He gave it up. It could wait--if he stayed sane. At any rate, he knew how to get the little boy his dog, now.

He built a signal generator to cancel out the effect of the big one, purring implacably in its mountain shaft, sending out its eternal, unshieldable signal. He blanketed one room of his apartment with the canceling wave, and added six months to his age by staying in it for hours during the eighteen months it took to mate Ugly and raise the best pup, for the stimulating wave was the answer to sterility, too; fetuses could not develop.

He cut himself off from the Dilly crowd, what was left of it, and raised the pup. And it was more than six months he added to his age, for all that time he debated and weighed, and remembered.

And by the time he was ready, he still did not know what he was going to do about the greater problem. Still and all, he had a new dog for the boy.

He packed the canceling generator and the dog in his car, and drove back up the road he had come.

Finally, he knocked on Riker's door, the dog under one arm, the generator under the other.

Riker answered his knock and looked at him curiously.

"I'm...I'm Kester Fay, Mr. Riker," he said hesitating. "I've bought your boy that dog I promised."

Riker looked at the dog and the bulky generator under his arm, and Fay shifted his load awkwardly, the dangling vault interfering with his movements. Light as it was, the vault was a bulky thing. "Don't you remember me?"

Riker blinked thoughtfully, his forehead knotting. Then he shook his head. "No...no, I guess not, Mr. Fay." He looked suspiciously at Fay's clothes, which hadn't been changed in three days. Then he nodded.

"Uh...I'm sorry, mister, but I guess I must have edited it." He smiled in embarrassment. "Come to think of it, I've wondered if we didn't have a dog sometime. I hope it wasn't too important to you."

Fay looked at him. He found it impossible to think of any thing to say. Finally, he shrugged.

"Well," he said, "your boy doesn't have a dog now, does he?"

Riker shook his head. "Nope. You know--it's a funny thing, what with the editing and everything, but he knows a kid with a dog, and sometimes he pesters the life out of me to get him one." Riker shrugged. "You know how kids are."

"Will you take this one?" He held out the squirming animal.

"Sure. Mighty grateful. But I guess we both know this won't work out too well." He reached out and took the dog.

"This one will," Fay said. He gave Riker the generator. "Just turn this on for a while in the same room with your son and the dog. It won't hurt anything, but the dog'll remember."

Riker looked at him skeptically.

"Try it," Fay said, but Riker's eyes were narrowing, and he gave Fay both the dog and the generator back.

"No, thanks," he said. "I'm not trying anything like that from a guy that comes out of nowhere in the middle of the night."

"Please, Mr. Riker. I promise--"

"Buddy, you're trespassing. I won't draw more than half a hectoyear if I slug you."

Fay's shoulders slumped. "All right," he sighed, and turned around. He heard Riker slam the heavy door behind him.

But as he trudged down the walk, his shoulders lifted, and his lips set in a line.

There has to be an end somewhere, he thought. Each thing has to end, or there will never be any room for beginnings. He turned around to be sure no one in the house was watching, and released the dog. He'd be found in the morning, and things might be different by then.

He climbed into the car and drove quickly away, leaving the dog behind. Somewhere outside of town, he threw the canceling generator outside, onto the concrete highway, and heard it smash. He unchained his memory vault, and threw it out, too.

There had to be an end. Even an end to starlit nights and the sound of a powerful motor. An end to the memory of sunset in the Piazza San Marco, and the sight of snow on Chamonix. An end to good whiskey. For him, there had to be an end--so that others could come after. He pointed the car toward the generator's location, and reflected that he had twenty or thirty years left, anyway.

He flexed his curiously light arm.

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