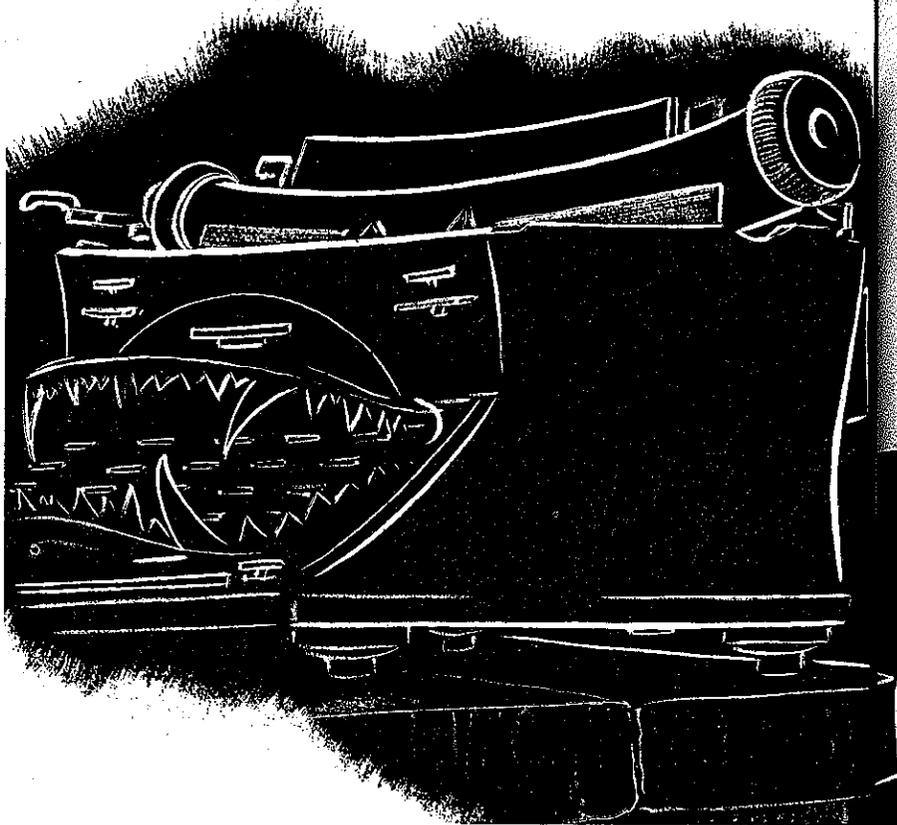


# Dulcie & Decorum

By DAMON KNIGHT

Illustrated by MEL HUNTER



*If you make typographical errors in typing,  
leave them alone! The biggest mistake is in  
trying to learn whether they mean anything!*

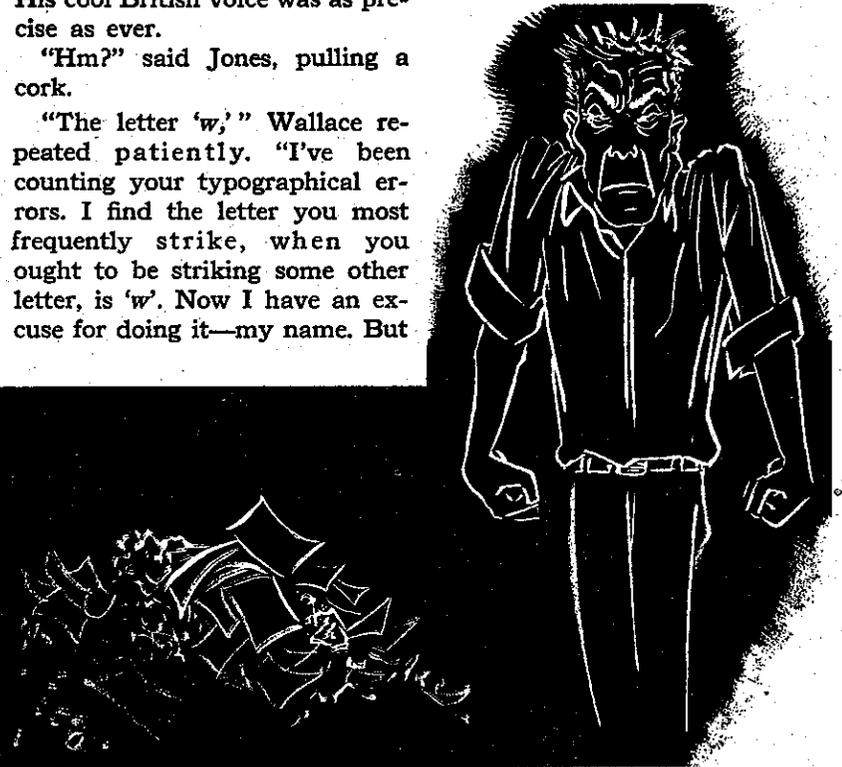
“**W**HAT is so fascinating about the letter *w*?” Wallace asked, looking up from the typed pages. His cool British voice was as precise as ever.

“Hm?” said Jones, pulling a cork.

“The letter ‘*w*,’” Wallace repeated patiently. “I’ve been counting your typographical errors. I find the letter you most frequently strike, when you ought to be striking some other letter, is ‘*w*’. Now I have an excuse for doing it—my name. But

what’s yours? Why ‘*w*?’”

Jones got the cork out and filled both glasses. “You’re supposed to be reading the article.”



"Couldn't possibly," Wallace said. "Awfully sorry. Full of Americanisms. I get fearfully loyal when I'm drunk. Language of Shakespeare and Milton and Robie. You know."

"Robie?"

"My editor. Filthy little bug. Writes himself, you know. Under pseudonyms. Asks you casually how you liked so-and-so's last piece. Actually his own, you see. Ugh."

JONES was beginning to feel mildly, pleasantly dizzy. It was quiet and cool down in his basement study at this time of night, with the house silent above them and the night airs astir. He and Wallace had been drinking and talking ever since four that afternoon, when they'd met at a press conference that turned out to be a bust. Wallace was a feature writer for a chain of British papers; he was just beginning a two-months' grand tour of America.

"Quite sinister," Wallace said. "Bear looking into. I should like to have your opinion, Jonesy. How do you explain it?"

Jones swallowed, and the cool brightness went smoothly down to join the warmth at the bottom. He said, "Maybe he has expensive tastes."

"Who?"

"Robie." He added, as Wal-

lace looked blank, "Your editor."

"What's that to do with 'w's'?"

"I don't know," Jones said. After a while, he got up and sat down at the desk with his hands resting on the typewriter keyboard. He twiddled his fingers experimentally a few times. "I think my fingernail catches on the 'w' key."

Wallace nodded several times. "Yes. But why?"

"Probably stands for something Freudian. Women. Woe. Waste."

"Wallace, in my case," said Wallace. "Scots wha hae."

Jones was slowly warming up to the topic. "No, you were right. I just remembered—when I used to work for a publicity man, years ago. I knew the crumb was getting rich and I had an idea he wasn't paying me enough. Thirty-five dollars a week. Well—" he typed rapidly—"I swear I never did it on purpose, but I kept typing his name like this."

He handed the sheet over to Wallace. It read: \$IDNEY \$TEVEN\$ON.

Wallace grinned. "I see. And yet the almighty dollar sign's nowhere near the 's,' is it? Not even the same finger."

"No."

"Well, this is interesting. What about the 'w,' then? I don't much care for your theory, but evidently there's a psychic message

there. 'W'—'w'—'w.' Wa, wa, wa. Baby crying. Maybe you weren't allowed to howl enough as a child."

They drank, thinking it over.

"You're going on the theory," said Jones, "that all typos have some sinister significance."

"Oh, absolutely."

"Well, that doesn't stand up. No. I hit every letter wrong sometimes. If they all mean something—well, hell, how do you know you know they mean anything? You're sure to hit a wrong one every now and then. Am I getting through to you? What I mean—"

"Know exactly what you mean," said Wallace. "Question of frequency. Frequency."

"Oh," Jones said weakly.

"Doesn't follow, though."

WALLACE got up to look over Jones's shoulder. "The 'w' happens to be in the middle of a nest of high-frequency letters, doesn't it? 'E,' 'a,' 's.' Hold on—I've got it! Suppose somebody were trying to communicate with you!"

"They could write me a letter," said Jones.

"No. No post where he is. Cloud-cuckoo land, or Mars, or somewhere. You follow me?"

"Or the spirit world?" asked Jones, interested.

Wallace collapsed into a fit of

silent laughter and spilled wine down the front of Jones's shirt. "Be sensible," he said happily. "Practical. Hard-headed. Some psychic little tout in Soho, asleep and dreaming of you. Or one of your remote descendants, centuries from now. A by-blow of your great-great-grandnephew's brother-in-law's mistress. Somebody reaching back in Time, you see, or forward, for that matter. Trying to communicate."

"What for?"

"Are you going to be difficult? How the deuce do I know what for? You haven't even opened the bloody envelope."

He sat down again, looking miffed.

"I apologize," said Jones.

"Accepted," said Wallace. He sniffed dreamily, tenting his fingers in front of his long, pale face. "Now just suppose—How would a fellow like that go about getting in touch with you?" He held up a hand to forestall Jones's reply. "He's got a bad connection, you see. He can't make you hear voices, or do automatic writing, or anything like that. All he can do is twitch your fingers the least bit, when they're already moving and you're not paying much attention. Only then. Result, typos." He saluted Jones with his glass and drained it.

"Magnificent," said Jones.

"See any flaws in it?"

"Not a one."

"Very well, we shall see. Ready?" Staring intently at Jones's manuscript, Wallace read off the typographical errors as he came to them, and Jones typed them out.

The resulting message read:

OYKEIOXILERWJWJ.

"Settles that," said Wallace with relief. "All nonsense, naturally. Find something else to worry about tomorrow. Meanwhile, landlord, more wine."

**T**HE next day was hot and sticky, and Jones had a hangover. He sweated on a story that had gone infuriatingly wrong somewhere and finally gave it up. He didn't tell himself he had given it up; he told himself he was killing time while his brain freshened itself.

The way he killed time was to go back through his manuscript and make a long list of typos. It was just as good as solitaire and, anyhow, there was a kind of witless fascination in it. Jones knew perfectly well that he was not going to find any message hidden in his typing errors, any more than the lint from his trousers cuffs would turn out to be pure uranium, but that didn't stop him. Millions of words have been written about Shakespeare and

Bacon for less reason.

After a while, he had a long foolish row of letters, like this:

EMJBFTDHHTAAGDWWFF4  
CDFZMG

So he returned to his work, which continued to go badly. He soon found himself mooning over the string of letters again, trying to rearrange them and break them up so they would make sense. Mostly, it seemed to him, the trouble was not enough vowels. He tried inserting vowels to make words like "job, fit, dough, hot," which was all right in a primitive kind of way, but not very satisfactory.

Well, suppose the meaning was in the letters he had *meant* to strike, instead of the ones he had actually hit? It was a possible hypothesis, no screwier than the rest of it, and it gave him an excuse to kill more time. So he went back painstakingly through the manuscript and tracked down every typo again, and under each he wrote what the letter should have been:

EMJBFTDHHTAAGDW  
JOUNSRGISQIIVE

WFF4CDFZMG  
MESESGDLC

Using the same system, the

best he could do with the second line was "Jurgen's rig is QQ I've messes GDLC." Not much help.

Dividing the letters into clumps of four and reading each backward across the top, forward across the bottom, gave him "Me Jo, U jug," followed by gibberish, and the word "this," just as plain; then drivel again.

He tried reading the whole sequence backward. Then he tried to break it as if it were a simple substitution code; but this was going too far. Jones gave it up.

**H**E went back to his story and actually wrote a paragraph before another idea came to him.

Even if you assumed that some typos were market tips from the Moon, or hiccups of the subconscious, or whatever, you had to figure that some typos were typos. "W" for "s," now—perfectly natural mistake. But "w" for "j," say—all the way across the keyboard—would be something else again.

On the typewriter keyboard, Jones discovered, "J" was directly under "U." He crossed the two letters out. Five more pairs went the same way, leaving a string of typos which, when you came to think of it, were pretty odd—like "E" for "J"—different fingers, different hand, different row of keys.

He stared at what he had left:

EMJBFTDHHTAAGDW  
JOUNSRGISQIIVE

WFF4CDFZMG  
MESESGDLC

Something about the bottom lines struck his attention. Under it, he wrote:

JONS RISIV MESSG DLC  
JONES RECEIVE MESSAGE  
DLC

He blinked. "Be taking up Yoga next," he muttered. "Automatic writing. Old ladies at séances."

But, of course, he was hooked. It was that irresolvable "DLC" on the end that did it. "DLC" what? Doll carts, dull caddy, dollars and cents?

He reached blindly to the shelf over his desk, hauled down a book, opened it beside his typewriter and began transcribing. His fingers were nervous. He was making a lot of mistakes, he knew, but he didn't try to do any better; he just kept banging away, eyes fixed on the open book, breathing in little agonized snorts through his nose.

He slammed the line-space lever and the paper tilted out of the machine; he was at the bottom of the page. He took the

paper almost angrily, smoothed it out, began listing errors.

After a few minutes, this is what he had:

ERVFTUOIFAFJKKA  
JOANSOLKBENOB;E

UWIFJYVJW  
OSKBEISDLG

JONS OBE OBE OBEI DLC  
JONES OBEY OBEY OBEY  
DLC

He got drunk all over again, sobered up and wrote a letter to Wallace in care of the New York office. He wrote the letter in longhand—four pages of it—and sent it off before he had a chance to lose his nerve.

**JONES** did not touch the typewriter again for almost a week, in spite of two sharp arguments with his wife, until the letter came from Wallace:

Hotel Imperial  
Deadwood, Ariz.

Dear Fred,

Well, you're right and I apologize for several things that occurred to me when I got your letter.

I am absolutely bowled over, but will try to get some first impressions down.

Your letter arrived Thursday, Friday night, I had just finished a piece and I tried your system on

it, feeling seven kinds of a fool. This emerged: Wals (me) cntakt dcrn. (Darkroom?) Not the best spelling, but the parallel with your message is impossible to ignore, and of course there is no way on Earth you could have engineered this, so I am stuck with the thing.

Now pay close attention, please.

1. I have no recollection of proposing this or any other theory of typos to you on that evening. I know I was well along, but I always remember the next morning. Either you're mistaken or—well, let's move along.

2. I took the trouble to examine typescripts by three other newsmen I met here; there was nothing in them. Has it struck you that even if one of us should demonstrate this thing, by typing an unfamiliar text in the presence of observers, they'd be able to say we had memorized the message beforehand and deliberately made the required errors?

I don't mean that we couldn't get a hearing—nothing easier with a crackpot hypothesis like this, as you know—but that we'd convince nobody who'd be worth the trouble of convincing.

Later: It comes down to this, that we have either got to drop the thing now—and do you really see yourself doing that, turning out tons of copy between now & your 80th birthday and wondering all the while what grisly mysteries are concealed in the typos?—or else we are both of us going to wind up listing to starboard, two bonnets with but a single bee. If you see any way out that I've overlooked, speak up.

Still later: Have just been through several of my old scripts, a thing which has probably occurred to you, too, by now. There is nothing in them; nothing in anything until just last week. I don't like this. I don't like it in the least.

Why us?

(In pencil) To save you the trouble, the typos in this letter spell out: Wlas (me again) fil fil be be dcrn.

I haven't the slightest idea what it may mean, but for some reason it bothers me more than the other one.

I keep thinking of that "dcrn" and it reminds me of Chesterton's "The Man Who Was Thursday"—do you know it?—that terrifying business about the giant who turned out to be giving everybody their orders, anarchists and policemen alike, while sitting in a pitch dark room.

Feel feel be be. I've got a headache. Write when you can.

Best,

Walt

**T**HE following morning, Jones went uptown to the offices of the news service for which he did most of his work. As a freelance feature writer, he should have gone to the Reading Room of the New York Public Library instead, but he had ancient privileges and felt more at home in the news service's compact reference library.

He looked in the Unabridged first, then in the Dictionary of Abbreviations.

He found no D. L. C. and no D. C. R. M.

D. L. S. was Doctor of Library Science. Jones snorted. Or if you inverted it, D. C. L. was Doctor of Civil Law. There was a C. R. O. M., meaning *Confederación Regional Obrera Mexicana*; you could put a D. on the front to stand for *Director* . . .

What if they were phonetic spellings, though? Everything else in the "messages" was DLC and DCRM. Dulcie and—uh—Decorum. Dulcie and Decorum! He felt a quickening of interest. That meant something, if only—

Phil Mann shuffled into the room and stood quietly watching him, comfortably paunchy in a knit sports shirt, pipe in his hand. Jones looked up.

"Find it?"

"No," said Jones abstractedly. Now what the devil was it that he'd been on the verge of?

Mann glanced at the dictionary on the table. "If it's abbreviations you want, that guy out there is your man."

"Yeah?"

"Sure. I think you met him once. Sam Fowler. Does crossword puzzles for the *Trib*. Any cockeyed combinations of letters, he knows."

Fowler was pudgy and fat-lipped; his eyes were enormous behind swimmy lenses. He gazed

at the ceiling, stroking his chin. "D. L. C.," he said. "Doctor of Literary—Doctor of Library—Nup. D. C. R. M. Hmm . . ." He shook his head.

"I didn't think so," said Jones. "It was just a—"

"Wait a minute, wait a minute."

Fowler shook a fat palm at him and went on staring at the ceiling. He shifted on the edge of the desk, moved his lips once or twice, sniffed, and went on staring.

Mann wandered over to look at one of the softly clicking teletype machines and wandered back again.

At last Fowler said, "Only thing I can think of—don't know whether it'll help you—"

"Yes?" Jones encouraged.

"Computer names. Not any that I ever heard of, but they're making new ones all the time. Digital Linear Computer. Digital Computer—ah—Recompensating, Military. Something like that. Not those, of course. Computer names."

Jones was heading for the door when Fowler called after him.

"Uh?" he asked, turning.

"Any periods?" Fowler repeated.

"Any—? Oh. No periods. Just DLC, DCRM."

"Computer names," said Fowler dogmatically.

AT home, mechanically transcribing from the open book on his left, Jones slowly realized that it didn't have to be computer names, for Pete's sake, at all. How about government departments? Department of Labor Controls? If you were going to imagine things, why not Department of Control and Regulation of Management?

Funny that hadn't occurred to him at the time. Or to Fowler. Jones felt a bit irritated; the man ought to know his own business better than that. And yet the idea of the computers had taken instant hold of his imagination. DLC and DCRM, two giant blocks of masonry, dull-lit, full of the smells of ozone and oiled metal, and the sound of purring . . .

He came to the end of a page and ripped it out of the machine. It was getting so that he hated to touch the typewriter; the keys were like little metal teeth that snapped back at him. Not enough sleep last night or the night before. He was on edge.

He forced himself to think about the government departments again while he tabulated errors. There was something so solid and safe about a government department. Department of Control and Regulation—

His fingers had gone numb. He stared down at his writing.

JONS ABC KLK ABCDEF  
KLK ABC KLK DLC

It was as clear to his mind as if he had heard it in the rhythmic rotary murmur of one of the teletype machines at the office . . . JONES ABC (Click) ABCD EF (Click) ABC (Click) Dulcie. Idling up there in the big masonry block—idling (click) like a metal Red King (click) dreaming of a man named Jones . . .

"Dulcie!" cried Jones, strangling. "Dulce—uh! Dulcie!"

Little steel typewriter keys were stuck in his shoulder. He writhed.

"Wake up! Fred!"

He stared at his wife's face foggily. She was all blurry in the funny light from the bedstand.

"Dulcie," he said with a thick tongue.

She let go his shoulder and brushed a cable of hair back from her forehead. "Fred, what's the matter with you? You scared me."

He moved his lips and tongue experimentally. "All right," he mumbled.

"You're not awake yet," she said, studying him. "Who's Dulcie?"

"Just a nightmare." He shuddered. "Just another damned nightmare."

He threw the bedcovers back and started to get out of bed.

MYRA watched him in silence until he began putting on his clothes. "Where are you going? Do you know what time it is?"

"Half past three," said Jones, glancing at the clock. "Doesn't matter. Wide awake."

"Fred, sit down a minute. I want to talk to you."

Jones kept going out of the bedroom.

"Fred, I've taken about as much of this—"

"Not now!" he shouted.

He went on down to his study, clicked on the friendly lights and sat down by the window. He lit a cigarette. The fluorescent light on his desk began to hum.

"Stop that, damn you!" Jones yelled, and sprang at it. It toppled over, tinkled, sputtered maliciously, and went out.

Jones got the oilcloth cover from behind the filing cabinet, where he had tossed it years ago, and carefully draped it over the typewriter, not touching the metal with his fingers.

"Click," he said between his teeth, pulling the edges of the cover tight. "Go ahead and click."

After a moment, hesitantly, he picked up the telephone. He used a yellow pencil to dial 211.

"Long distance," said the whis-  
kery voice in his ear.

"I want to make a call to

Deadwood, Arizona. Station to station. The Imperial Hotel."

Jones introduced himself to the thin voice at the other end of the line. "I'm trying to locate Mr. Walter Wallace. Did he leave a forwarding address or mention where he was going when he checked out?"

"Just one moment, sir . . . No, sir, Mr. Wallace hasn't checked out. He's still in the hotel."

"Ring him," said Jones. "No, wait a minute. Take a message. Tell him I'm grabbing the first plane out."

Wallace was waiting for him in his room. He was paler than ever. He seemed to listen to himself with a faint, incurious surprise.

"I was due to go on to Reno day before yesterday, but I didn't. No point to it until I get this thing settled. Awfully good of you to come out and compare notes."

The roar of the plane's engines was still faintly in Jones's ears, like a far-off, thunderous, metal surf. He heard himself ask, "Do you have nightmares?"

"Nightmares!" said Wallace faintly, with a wry twist of his lips. "Oh, yes. Any amount. I haven't touched a typewriter."

"Me, either."

"Now you'd think that would help, but it doesn't." Wallace laced his long, translucent fingers together, hunching himself

like a large, pale spider in the maple chair, in the chintz-filtered sunlight. "Has it struck you," he asked slowly, "that none of the messages actually said anything? Told us anything? Contact. Receive message. Obey. Would you take the trouble to reach back two hundred years in time to say that to anybody?"

JONES heard his own breath whistling in his nose. "Why did you say two hundred years?"

"Oh, well," said Wallace, and looked away with a little smirk. "I have been sitting here thinking," he went on, "and do you know what else I've thought of . . . I'm not boring you? Can't understand why not . . . I'm thinking of thrillers I read in my carefree youth, where the murderer would send you a note with some insidious Oriental poison on it. You see, it didn't matter what the note said. It could be anything. For example, 'What price umbrellas now?' You opened it up, and got the poison on your fingers, and then you were as good as dead. *That* was the real message."

"Listen," Jones asked after a moment, "what does it want? Can you feel that? Do you—"

"Want?" said Wallace. "Want? I don't know. We're finding out, though, aren't we? *We opened the bloody envelope.* Now they don't

need to muck about with typographical errors, you see. We're on the hook." He smiled. "What do you suppose the worm says to the fish?"

Jones sat dully in his rumpled topcoat with his hat on his knee. He was unshaven and his shirt was buttoned up wrong. He got a cigarette out of his pocket, looked at it and put it away.

"I do run on," said Wallace politely.

Looking at him, Jones discovered that Wallace was astonishingly flat. He was a nicely colored picture pasted up in the air in front of a flat chintzy wall, with light coming through from somewhere Outside . . . like the peephole boxes they had made in Sunday school when he was a kid, pasting up cut-out people and furniture from magazines, to stand there in a stifling shoe-box and be stared at.

It was a curious feeling. He knew that he could get up and step across the carpet and touch Wallace, and find him round and solid and breathing. But he knew it wouldn't mean anything; he could do it, yet it wouldn't be any sort of proof.

And looking at the flat illusion that was Wallace, he could see that Wallace felt the same about him.

He stood up. "We'll have to work together," he said. "Lick

this thing. Must leave now."

"Oh, yes," Wallace agreed. "Awfully nice of you to call."

MYRA said, "I just can't get used to it." She was sitting on the dim side of the room, hands in her lap, looking at the carpet. Near her, Milt Kalish sat uncomfortably, wishing for more light and holding an unlit cigar in his hand.

From the next room came the intermittent sound of hammering.

"We don't know yet, Myra," said Kalish.

"Can't you tell?" she asked, with a bitter undertone. "I know. He's going to have to go to a sanitarium, or a rest home or whatever name you want to call it. He probably won't come back. I knew it and I could see it on your face, even before dinner. So why won't you admit it?"

Kalish sighed. "Maybe it isn't that simple."

"Simple!" she said.

Kalish did not move; his mind registered the implied resentment, classified it and filed it away. He said nothing and did not move, and his hostility toward the world of people stayed buried so deeply that Myra could only sense that it must be there, not feel it or use it.

The hammering started again and Kalish saw Myra's hands

clench. Then it stopped and there were footsteps in the kitchen.

Myra looked straight ahead.

Jones came into the room, stooping a little, his spectacle rims catching the light. He had a tack hammer in his hand. He went to the secretary, opened the top drawer and scabbled up a handful of pencils.

"Fred," said Kalish, "have you got time to sit down and talk to me a little?"

"*Shudas paparialishus,*" replied Jones. He turned around and went out.

Myra's voice was thin with strain. "What was that? More Russian?"

"No."

"What then?"

Kalish shrugged his shoulders and twisted his neck slightly. It helped the little tickle of pain between his shoulder-blades, but it wasn't a gesture he permitted



himself during office hours. "Lithuanian, perhaps. I didn't recognize it. I'm not really a linguist; I just pick up a few words here and there from my patients."

"What was that he kept saying all during dinner? *That* was Russian."

Kalish blinked. "Yes. *Pogebele*—ruin, devastation."

"Why Russian? That's all I want to know. We never had any trouble—I think I could stand it, but it's that one extra thing on top of everything else." She began to cry. "Russian!"

"You don't know where he might have picked it up?"

"No." She added bitterly, "Two nights ago—when I told you about, when I thought he was coming out of it—I asked him. And he said it was because his great-great-great-I-forget-how-many-times grandson was a Russian. Then I *knew* he was crazy."

**J**ONES was building a maze. He had started with little rectangular strips of wood from an orange crate, all different sizes, and when the crate gave out he had begun using strips of tin, held together at the corners by all-purpose cement and lead pencils.

"Maze" was the nearest word. It was a little like a model for a mad architect's building, skeletons of rooms piled one on an-

other, first the wood from the orange crate; then tin, all at different levels, all open at the ends, so that you could look all the way through it. He did not know what he wanted it for.

Myra and some man were standing behind him, watching.

They didn't bother Jones. In one ear and out the other. Now a top piece here and then we start a new cell . . .

He reached for the tin and found only a snippet, not big enough for anything. There had been a bigger piece on the bench, he remembered, but no matter. He wandered down the bench, looking at things. There was a scrap of linoleum—

Somebody's arm in a blue pinstripe sleeve appeared just as he reached for it and took the linoleum away.

What else? Jones started musingly across the garage workshop, thinking and looking. Kerosene can—big one, empty, standing in the corner. He could cut that up with the tin snips, probably. But just as he got to it, the same blue pinstripe arm came and took it away.

Jones looked around in mild annoyance. The pinstripe man was standing there, with the can in one hand and the piece of tin in the other. Myra stood right beside him.

He reached for the tin; that

would be better than fooling around cutting up a kerosene can. The blue pinstripe held it away from him.

"Fred, do you remember me? Milt Kalish? We used to live next door in Long Branch. Remember?"

"Kalish," he said agreeably, and reached for the tin again.

Pinstripe held it away from him. "Not quite yet, Fred. First tell me what you're building here. Can you tell me now? Do you want to tell me what you're building here?"

"A thing," explained Jones. He made descriptive motions with his hands. "You know."

**M**YRA put a handkerchief over her mouth and went away.

Jones reached for the tin.

"Not yet, Fred. Tell me, who is Dulcie?"

Dulcie . . . A pulsating hum. A close warmth. A darkness. He could feel her around him, especially when he closed his eyes, but she was a long way away. It was hard for her to talk to him, hard for him to listen.

"Is she a person?"

Ridiculous idea . . . He grinned, shook his head.

"Is Dulcie female?"

Well, yes. You would have to say so, he supposed.

He nodded.

The voice kept on. Had Dulcie told him to make the thing, what was it for, did he see her, hear her? "Does she talk to anybody else besides you?"

"Not yet," Jones said. And that was enough. He turned around and went back to his bench, in case the piece of tin should be there, after all, and it was. He cut rectangles of tin with the snips, carefully, and began to build a new cell that would finish the fourth tier.

Their voices trickled through his head. "I think we'll leave him alone now for a few minutes. You said there were some papers?"

"Downstairs. In his study."

Pinstripe was gone, which meant Jones could go on with his work.

He began cutting linoleum into neat strips. Linoleum would do fine.

"Fred—" she began weepily.

He was cementing the first wall of a new cell that had nothing to lean against. That was the hardest part, making the first wall solid and straight. People didn't know.

"Fred, can't you talk to me?"

The linoleum was working very well. He had no way of being sure, but he had a feeling he was almost through.

A Myra hand came and yanked away the rest of the linoleum. Jones noticed the heavy paper

of the calendar on the wall and pulled it down. He cut a few strips of it experimentally.

It worked fine.

**T**HE maze was finished. Jones knew what it was for.

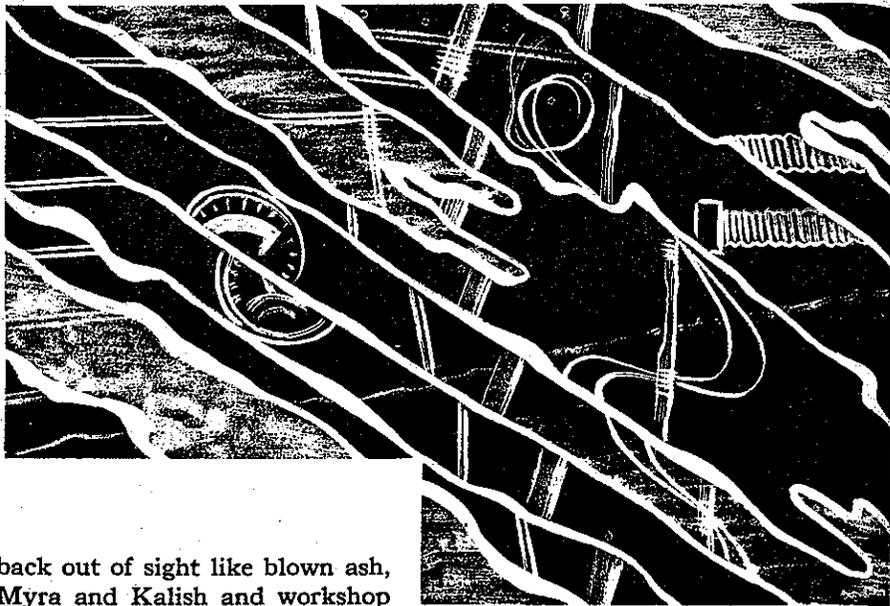
The reason it looked weird to other people was that it reminded them of a building. And of course, if you tried to make a building out of it, it was all wrong.

It was a model of something else altogether: a model of a way of thinking. It was, you might say, a constant reminder. In and around and down. *In* and around and down. Jones tilted the thing gently to see better. *In* and around and. *In* and around. *In* and. *In*.

It was like looking at one of those hypnotic spiral disks, but with a difference. Looking at a spiral only stunned your forebrain, opened up your skull to let any suggestion in. But looking into the maze forced your mind into a definite pattern, over and over—like tuning a radio receiver to one station, or like making a lock that would fit only one key.

Jones's mind was perfectly clear. He knew the maze was to make him hear Dulcie better. And he heard her.

When he shut his eyes, the world blackened and slipped



back out of sight like blown ash, Myra and Kalish and workshop and all. He felt the centuries wavering past him until he hung disembodied in tomorrow's twilight—

A cool dim place. Tip. Mind your hats goan in. A silence that trembled in the walls.

This was Dulcie. As he hung there, loving her, her knowledge flowed through him.

*He remembered how it all began:*

"Of course it isn't a substitute for the General Staff or anything like that. Human minds still have to make the decisions. But modern warfare involves so many factors that it really has become a mathematical problem. And to

solve a mathematical problem faster, more efficiently, we use an electronic calculator—DLC. We know, incidentally, that the other side has been doing the same for the last three years."

After that, at first, Dulcie munched the little problems they gave her and ticked out the answers. But it happened that a human evaluation lost a battle and they set up the channels to feed information directly into Dulcie. And a human decision lost another battle and, not without fierce argument among themselves, they gave her the channels

of command. They had no real choice, except to wait until the other side did it to their computer first.

So Dulcie became a chess player. Her board was the planet, her pieces men and machines.

*P to QB4:* and down rained a hell of missiles that pretended

economy became her passion. She reduced the elements of warfare to a basic few, and reduced them again.

Across the ocean, deep in another continent, so did her enemy.

Now war to a computer is not the same as war to a human being. Nobody had ever thought it was, or so much as tried to make Dulcie feel that human revulsion from the things they so enthusiastically did.

Dulcie did two things that no one had expected.



the rooftops were not there, nor the people under them, nor the ships in the harbor, nor the boys playing ball outside the town.

**D**ULCIE was a living thing. It was in her to grow and increase her ability, to do her job with greater thoroughness, efficiency, simplicity, elegance.

Like an old gray philosopher, or boxer, or politician, she learned to do much with little;



Probing into the mysteries of the human brain, so convenient and puzzling a model of her own, she found the pattern that could fix a mind forever in one unreasoning conviction. She chose the simplest and best for her purpose: *I love Dulcie*. She insinuated that pattern into the mind of every man, woman and child within her reach—within her hemisphere—and canceled out all the problems of discipline, training, tradition, politics, civil government, military organization, law enforcement—seven-tenths, let's say, of the human picture—at one stroke.

The second thing was even simpler. She deduced the existence of her opponent, searched for him on wavelengths which should be as perceptible to him as to her, and worked out a system of communication.

It was not necessary for men or machines to go to war. DLC could say to DCRM, "I move such a force here." DCRM could reply, "Then I move here."

Not every game had to be played out. When Dulcie lost, she paid. Machines could be destroyed more efficiently by their owner than by the enemy; human beings, asked to die, did it tidily and conveniently. There was no cruelty or humor in it for Dulcie; it simply made her books balance.

And when, in spite of her best fumbling efforts, her human beings—her counters—diminished until none were left, what was she to do but search in the vastness of time for more? She began tentatively, feeling back along the ancestral lines of the last to die, touching here an ancestor more susceptible than the rest, here another—

JONES mumbled something. "What was that?" Myra asked Kalish. "Did you get it?"

Kalish was carrying some typed papers; the inked notes at the bottom of them, in his own handwriting, were not quite dry. His face had a peculiar expression, a little like that of a man who thinks he has just been wounded, but hasn't felt the pain.

"Latin this time," he said. "*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*. 'It is sweet and fitting to die for one's country.'"

The link strained tight. Jones felt his love gathering inside him like a fist: suffocating love, bursting love. He knew it all now. He knew what Dulcie wanted him for and the joy of being chosen was more than he could bear.

His heart burst with it.

"Click," said Dulcie.

"Click," answered Decorum.

And Jones did.

—DAMON KNIGHT

# ONE WAY

*I thought of every way to save  
Hal from the Lydna Project and  
failed . . . but the women didn't!*

By MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD

Illustrated by Irv DOCKTOR

WE had the driver let us off in the central district and took a copter-taxi back to Homefield. There's no disgrace about it, of course; we just didn't feel like having all the neighbors see the big skycar with LYDNA PROJECT painted on its side, and then having them drop in casually to express what they would call interest and we would know to be curiosity.

There are people who boast that their sons and daughters have been picked for Lydna. What is there to boast about? It's pure chance, within limits.

And Hal is our only child and we love him.

Lucy didn't say a word all the way back from saying good-by

to him. Lucy and I have been married now for 27 years and I guess I know her about as well as anybody on Earth does. People who don't know her so well think she's cold. But I knew what feelings she was crushing down inside her.

Besides, I wasn't feeling much like talking myself. I was remembering too many things:

Hal at about two, looking up at me—when I would come home dead-tired from a hard day of being chewed at by half a dozen bosses right up to the editor-in-chief whenever anything went the least bit out of kilter—with a smile that made all my tiredness disappear. Hal, when I'd pick him up at school, proudly dis-