

CHROME PASTURES

*The Car was the new concept of the golden calf.
And the Green Pastures and Still Waters had
been replaced by the Happy Highways of Heaven . . .*

Object worship reached its heyday in the mid twenty-first century. The bluebird, which had already become a number of ignominious things, finally became an automobile. It grew chrome wings and exchanged its heart for a carburetor, its feet for wheels and its backyard for a pedestal in The Church of the Happy Traveler. It was inevitable that the procedure for catching it should change.

—Bethe Royale, MASS MOTIVATIONS

THE SENECA Cathedral was crowded even for Display Sunday. Marcus Brett shouldered his way through the vestibule into the big Showroom and paused at the head of the center aisle. The Showroom was ablaze with the blue-white radiance of fluorescent candles, a radiance brightly multiplied by the mirrored walls, caught by the polished chrome ceiling and flung blindingly down upon the congregation. The new Seneca model which was to be unveiled stood upon the pedestal behind the Dealer's dais, concealed by a huge damask sheet. Brett looked at it hungrily, trying to visualize its new lines, its new combination of colors. He took a slow deep breath, then started down the aisle toward his reserved seat.

The seat next to his was Czech's, Brett's turn-buddy. Brett was surprised to find it occupied by a White Collar girl. White Collar Workers were getting bolder and bolder every day. Not that the girls' boldness was going to do her any good: as soon as Czech showed up she'd have to leave.

Illustrated by Kelly Freas

She glanced at Brett curiously when he sat down beside her and he returned the glance with his flat gray eyes. Her hair was short and dark and her eyes were a limpid brown. Her small turned up nose and round cheeks lent her face a quality of childish innocence; it could almost have passed for a little girl's face if her full lips hadn't given it away. She was wearing a cheap majorette ensemble, but cheap or not, on her robust young body it looked good.

Quite without his knowing it, Brett's glance had become a stare. The girl dropped her eyes, obviously embarrassed, though she did not blush. Brett turned away then, irked at the direction of his thoughts, and tried to concentrate on the sheet covered model.

It looked slightly longer than last year's job, but he couldn't be sure. However, an increase in length was a good bet, for the Seneca manufacturers had a tradition to live up to: every new model they put on the market virtually *had* to be longer than its predecessor...

Gradually Brett became aware of a subtle perfume. There was something about it—perhaps the nostalgic scent of apple blossoms which it contained—that intrigued him. There was no question as to its source and it was all he could do to keep his eyes on the sheet covered model where they belonged. He was relieved when the electronic organ struck up the Seneca hymn and the choir came down the aisle, Brett listened to their voices with usual dedication, but he still smelled apple blossoms.

After the choir had aligned themselves on either side of the pedestal and delivered their last note, the Dealer himself appeared, resplendent in a gold and scarlet robe. He walked slowly and majestically down the aisle, stepped upon the dais, and turned to face the congregation. His eyes surveyed the

packed Showroom. "My children," he said simply, in his deep resonant voice; then, after a brief prayer, he began the Seneca beatitudes:

"Blessed are the rubber forests of Vega Twelve for their worthy contribution to the betterment of Mankind. Blessed are the mountains of Rigel Seven for their tin and their copper and their magnesium. . . ." And finally—"Blessed are the rust red plains of Alpha Crucis Fourteen, for without their manganese, their titanium, and their iron ore, life as we know it would have long since perished from the Earth."

The sermon followed. It was a typical sermon, exalting the supreme patience of the Finance Bishop and deprecating the thoughtless irresponsibility of the average consumer. Brett shifted uneasily. He had a guilty conscience. During the caryear which was now drawing to a close, he'd missed three weekly installments and had had to have them prorated. As a result, the remaining installments had been so huge that he'd barely been able to manage them, and he'd come uncomfortably close to losing his Seneca. Even now, with his final payment safely deposited with the Finance Bishop, the very thought of such a calamity was enough to evoke tiny globules of sweat on his brow.

He promised himself to be more conservative in the future, chase fewer women, drink fewer Dream Girls. Then his attention wandered. The Dealer was explaining a new decree which the Finance Bishop had issued, and decrees bored Brett to death. He unsealed his white driving jacket and slumped down in his seat, crossing his booted legs. The apple blossom scent was all around him, more intriguing than ever. He wondered rather desperately what had happened to Czech and concluded that something important must have come up and made it impossible for him to attend the services.

At last the sermon ended and the moment for the unveiling arrived. The congregation murmured in awed expectation, and there was an over-all shift in the spectrum of gaudy driving jackets as everyone leaned forward in his seat. After giving forth with the usual panegyrics concerning the superiority of Seneca models in general and the new Seneca model in particular, the Dealer said: "And now it is my privilege to reveal our latest creative masterpiece—the Bluebird!"

He raised one square bejeweled hand and the sheet fluttered ceilingward like a frightened cloud. At first there was only silence, and then a mass *Ahhhh* rose from the congregation. Following the *Ahhhh*, voice after voice was raised in reverent astonishment.

"Why," Brett gasped, "it *is* longer. A good ten inches longer!"

"It's a dream," the White Collar girl breathed.

"Beautiful," Brett murmured. "Beautiful beautiful beautiful ..."

He began to notice some of the details he had glossed over in his first moment of rapture. The Bluebird was not only longer than last year's model, it was lower, too: its highest point was barely three feet above the pedestal. And there was a striking change in the chrome decor, the main feature being a wing-like strip along the brilliant blue flanks so suggestive of movement that it was hard to believe the car was standing still.

"It looks almost as if it could fly," the White Collar girl said.

In his excitement, Brett forgot her status. "It's a swell job all right," he said, turning towards her.

"Such a beautiful blue!"

Briefly, Brett forgot the car. The girl's enthusiasm had turned her full cheeks pink, made her dark eyes sparkle. Her cheap majorette ensemble was painfully conspicuous in a gathering where women wore feminine adaptations of masculine driving attire; nevertheless, it brought out her figure in a way that a pair of thigh-tight breeches and a breast-fitted jacket never could have. Abruptly Brett wondered what she'd be like undressed. He'd never tried to pick up a White Collar girl, not only because they were beneath his social status, but because it had never occurred to him that any of them would be worth the trouble.

This one looked like she might be worth a lot of trouble. "What's your name?" he asked impulsively, invisible apple blossoms falling all around him.

"Linda," she said. "Linda Halms."

"Mark Brett... Like to ride?"

Her eyes had been on his face. At his question they dropped to the gaudy Seneca insigne on the collar of his jacket. "Yes. Yes I do."

"How would it be if I picked you up around six tonight and we take a whirl?"

"It would be divine," Linda

The Dealer was bringing the services to a close. "Tonight," he said, "the Bluebird will be placed on display in Seneca Square. While there will be enough of the new models to supply all our customers, I'd advise all prospective buyers to place their orders before Turn-In Friday in order to be assured of delivery by New Car Sunday. Orders will be taken in the vicarage immediately following the end of the services."

After the prayer, Brett accompanied Linda to the street. Standing in the April morning sunlight, he said: "Guess I'll order mine right away. No sense waiting."

He watched for a gleam of envy to come into her eyes; such a reaction on the part of a person who couldn't even buy one of the chrome wings of the new model would have been logical. But Linda's eyes remained the same—large and limpid and guileless—and all she said was, "I'm glad, Mr. Brett."

Brett was annoyed. "Whereabouts in Center City do you live?" he asked abruptly.

She hadn't said she lived in Center City and his assuming that she did was a calculated insult, even though both of them knew she couldn't possibly live anywhere else. But if the insult got home, she gave no sign. "The old office block," she said. "Building 14, Apartment 902."

"I'll see you about six," Brett said. He was about to turn and walk away, but she beat him to it. She threw a soft goodbye over her shoulder just before the departing crowd engulfed her. He stood there furious for a moment, but a wisp of her perfume had lingered behind her and when it touched his nostrils his anger dissolved.

Suddenly he remembered the small apple orchard in which he had played as a little boy. The whole scene came back, the trees with their pink-white blossoms, his mother reading in the nearby summerhouse; the utter peace and tranquillity that had pervaded the lovely June day. . . The orchard was gone now, leveled to make room for the new illuminated Raceway, the orchard and the antique double garage behind which it had stood; and his mother too, for that matter, killed in the same five car pile-up in which his father had perished magnificently. Only the memory remained, strengthened by the number of times he had had to recall it orally in the presence of the finance psychoanalyst during the yearly pre-contract examination, and triggered now by the ersatz scent of apple blossoms contained in a White Collar girl's perfume.

It was far from being an unpleasant memory, and ordinarily Brett would have permitted his mind to dwell upon it. But there was a much more important item on his mind this morning and the memory had scarcely touched his consciousness before the Bluebird brushed it aside with a scintillating Hurry of chrome wings. Brett turned and began walking towards the vicarage.

The Seneca vicarage adjoined the Seneca cathedral, facing the mile-wide business boulevard that encircled Center City. While its modest façade could not compete with the glorious façade of the cathedral itself, it was imposing in its own right. It had no chrome-mullioned windows of course, and no chrome-garnished steeples; but its ornamental glassbrick design was pleasing to the eye, and it boasted the largest display window of any vicarage in the city.

Last year's Seneca—the Four Million model—still stood in the window. Brett merely glanced at it as he passed. A year ago its sleek lines and scarlet body had dazzled him, and he had been one of the thousands of enthusiastic First Owners to drive in the New Car Sunday Parade. But now he had glimpsed the Bluebird and beside the Bluebird the Four Million looked like an antique clunker, only too deserving of the fiery demise which awaited it in one of the open hearths during the coming caryear.

A queue of people had formed outside the vicarage door and Brett appended himself to it. He lit a cigarette and smoked nervously. It was noon by the time he stood in front of the caged window and presented his identity disk to the acolyte in charge.

The acolyte took the disk and placed it beneath the objective eye of the electronic examiner. Brett waited complacently for the familiar "Beep" of approval. He was demoralized when the examiner emitted the raucous buzz that signified credit disqualification.

"There must be some mistake," he said tightly. "Try it again."

The acolyte did so. The buzz sounded again, more raucous than before. "There's no mistake," the

acolyte said.

"But there must be!" Brett's whole world was tottering. "I want to see the Dealer. I demand to see the Dealer!"

"If you wish." The acolyte depressed a button with his elbow. "Another one, Father," he said into his wristcom, giving Brett's name and number. Then he raised his wrist to his ear, listened a moment, finally lowered his arm and depressed the elbow switch again. "The Dealer will see you presently," he said to Brett, handing back the disk. "Take a seat, please."

There was a bench running the length of the office at right angles to the acolyte's window. Brett saw that it was already crowded, and he felt some consolation in the evident fact that his disk wasn't the only one that the examiner had rejected. He made room for himself, wedging his lean body between a perspiring fat man and a sniffing woman; then he folded his arms across his chest and gazed up through the transparent ceiling into the pale blue April sky.

A jet had just finished stratosphere-writing. Brett read the familiar sentence automatically: THE FINANCE MAN WILL GET YOU IF YOU DON'T WATCH OUT! He winced and dropped his eyes to the tile floor. The Finance Man had been close upon his heels for the past several months and the experience had been harrowing. And then the thought struck him: perhaps his three defaulted payments had had something to do with his credit disqualification.

He shook his head. Missing payments and prorating them was common practice, and becoming more common every day. It was unthinkable that the Finance Bishop would disqualify anyone's credit on those grounds alone.

Or was it?

Brett spent the next two hours trying to convince himself that it was. Every fifteen minutes or so a small, tousle-haired acolyte threw open the door leading to the Dealer's quarters, called a name, and one of the occupants of the bench got up and followed him out of the office. But the bench never emptied. At intervals the examiner behind the acolyte's window would emit a raucous buzz, and shortly thereafter another crestfallen consumer would come over and sit down.

Presently the tousle-haired acolyte opened the door and said: "Marcus Brett." Brett got up, followed him through a long cool corridor, through two sumptuous outer rooms and into a large study. Three of the study walls were lined with car catalogues, parts manuals, and road atlases—all bound in imitation Morocco leather. On the wall opposite the door hung a huge three-dimensional mural depicting the popular conception of the Highways of Heaven: shining roads leaped like shards of light from fleecy cloud to fleecy cloud against a backdrop of breathless blue, and here and there along the promised highways could be seen the speeding cars of the Happy Travelers.

The Dealer sat behind a tremendous chrome desk studying a thick sheaf of papers. He had divested himself of his sacerdotal robes and was wearing a black, smartly-cut driving jacket that contrasted effectively with the whiteness of his turned around collar. He looked up when Brett and the acolyte entered, dismissing the acolyte with a wriggle of his little finger. "Sit down, my son," he said to Brett, indicating a chrome chair by the desk.

Brett complied nervously and the Dealer returned his attention to the papers. He was an old man—forty-five at least. But that was not surprising for Dealers were usually good drivers. The ancient tortoise-rimmed spectacles which he affected gave his full square face an aristocratic touch, and his dark brown hair grew gray and graceful along his temples.

After a moment he looked up at Brett again. "You realize, do you not," he said in his deep pleasant voice, "that these papers which I am perusing are facsimiles of your contract, your promptitude record, your character analysis, and your biography?"

"Yes, Father."

"An electronic examiner *never* makes a mistake, but I am always willing to check and recheck a customer's dossier if he so wishes. I have checked yours thoroughly and see nothing that would invalidate the examiner's decision. What makes you think that your credit does *not* deserve disqualification?"

"I can't see any reason why it should deserve disqualification," Brett said hoarsely. "My Four Million's all paid for—I deposited my last installment in the Finance Bishop's account yesterday. Maybe I

defaulted once or twice, but—"

"Three times," the Dealer said. .. "Did you attend my services this morning?"

"Certainly, Father. I attend your services every Sunday."

The Dealer shook his large hand- some head in mild despair. "You attend them—and hear nothing of what I say. This morning I called everyone's attention to the new restriction which the Finance Bishop has seen fit to impose on future finance contractions, yet apparently no one in the Showroom heard me other than myself."

Brett hung his head. "I heard you mention something about a restriction, but I'm afraid I missed exactly what it was."

"I'll repeat verbatim what I said." The Dealer leaned forward, resting his elbows on the polished chrome of the desktop. "Listen carefully, my son: In view of the fact that delinquency in weekly finance payments has increased deplorably during the recent caryear, the Finance Bishop has been forced to issue the following decree: Any car buyer who has defaulted on more than two installments during the caryear ending April 6, 2055 shall be deemed unworthy of contract renewal on any new model unless (1) he deposits a down payment in addition to the traditional one third allowance on his last year's model, said payment not to be less than one fourth the amount of the remaining balance, or (2) he submits evidence that his character has, or will in the near future, come under the stabilizing influence of a factor hitherto unresent."

Brett was on his feet. His face was ashen. "But that's fantastic, Father!" he shouted. "You know I can't raise that much money!"

The Dealer raised a square, twinkling hand. "Calm yourself, my son. If alternative number one is impracticable, why not consider alternative number two? And in this connection, may I presume to elaborate upon the Finance Bishop's erudite, but somewhat confusing, phraseology? The factor to which His Holiness refers is, to put it simply, marriage. It is a statistical fact that of all the car buyers who defaulted on more than two payments during the recent caryear, ninety-eight percent were unattached men or women, the men predominating by a ratio of almost two to one. Quite obviously the responsibilities of conjugality have a stabilizing effect upon both sexes, particularly the male; add to this happy eventuality the fact that marriage brings two incomes together over the same garage and you begin to appreciate the shrewd reasoning behind the Bishop's decree ...Have you any marital prospects, my son?"

Brett shook his head numbly. His last affair had been dead embers for more than a week, and the one coining up with the White Collar girl didn't count. A White Collar girl was a far cry from being a marital prospect.

"Then I'd suggest," the Dealer continued, "that you start looking around. And may I remind you," he added, his wide, thin-lipped mouth curving in a bleak smile, "that you haven't much time if you don't want to get caught without a new car. You have, in fact—and he glanced at *his* watch—"six days, nine hours, forty minutes, and some odd seconds before New Car Sun-Day."

He wriggled his little finger and the tousle-haired acolyte appeared magically in the doorway. "Show Consumer Brett out through the side entrance." the Dealer said. "And for Seneca's sake, comb your hair!"

BRETT HEADED straight for the parklot. He was so upset that he almost climbed into his Seneca without deactivating the sentry and he came close to getting his brains blown out for trying to steal his own car.

The sentry was the latest thief device to be put on the market, and like all the devices that had preceded it, it would be good only until the car thieves got onto it. Otherwise its only drawback was its impartiality: while, it was functioning anyone who came within its field of vision was automatically classified as a car thief and shortly thereafter became a car thief with a hole in his head.

Driving along the boulevard, Brett considered getting rid of the deadly little mechanism. He decided not to. The safety of his Seneca warranted a little personal danger. After all, it was the only car he had,

and from the way things were beginning to look, it was the last car he was ever going to have.

He made a complete circuit of the business district, his mind reverting to the Bluebird. He had never wanted a car so badly. Presently he turned down one of the tangent streets that led to Peripheral City. After the mile-wide boulevard, Peripheral City seemed friendly and secure. Brett drove along slowly, winding through the idyllic streets, looking at the trimmed hedges and the pruned shade trees, the neat garages set well back from the street and reached by concrete, blacktop, pebble, or gravel driveways; the charming little self-service stations tucked away in maple arbors.

Garages always fascinated him, regardless of his mood. There was that colonial affair, with sedate hedgerows leading up to its early American double doors; and then, block farther on, that ranch type affair, so low and rambling that there was hardly enough space for the overhead apartment. Double garages predominated of course; one car families were unusual in Peripheral City, and a single garage almost invariably implied a single man or woman.

Presently he came to the street that led to his own garage and turned down it. His problem was heavy on his shoulders as he climbed the narrow stairs to his overhead apartment, and when he bumped his head on the low beam in the kitchenette, his morale was far from being improved.

He ordered a salmon course from the Instantcook, and picked at it disinterestedly when it emerged. For one of the few times in his life he couldn't concentrate on his food. All he could think of was the Bluebird.

He glanced at his watch. He had nearly two hours to kill before he could pick up Linda. He decided against going for a ride—riding would only bring the Bluebird more poignantly to mind. That left 3V. Brett threw the remnants of his meal into the devourer and went into the compact living room. He sat down in his relaxer and toed on the 3V set. The Construction Engineer materialized on the screen.

Ordinarily Brett never listened to the Construction Engineer Changing channels when the thin haunted face appeared was practically a conditioned reflex in an car owner. But Brett wasn't himself today, and he lay back in his relaxer, hardly aware of what the man was saying.

However, his indifference was short-lived. There was a quality about the Construction Engineer's voice that commanded attention: a deep, vibrant sincerity that belied the insanity of his perspective, the dearth of logic behind his words.

His words were many—

"—cannot impart sanctity. Stealing the hierarchical nomenclature, the architectonics, and the ceremonial garb from a genuine institution and integrating, them into a pseudo-institution can never validate that pseudo-institution in the eyes of God. A money lender is still a money lender no matter what title he confers upon himself. Spires do not a cathedral make, nor sacerdotal robes a man of God.

"Economic necessity can never justify the apotheosis of metal. The fact that the yearly turnover of automobiles is inexorably related to the financial security of the individual is an inadequate foundation for a religion. I say to you: Better an economic chaos than the ideological chaos which affronts us now!"

Brett shifted uncomfortably in the relaxer. What the Construction Engineer was saying was pure nonsense, but his sincerity was so unquestionable that the nonsense took on some of the aspects of sense.

Perhaps that was why the Dealers feared him so much, why they campaigned so incessantly against him. The Seneca Dealer was the most zealous campaigner, possibly because it was the Seneca Memorial Trust Building that had precipitated the Construction Engineer's heresy. A year ago his bid had been accepted by the Seneca Foundation and he had begun the job on schedule. Then, the day following the ceremonial laying of the first cornerstone, he had inexplicably disappeared. All efforts to contact him had failed, and finally another contractor had been engaged. Then, six months later, the Construction Engineer had reappeared, purchased 3V time, and commenced his series of anti-automobile lectures.

To date, the Dealers had been unable to do much about him. Even the Finance Bishop was helpless. For although the Construction Engineer's lectures sometimes embodied economic and ethical heresy, he had never advocated the overthrow of the existent society on any but a religious level and therefore could not be prosecuted.

With an effort Brett raised his eyes to the man's face. It was an old face—the Construction Engineer

was a good fifty. But considering the fact that he had not driven a car for years, his age was not unusual. In spite of himself Brett found himself listening to the man's words:

"The canonization in the year 1970 of the original automobile manufacturers was the result of diverse pressures: the whole economy hinged on car output and car consumption; the four-wheeled *raison d'etre* of the average individual had long ago been established; and the automobile foundations had already begun the initial experiments in faster-than light drives that led eventually to the conquest of interstellar space—and of course to the acquisition of desperately needed natural resources.

"But the canonization of the original automobile manufacturers can never justify the series of sacrilegious events that followed it: the new sales methods, the renaming of names, the rebuilding of showrooms to resemble cathedrals, the creation of the Church of the, Happy Traveler and its subsequent usurpation of all religious activities in the western world; the supplanting of Green Pastures and Still Waters with the immature concept of the Highways of Heaven—"

The Construction Engineer paused, as though overcome by his own rhetoric. "What" he asked abruptly, "is a car?" There was a blackboard behind him and, turning, he printed the letter "A" in the upper left hand corner and the letter "B" in the lower right hand corner.

"A car," he went on, "is a mechanical conveyance capable of transporting us from point A" to point "B", or, conversely, from point "B" to point "A". It is nothing more than that.

"It is a means toward an end, and as long as it is so regarded, it is beneficial to the human race. When, however, it is regarded as an end in itself, nothing but tragedy can result—"

With a convulsive movement Brett pressed the channel pedal with the toe of his right boot. The Construction Engineer was beginning to get on his nerves.

He looked at his watch: 5:00 o'clock. If he stopped some place and had a few drinks he could be at Linda's apartment long enough after six to convince her that he didn't much care whether she went riding with him or not.

He descended to the garage, deactivated the sentry and got in his Seneca. He chose a tangent street at random, made a half circle of the business boulevard and drew into the parklot of the The Hub Cap. It was dusk by then and the myriad lights of the business buildings formed coruscating palisades on either side of the car streaming boulevard.

Brett brooded over a Dream Girl at the chrome bar, trying to see some way out of his dilemma. He lit a cigarette and considered selling his garage to raise the one fourth down payment which the Finance Bishop required. But if he sold his garage he'd have to live in his car, and it would only be a question of time before the carcops picked him up for Indecency. Next he considered putting a second mortgage on his garage. But that would never do: he had trouble enough keeping up the payments on the first mortgage.

Finally, after three more Dream Girls, he got around to considering marriage. He didn't consider it for long. Marriage, when you were only twenty-six, was an outrageous price to have to pay, even for a Bluebird. Besides, he had no prospects anyway—unless you counted Linda.

And he was damned if he'd count her!

But just the same, when he thought of her his pulse came to life, and he glanced at the clock inset in the big chrome hub cap behind the bar: 5:57. He finished his fifth Dream Girl hurriedly and went out and got in his Seneca. It wasn't technically wise to be *too* late.

Center City had once been *the* city before the gradual exodus to the suburbs had isolated it. Some of its buildings were centuries old, and its ancient streets were little more than series of chuck holes, frost upheavals, and fissures.

A long time ago the begrimed towers had been honeycombed with offices; now the few offices needed in a society of business machines existed behind the bright facades on the business boulevard, while the old office space had been taken over by the White Collar Workers and converted into apartments.

The elevator of Building 14 creaked alarmingly as it raised him to the ninth floor. He was relieved when he stepped out into the cluttered corridor. Old fashioned fluorescents cast pallid light on the dusty

floor, lent a ghastly tinge to the peeling walls. Many of the rooms were vacant, but most of them were occupied by squabbling families. The stale odor of plankton soup hung in the air like miasma.

By the time he found Apartment 12, Brett was sorry he had come. Then, when the battered door opened at his knock and Linda stepped out to meet him, he was suddenly glad that he had come. The odor of plankton soup faded away and the corridor became an apple orchard in June. Linda had exchanged the majorette ensemble for a simple dacron dress, and she looked like a Greek goddess with a baby face who had just descended the slopes of Olympus to find out what mortal life was all about.

Brett took a slow, deep breath, "All set, baby?" he said.

When Brett was a small boy attending elementary tech, there had been a certain period which he and all the other pupils looked forward to each day. It was the period during which the identifilms—donated by the Seneca, the Oneida, or one of the other Dealers—were shown, and it was called the Daydream Hour.

Invariably the identifilms dealt with automobiles, and invariably the youthful audience got a chance to get behind the wheel at least once during the hour. Total identification techniques were primitive in those days, but they were capable of lending a sense of participation, especially if you were a child.

The film that had made the deepest impression on Brett depicted a boy taking his girl for a ride in a new Seneca. The boy was Brett's own age and Brett identified with him easily, and shortly *he* was behind the wheel and feeling the pulse of the car beneath his feet and the summer wind in his hair. From that moment on, he had lived for the time when he could really climb into a new Seneca and really take his girl for a ride on the Speedway.

He had realized the Daydream many times by now of course, though the Speedway had bowed out before the wider and better banked Raceway; but those first vicarious moments were still sweet in his memory, and he knew he would never forget them as long as he lived.

"Do you always drive so fast?" Linda asked

"You call this fast?" Brett said. "You should ride to work with me some time!"

The illuminated Raceway had its usual Sunday evening complement of hurtling cars. Brett twisted adroitly in and out, never diminishing the Seneca's speed unless collision were unavoidable. The myriad lights of the Seneca Assembly Plant began to flicker by. Brett pointed.

"That's where they put these jobs together," he said.

"Do you work there?"

"Not me. I run an open hearth."

"Oh."

It was a small "oh." And small wonder, Brett thought. The kid was probably overawed. Here was a world she had probably never seen before, imprisoned as she was in the cramped canyons of Center City.

The lights of the Seneca Stamping Plant came next, and after them, the haze-dimmed lights of the Seneca Steel Mill. Brett pointed out the open hearth which he operated, but it was behind them by the time Linda turned her head.

"Ever seen the spaceport?" he asked.

"Not for years."

"I know a parking place where we can get a good view of the ships. "What d'you say?"

"All right," Linda said.

Brett watched for the turnoff, and when it appeared, slipped smoothly out of the stream of traffic. The darkness of the countryside activated the Seneca's headlights, and the macadam leaped into bright visibility. It was familiar territory to Brett and he drove confidently, taking the banked curves at an easy ninety. It was the kind of driving he liked best.

The spires of the ships began to show against the starred sky. Brett slowed the Seneca, keeping an eye on the right shoulder of the macadam. Presently the sign he was looking for appeared: SKULL HILL ROAD. PROCEED AT YOUR OWN RISK.

It was a dirt road, badly eroded by the spring rains. He followed it to the crest of the hill from which

it had obtained its name, then turned off into a blackened field. The hill had been halved to make room for the expanding port, and he braked the Seneca near the edge of the man-made cliff. There was a ship squatting in the blasting pit at the foot of the cliff, its tapered prow rising high above the halved hilltop. Beyond it, the prows of other ships showed, some in darkness, some pined with the round radiance of open ports

Brett turned off the motor and extinguished the headlights. He turned to Linda. "Like it here?"

"Is it safe? That sign back there—"

"That sign is for rubes who don't know anything about ship schedules," Brett said. "That big job in the pit there is the only one close enough to burn us and it isn't due to blast off till Turn-In Friday. It's a prison ship."

"If it did blast right now, there wouldn't be much left of us, would there, Mark?" she said.

"Not even ashes. But I didn't bring you all the way up here just to talk about ships." He slipped his arm around her shoulders.

She moved closer to him. Her face, when he bent down to kiss her, was soft and pale in the starlight; her lips were tender, cool and moist. Apple blossoms fell aromatically and April changed subtly to June. A sense of security pervaded Brett; he felt safe and warm and wanted.

His hand fumbled with the shoulder strap of the dacron dress, then pawed of its own accord. He tried again, and again his hand refused to do his bidding.

He raised his head and looked down into Linda's round starlit face. Her eyes seemed more limpid than ever, and from their deeps the reflected stars looked steadily up at him. Tenderness suffused him, tenderness and anger. For with the tenderness came the realization that he could not treat this girl the way he had treated all the others.

His need for her was different; it was far more complex than the simple craving he'd experienced in the presence of the other girls he had taken out. He could not analyze it—it was far beyond him; and finally he gave up trying.

He bent and kissed her again and contentment and peace engulfed him. He became a wanderer in the enchanted universe of her lips and her subtle perfume. When he raised his head and looked around him the night had attained a new beauty; a simple beauty of land and sky and stars.

He knew that if he kissed her again he would say things he would regret in the morning, and he knew that if they stayed there on the hilltop he could not help kissing her again. Brett was a practical man. He kned the starter and the Seneca purred in the night, its headlights picking up the pitted hull of the prison ship.

He withdrew his arm from Linda's shoulder. "Feel like riding?" he asked.

Her limpid eyes regarded him quietly, and again he saw the reflected stars in their depths. The laughing stars— For a moment he had the eerie feeling that she knew exactly what he was thinking, exactly why he was running away.

But she only said: "I love to ride."

BRETT WENT to bed thinking about Linda and he got up the next morning and went to work still thinking about Linda. Her face accompanied him up to the air-conditioned control booth and her eyes mocked him as he sat down before the televised images of his six furnaces, numbers 40 through 45.

"40's ready," the 0400-0800 man said, donning his jacket. "I just took a test bar ... How's the car?"

"Fine," Brett said. "How's yours?"

"Couldn't be better. Be seeing you."

Brett lit a cigarette and blew smoke into Linda's face. Then he tapped 40 giving his attention to the pit screen while the blue-white heat poured out into the three hundred ton ladle. His fingers moving unerringly over the intricate maze of buttons on the horizontal remote control panel. He started number 2 charger on the limestone charge. The scrap charge was late and he phoned Yard to hurry it up.

Pit called. "45 be ready this turn?" Czech asked.

Brett glanced at the tapping time schedule. "No."

"That's good Czech said... "How's the Seneca?"

"Fine," Brett said. "How's yours?"

"Great."

Brett thought of something. "Where were you yesterday? I didn't see you at the Service,,"

"I got called before the Finance Bishop," Czech said. "Somehow they forgot to process my last ten payments and the F. B. thought I'd defaulted. But when I kept insisting that I was paid up to date, he checked back and found out that his office was to blame. Some efficiency! How was the Bluebird?"

"Out of this world." Brett said.

"Going to get one?"

"Certainly I'm going to get one! Why should you ask that?"

"Don't get mad. I was just curious."

"I'm not mad!"

Brett hung up. His hands were trembling. Linda had driven the Bluebird out of his thoughts, but now it flew back, more tantalizing than before. If he continued to drive his Four Million model after Turn-In Friday, he would automatically become a social outcast. There was no *law* that said you had to turn your car in every year. But there were the expressions on peoples' faces and there was the contempt in peoples' eyes; there was the hollow feeling inside you that you did not belong; that you were no better than the White Collar Workers who walked all their lives because their wages never permitted them to amass the amount of a down payment.

Abruptly his thoughts switched back to Linda. Why should a poverty-stricken White Collar girl affect him so? What quality did she have that his other girls had lacked? He did not know. He only knew that he had to see her again, that the security and contentment he had experienced in her company had only whetted his appetite.

Yard had sent up the scrap charge, and Brett started number 2 charger in on the first buggy. He never tired of watching a scrap charge. He loved to see the compressed bodies of last year's cars being shoved into the White-hot maw of the hearth, dumped unceremoniously, then left to turn into unshapely pink ghosts, finally to dissolve into the yellow ignominy of molten metal.

Soon, he knew, he would be getting the first of the Four Million bodies. And none too soon. Last year's scrap inventory was nearly exhausted and the open hearths needed new material.

In his absorption with the scrap charge Brett had forgotten Linda and the Bluebird, but the moment the charger dumped the last pan, both returned to haunt him. For the first time he saw Linda and the Bluebird in relationship to each other, and a common solution to both problems began to germinate in his mind.

It was time for 43's drink and Brett brought the hot metal ladle down on number 1 crane, set the spout in number 3 door, and slowly tilted the ladle till the red-gold Crucis ore spilled in a steady molten flow down into the bath.

His mind was exceedingly clear now. There were two main objectives: (1) to get the Bluebird, (2) to have his way with Linda. Getting the Bluebird involved getting married; having his way with Linda, and placating his incomprehensible idealization of her, involved the same thing. But there was one more consideration: his self respect.

Steel workers in their right minds did not marry White Collar girls. Not if they wanted to keep their self respect. But a steel worker could marry a White Collar girl and keep his self respect if he had the marriage annulled as soon as he got what he wanted. And getting the annulment would be no problem: no judge could possibly fail to see the incongruity of such a union once it was brought to his attention.

Relief ran warmly through Brett's body. Here was the perfect solution: here was the loophole which the Finance Bishop had overlooked, Not only would he be able to get the Bluebird, but he would be able to make love to Linda without coming into conflict with his idiotic idealization of her; and he would emerge from the whole transaction a free man.

It was time for 44's drink. Brett whistled happily as he guided number 1 crane down the floor to the hot metal pit. The world has never seemed so bright.

After the turn he shaved and showered, then he dressed and went down to the open hearth parklot. He deactivated the sentry, then he started the Seneca and drove it out of the lot and onto the raceway. He gunned it up to one ten. The April wind sang in the vents, and the sky was a brisk spring blue.

He stopped at a Raceway restaurant and ordered a scallop plate. There was a 3V screen behind the counter and a tele-newscast was in progress. The Construction Engineer was the number one topic of the day; according to the announcer he had gone berserk on the previous night and left himself wide open to legal prosecution.

The scene of his activities had been Seneca Square. He had desecrated the alabaster statue of the Seneca Dealer by writing "Thou shalt not steal!" across its hash, and he had desecrated the Bluebird, which had just been put on display, by printing "Golden Calf II" on its windshield. Moreover, the announcer said, the Construction Engineer had performed both acts in the presence of a dozen witnesses, all of whom were willing to testify against him. It was as though he were proud of his heretic vandalism, though not proud enough—the announcer added—to remain on the scene till the police arrived.

"Mr. District Attorney has let it be known," the announcer confided, "that every force at his command will be utilized to apprehend this madman in our midst. Informed sources say that the Construction Engineer is at present hiding out in Center City."

Brett finished the rest of his scallops and lit a cigarette. He wondered if the Foundations would ever get far enough ahead on raw materials so that they could develop at least one of their planets along agricultural lines—a project they had been promising the people for decades. Seafood was all right, but it got monotonous after a while. Meat wasn't even available on the black market any more, and potatoes were no more than a dream remembered.

But the economy came first, and automobiles were the backbone of the economy, and you couldn't very well manufacture automobiles without the necessary metals and people couldn't very well drive them without the necessary fuel. Besides, there were plenty of fish in the ocean, so there wasn't really any *need* for extra-terrestrial agricultural development—as long as traffic fatalities continued to counter-balance population.

Brett paid the electronic cashier and went outside. The sky was more briskly blue than before, and the breeze coming in over the fac-tolled fields was acrid with spring. High in the sky a jet was stratosphere-writing. Brett watched idly as the lofty letters emerged:

BUY A BLUEBIRD TODAY!

He smiled. No, not today, he thought. Nor tomorrow. His courtship of Linda was going to take a little time.

But definitely by Turn-In Friday!

COURTING LINDA, Brett discovered, had a Fitzgerald effect on time.

At first she was very quiet when he picked her up for their second date, opening the door of her apartment before he even had time to knock, then closing the door quickly behind her and taking his arm. But her quietness gave way to gayety when he took her to the latest identi-scope where they became vicarious bride and groom in a hilarious highway marriage. Afterwards on the Raceway she snuggled against his shoulder, so close that her soft hair tickled his neck and her perfume enveloped him like an enchanted cloud. Almost before he knew it, it was time to take her home.

That was Monday night. Tuesday night he took her dining, and later in the evening they found a charming little cafe in the country where you could sit at a rustic table in a secluded corner and listen to the muted strains of the latest love songs, and drink and talk—

They talked of many things. Brett talked about his work, and she listened attentively. But when it came time for her to talk about her work, she said very little, only that she was a secretary and that she hated her job. Brett thought he understood her reticence and did not press her.

After a while the Construction Engineer crept into their conversation "I can't figure him out," Brett said. "What's he trying to accomplish?"

"He has a Christ-complex," Linda said. "Can't you recognize the pattern?"

"You mean he thinks he's Christ?"

Linda's voice had become bitter. "Yes. He thinks he's Christ."

"But he's never claimed to be."

"Of course not. Did Christ ever publicly claim to be the Messiah? It's all a part of the pattern. His disappearance a year ago was supposed to symbolize Christ's sojourn in the wilderness, and his 3V harangues are supposed to symbolize the ministry in Galilee; his antisocial demonstration in Seneca Square the other night was supposed to represent Christ's conflict with the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin. He's deliberately seeking both persecution and prosecution now, and probably will contrive some way of attaining symbolic crucifixion."

"But why?" Brett demanded.

Linda's eyes were on the chequered tablecloth. Sadness routed the bitterness from her voice. "Because he's sick," she said. "Though of course he thinks that we are the ones who are sick and that he is the physician come to cure us. By playing Christ he hopes to change society—eliminate the automobile, the Raceways, and so forth. His perspective is so warped that he can't realize that a high traffic fatality rate is the only effective way to counterbalance population increase: that the public's endorsement of the Church of the Happy Traveler is not the result of materialism but of economic pressure; or that economic pressure is merely a civilized way of saying 'fear of hunger'. Considering the economic importance of the automobile to the average consumer, its apotheosis isn't any more abnormal than the fertility rites of the ancient Egyptians, or the worship of the rain gods by the Zuñi."

"You seem to know a lot about him," Brett said. "Why are you so interested in him?"

"Because— Oh, never mind. I don't want to talk about him any more!" She raised her eyes and the desperation in them astonished him. "It's so close in here. Can't we go riding somewhere?"

"The Raceway?"

"Yes. Yes. The Raceway. And drive fast, Mark. Fast . . ."

The Construction Engineer was apprehended the next morning. Brett was eating a late breakfast when the bulletin bulb on his 3V turned red and began to buzz. He went into the living room and toed the set on, depressing the channel pedal till the buzzing stopped and the light went off.

A familiar room appeared on the screen and Brett recognized it as the vicarage office. There was the bench, and there was the acolytes window, and beyond the window—

Brett gasped. He had never seen so many overturned tables and chairs before, so many papers of all description scattered about. In the middle of the shambles stood the Seneca Dealer, and beside him stood On-the-spot Harrigan, the traveling newscaster. An interview was in progress.

The Dealer was saying. "He performed the whole sacrilegious act right in front of me. But as I said, I couldn't raise a finger to stop him. There was something about the way he looked at me—As though—As though he felt sorry for me."

"But why should he feel sorry for you of all people, Father?"

"I don't *know*," the Dealer said.

"Well all I can say is he should have saved his pity for himself," On-the-spot Harrigan said meaningfully. "He's going to need it." He turned and faced the eye of the 3V camera. "Yes folks" he went on, "he's going to need it real bad. For our minions of the law have him safely in custody, and Mr. District Attorney assures me that he'll have this infamous scoundrel shackled in the brig of the prison ship before Turn-In Friday."

Brett toed off the set and returned to his breakfast. He wondered what Linda would have to say regarding this new development.

She didn't say anything about it. She was pale and listless when he picked her up that night, and all she wanted to do was ride on the Raceway. He couldn't drive fast enough to suit her.

Brett was disgusted. He'd planned to propose to her, but you couldn't propose to a girl while you were hurtling at a one hundred thirty mile per hour clip through a veritable river of cars. He decided to wait till he took her home, but when he pulled up before Building 14 she got out of the car before he had a chance to say a word; then, as though remembering his existence, she leaned through the open window

and kissed him warmly on the lips. "I know I've been terribly poor company." she said. "But I'll make up for it tomorrow night."

"Promise?" Brett said.

"Promise!"

And then she was gone and he was sitting alone in the car. It began to rain and he drove home in the rain, wondering if he was going to get the Bluebird after all.

There was only one day left.

He proposed to her the next night. He didn't wait for the right moment, the right background, the right anything. Time was running out, and not only that, there was a desperation inside him that he could not analyze, that he was afraid to analyze. "Will you marry me, Linda?" he said when she answered his knock.

She paused in the doorway, lovely in her white dress. She did not close the door behind her as she had the night before and he could see the bare peeling walls of the apartment behind her.

She said:

"You can't be serious, Mark!"

"Yes I can." The huskiness of his voice surprised him. His words sounded sincere even to himself.

Apparently they sounded sincere to Linda too, for she said, "When?"

"Right now," Brett said. His heart was pounding painfully and it was all he could do to keep from taking her in his arms and kissing away whatever objections she might have. His passion for the Bluebird astonished him; he could not recall a time when the prospect of getting a car had had so profound an effect upon his emotions.

"You forgot one thing," Linda said. "When you propose to a girl you're supposed to tell her you love her."

Her large limpid eyes were on his face as though daring him to say the words. A little ways down the hall a husband-wife fight was in progress, and from somewhere nearby a baby was squalling lustily. But even though the background was definitely detrimental to romance, Brett found that he could say the words easily.

"I love you," he said.

Her eyes dropped then. "I'll get my things," she said.

She had pitifully few belongings: an armful of clothes, a handful of trinkets, and a half dozen books. Most of the books, Brett noticed, were written by the same author—someone named Freud. He helped her carry them down to the car.

By ten o'clock they were man and wife, thanks to the efficiency of the marriage processing bureau which was open twenty-four a day. Across the street from the marriage bureau was the separation bureau which maintained the same hours and the same efficiency.

"I think the occasion calls for champagne," Brett said.

"But darling, it's fabulously expensive."

"We aren't going to drink an ocean of it. Just a glass or two. I've got the midnight turn tonight, so that's all we'll have time for anyway."

He chose a glittering bar on the business boulevard not far from the Seneca Cathedral. Czech was there, sipping a Dream Girl at the bar. Brett waved to him as he ushered Linda to a private table, and Czech waved back, his eyes protuberant with surprise. Linda gave a little start when Czech's eyes met hers. She glanced away quickly. At first Brett felt self-conscious about being out with a White Collar girl; then he remembered that this particular girl was his wife and his self-consciousness was supplanted by pride. His pride, in turn, was supplanted by bewilderment: why in the world should he feel proud of Linda?

The inevitable 3V screen iridesced behind the bar, strategically located so that it was visible—and audible—to every customer in the place. Brett didn't want to watch 3V, but when he saw the direction Linda's eyes had taken, his own eyes followed.

A bulletin had just been issued. The Construction Engineer had been tried, found guilty of

car-desecration, and sentenced to hard labor for the rest of his life in the Foundation mines. Two car thieves had received similar sentences at the same tribunal, and all three sentences were to be carried out immediately.

The scene shifted from the studio and the announcer to the spaceport. On-the-spot Harrigan was standing at the foot of a mobile Jacob's lift. On the platform of the lift stood three men manacled together. Brett recognized the man in the middle as the Construction Engineer.

"You cannot sin against your society and survive," On-the-spot Harrigan said sententiously. "The three prisoners you see standing before you have cheated on the Ride and now they must pay the Chauffeur."

He raised one arm dramatically and the platform began to rise. The camera followed it. The three men stood pale and silent, their laces touched by starlight. Presently the bright rectangle of the open lock came into view and the platform stopped. Two guards stepped forth and ushered the prisoners into the ship. The lock swung shut and the scone faded out.

Brett became aware of Linda's fingers digging into his wrist. When he turned to her the whiteness of her face frightened him.

"That ship," she said. "It's the one we saw that night we parked on that hill, isn't it?"

"That's the one," Brett said. "It blasts at dawn tomorrow"

"And the hill we were parked on. What was its name?"

"Skull Hill. You haven't touched your champagne."

"Skull Hill. Of course. The pattern was too perfect, it might never occur again. The fool, the poor, pitiful fool . . ."

Her eyes glistened oddly in the rose-tinted light of the table lamp. Brett looked at her for a moment, wanting to question her, and yet reluctant to question her because he was afraid he might get answers he did not want to hear. Out of the corner of his eye he saw that Czech was looking at her too, staring at her as though he couldn't get over the fact that his turn buddy had fallen for a White Collar girl.

Again the sequence of self-consciousness, pride, and bewilderment ran its gamut of Brett's emotions. But this time another phase was added. Realization. With a shock he recognized his real reason for marrying Linda. The Bluebird, for all its chrome and grandeur, had been nothing more than a rationalization, a means whereby he could fit an incongruous item into his rigid set of values. And the item was love—

Brett stood up. "We can go home if you want to," he said. He took her arm and escorted her proudly to the door. He hoped that Czech was still watching but he did not turn his head to look. Suddenly he felt sorry for Czech.

The 2000-2400 man had tapped 43 and when Brett took over the heat was still running into the pit ladle. He gave 41 a drink while he was waiting and by the time he replaced the hot metal ladle the last of 43's contents had run out and Czech was already pouring the heat. Brett dried 43's bottom with the robo-shoveler and closed the tap hole. He started number 1 charger on the limestone charge.

Czech called. "Where'd *you* meet the Finance Bishop's secretary?"

Brett had anticipated the call but he hadn't anticipated the question. He'd anticipated a number of other questions and he had his answers ready. But this one caught him unprepared.

"Whose secretary?"

"The F.B.'s. Don't tell me you didn't know she works for His Holiness himself!"

The control booth seemed suddenly cold.

"She's some number all right," Czech went on when he got no answer. "White Collar girl or not! I saw her Sunday morning when I went before the E. B. She was just leaving when I got there. I heard her tell His Holiness she had an important appointment, and away she went! Where'd you meet her?"

The suspicion in Brett's mind was as yet no more than a minuscule seed but it was germinating rapidly. "I'll tell you later," he said. "The scrap charge just came up and I've got to get it started."

He couldn't feel his fingers they were so numb, but they were so familiar with the console of the r.c. panel that they directed the charge of their own accord. The whole pattern of Linda's deceit emerged and

arrayed itself mockingly before his eyes. She had known about the Finance Bishop's new restriction long before anyone else—months in advance, probably—and she had seen in it an opportunity to escape from the sidewalks to the boulevard, from the crumbling canyons of Center City to the idyllic garages of Peripheral City, From poverty to security: and above all she had seen an opportunity to get the Bluebird.

As secretary to the Finance Bishop she had access to the dossier of every car owner in the city. She had known which marriageable car owners would be affected by the new restriction and to find the most likely prospect she had merely needed to study their character analyses, their personal histories, and their financial statuses.

She had finally narrowed the prospects down—probably after a great deal of deliberation—to a single name: Marcus Brett.

As secretary to the Finance Bishop she also had access to the floor plan of every Cathedral in the city. To arrange a meeting at the most opportune moment, all she had to do was vacate the seat next to Brett's. This she had done by deliberately neglecting to process Czech's last ten payments, by calling the Finance Bishop's attention to Czech's payment record a day or two before Display Sunday, and by coinciding Czech's appointment with the Finance Bishop with the unveiling of the Bluebird.

The rest had been a gamble—a gamble abetted by a perfume that was probably aphrodisiacal, a baby face, a goddess-figure, and a proficiency in the art of dissimulation.

Brett's fingers were no longer numb. They were taut and purposeful, depressing combinations of switches with cold efficiency. He took a test bar of 41. He filled the manganese pan for 43. He gave 42 a shot of spar.

The pit phone rang. Brett let it ring.

WHEN BRETT got home that morning Linda had disappeared. The windows of the overhead apartment were gray with dawn and the bulletin bulb was buzzing angrily. When he went into the living room Brett saw the folded sheet of paper propped before the 3V screen. Wonderingly, he picked it up and unfolded it. He read the hastily written words in the led light of the bulletin bulb:

Dear Mark,

Czech recognized me tonight and by now he has probably told you where he saw me. No doubt you've guessed part of the truth and no doubt you hate me. When I tell you the whole truth you will despise me.

Five years ago my mother was horribly mutilated in a ten car pileup on the Raceway. She lived for almost a year, if you can call existence without a face, without sight, without hearing, without vocal chords, living. My father never left her side. The only sound she ever made was a thin whispering sound. I heard it only once. He must have heard it many times. My father is the Construction Engineer.

After my mother's death, he went back to work. That is, part of him went back to work. The rest of him brooded. He did not break down till a year ago at the laying of the cornerstone of the Seneca Memorial Trust Building, and he did not break down then, really; the inner part of him took over—the part that had exhaustively systematized the factors that resulted in my mother's death and discovered that society was to blame.

I reacted to my mother's death differently. I was young and I had only heard the whistling sound once. To me my mother's death was tragic, but I did not hold society responsible. Society was nothing more to me than a musty concept and had nothing to do with the glittering galaxy of objects almost within my reach—objects made all the more desirable by my father's refusal to let me touch them.

Shortly after my mother's accident I was taken out of tech school and forbidden to ride in any kind of car whatsoever. My friends refused to associate with me; the world I had taken for granted came tumbling down around me. Owning a car of my own became more than a conditioned reflex for me: it became an obsession.

I was twenty-one when my father began his symbolical acts. That was when I left home. I never saw him again till last week when he came to Center City and asked me to hide him from the police. Yesterday morning he left the apartment and committed his penultimate symbolic act—the overturning of the tables in the "temple".

When I left home there was no place for me to go except Center City. (All my near relatives are listed in the traffic fatality files). My technical education had been cut short, so I couldn't obtain a respectable position; however, I was literate enough to obtain a white collar job, and I finally did obtain one—with the Finance Bishop.

I had only one aim in life—to get a car. The opportunity I had been waiting for turned up two months ago when the Finance Bishop drafted his new restriction. I selected you as the most logical prospect and contrived to meet you. That much you probably know already. What you don't know is that part of the F.B.'s restriction never got through to the Dealers—the proviso that reads: "Any person who has defaulted on more than two payments during the recent caryear and who chooses alternative number 2 (marriage) must agree to forfeit his or her purchase to his or her marriage partner in the event of a divorce or an annulment." I saw to it that it didn't go through—but it'll be a part of the contract you'll sign tomorrow.

Now you merely hate me. But in a moment you'll despise me.

When you were eight you fell in love with your mother. You fell in love with her in an apple orchard on an afternoon in June, and the apple trees were in blossom. It's all there in your dossier. Finance psycho-analysts, like all psycho-analysts, are primarily interested in the Oedipal phase, even when it is normal.

All children fall in love with their sexually opposite parent at one time or another, and to a varying degree, carry the parent's image in their mind. But the image is not merely a mental picture of the parent it is a composite memory, a memory compounded of surroundings and sound; of sight and smell and taste.

My perfume called your mother to your mind, whether you were aware of it or not. The taste of her lip rouge was enough to complete the illusion (I had access to her dossier too, and I had the rouge made especially.) The combined attack upon the two senses brought back the feeling of security and love which you once felt in your mother's presence, and reawakened your idealization of her. And you transferred that idealization to me.

In retrospect it seems fantastic that I should have gone to such extremes to acquire an object which, now that I can acquire it, means utterly nothing to me.

When you sign the contract tomorrow, you needn't worry about the proviso. I don't want the Bluebird. I was glossing over the truth when I said that the apotheosis of the automobile wasn't our more abnormal than the fertility rites of the ancient Egyptians or the worship of the rain gods by the Zuni. I wanted to prove to you—and thereby prove to myself—that my father was wrong in his denunciation of the Church of the Happy Traveler. Fear of hunger seldom gives birth to noble concepts, and hucksters are poor substitutes for men of God. My father was right in everything he said.

You're wondering by now what made me change my mind, and why I'm writing this. I have been sitting here in this absurd overhead apartment ever since you left, thinking of how clever I have been. But I forgot one thing—the most important thing of all. I forgot that I, too, had been a child once, and that I had fallen in love with my sexually opposite parent.

Do you know when I fell in love with my father. Mark? I fell in love with him the first time he took me riding on the Raceway.

Linda

Brett stood in the gray room waiting for the hatred to rise in him. He stood there waiting for a long time, cold and empty. Presently he became aware of the buzzing of the bulletin bulb and he turned the 3V set on and depressed the channel pedal till the buzzing stopped and the light went out.

There on the screen before him, was the Prison ship, gaunt in the dawnlight, Behind it was Skull Hill,

its blackened top a smudge against the pinkening sky. On the edge of the man-made cliff bordering the blast pit stood a tiny figure—unidentifiable to the casual observer, unmistakable to Brett.

His emptiness left him abruptly, and he realized wily he had been unable to feel hatred. The sight of Linda standing there awaiting cremation in the backwash of the prison ship brought home to him the truth that love is a thing-in-itself, unrelated to the factors that motivate it.

And then he was running down the stairs to the garage and climbing into the Seneca—and remembering, almost too late, the death trap he had set for thieves.

The bullet struck Brett in the shoulder as he made a convulsive effort to get out of the car. He felt no pain, only numbness, and the numbness spread all through him, turning into rage. He bent and tore the deadly mechanism from its fastenings and hurled it, trailing wires and all, against the back of the garage, all the while marveling how any human being could value a possession more highly than he valued his own life.

He drove furiously through the streets of Peripheral City, finally gained the Raceway. With luck he could reach her in time and with more luck he could get her to safety before the prison ship blasted. Just before he came to the turnoff he passed a four car pileup—two Senecas, an Oneida, and a Cortez. The cars were mangled and there were mangled bodies in them, and shattered glass and blood intermingled on the macadam. The salvage crew was already on the scene, separating flesh from metal. As usual, there were no survivors.

Brett had seen a thousand pileups but none of them had ever bothered him. This one, why he did not know, horrified him. He kept seeing the flesh and the metal and the blood long after he had left the Raceway behind, and for the first time he asked himself the question: *Why?*

The spires of the ships came into view against the brightening sky and Brett slowed. He noticed an acrid odor and traced it to the shorted wires behind the crash. His Seneca was on fire! His every instinct screamed for him to stop and extinguish the flames but the thought of Linda standing on the blackened hilltop froze his foot to the accelerator and his eyes to the sky where, any moment, he expected to see the prison ship rise on an incandescent geyser.

A barrier had been erected across the entrance to Skull Hill road and a new sign said ROAD WASHED OUT. Brett parked the Seneca on the shoulder of the highway and fumbled beneath the seat for the fire extinguisher. Abruptly the Brobdingnagian voice of the port tower came to life

"The *Gethsemane* now blasting from pit 32. Payload sixty prisoners for occupational assignment. Destination: Alpha Crucis Fourteen...

"One minute—"

Brett stood paralyzed, the fire extinguisher in his hands. "Fifty-nine seconds—"

Without a car as a down payment he would never be able to buy the Bluebird.

"Fifty-eight seconds—"

He would lose his job, his garage, his social status

"Fifty-seven seconds—"

Everything he had valued so highly, everything—except Linda-

"Fifty-six seconds—"

The fire extinguisher slipped from Brett's fingers and he began running up the hill. As he ran, a burden slipped from his shoulders and his heart found a new rhythm—a cadence that pounded through his whole body apprising his every cell of the new freedom.

"Nineteen seconds—"

He glimpsed the hull of the *Gethsemane* through the trees. It was blood-red in the morning sunlight.

"Ten seconds—"

There wasn't going to be time enough to save Linda from the backwash, but there was time enough to try—

"Five seconds—"

No, not even time enough to try.

"Two seconds—"

Brett breasted the hill just as the *Gethsemane* blasted. He reeled back, blinded by the fire, deafened

by their thunder. When the afterimage faded he saw the brief morning star in the sky and he felt the first tearing pangs of his loss.

"How did you know I'd be here?" Linda said.

Brett turned around, not believing at first. She had just stepped from a sheltering stand of locusts. She was crying.

"I saw you on the telecast," he said. "I thought—"

She shook her head. "You can't fight anything by running away from it," she said "One useless sacrifice is enough."

She swayed and Brett leaped forward and caught her arm. "I'm all right," she said. She looked into his eyes and seemed surprised at what she saw there. "I thought you'd hate me," she said.

"I can't hate you," Brett said. "You can't hate someone when you already love them."

She looked up at the sky. "I'll get him back," she said. "Somehow, some way. Will you help me?"

"Of course I'll help you."

They walked down the hill together. When they reached the highway the Seneca was burning brightly. Linda gasped. Brett took a skin deep breath. It was the most beautiful fire he had ever seen.

A long time ago Thoreau said: "We do not ride the railroad; it rides upon us." It remained for the wife of an unemployed steelworker to paraphrase that statement. In her best-selling social novel, The Highways of Hell (Brandt & Payne, 2060), Linda Dalms Brett wrote: "We do not drive our cars; our cars drive us."

Civilizations decay from within. Sometimes the decay goes unnoticed for years, manifesting itself only through reactions of the subconscious. But it is there, weakening the social structure to a point where the slightest impetus can send that structure toppling.

The Highways of Hell afforded that impetus, and the sacred automobile fell from its pedestal. It became a mere vehicle again, with a tyrannical governor that said 30 mph and meant it. As a mere vehicle it could not of course justify the stern laws enacted to protect it in its former glory, and consequently those laws were modified. This resulted in amnesty for some tens of thousands of prisoners serving sentences on the Foundation planets, among them a man who once believed himself to be Christ.

—Bethe Royale

MASS MOTIVATIONS