THE FANTASTIC UNIVERSE OMNIBUS

Edited by HANS STEFAN SANTESSON

Brilliant science-fiction stories from the magazine FANTASTIC UNIVERSE... including such masters as:

ARTHUR C. CLARKE • ISAAC ASIMOV
L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP • JUDITH MERRIL
WILLIAM TENN • ROBERT BLOCH
ROBERT SILVERBERG and many others.

Introduction by LESTER DEL REY

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THE FLOWERS OF VENUS

I am afraid I have said very little about the astonishing flora and fauna on Venus, and it is obvious that I cannot do justice to this tremendous subject in these few lines. I hope some day, as a matter of fact, to write a monograph on the explanation, in their mythologies, for the similarity of flowers and trees found on Venus, on Aldebaran Minor, and in the Hesperide System.

The Goffur plant is popular with Venusian women who use its flowers as decorations in their homes. The long, waving Snake plant was called so by the colonists because of the soft, sibilant hissing of its leaves. The Sova plant, which releases an almost invisible mist when clumsily handled, usually puts the person handling it to sleep. And then there is the Bibul Tree, at the feet of which Venusian sages have taught since time immemorial,—a huge purple cone that whispers with a particular language of its own when the rains come.

VITHALDAS H. O'QUINN

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INTRODUCTION BY LESTER DEL REY

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INTRODUCTION *by Lester del Rey*

WHEN I WAS young and innocent (well, at least innocent of judgment), I was filled with a crusading zeal for the absolute purity of what we called scientifiction. I wrote letters to editors and raised my voice generally in protest against any story which dared to deviate from my own private idea of what the true and holy of science must be in the precious and bombless technocracy of the future. At the time, the expression, *science fantasy,* hadn't been coined yet; but had it been, I should have issued countless diatribes against it.

Now that I'm somewhat older (and perhaps more innocent

of at least absolute judgments), I can afford to remember that many of the first and the finest stories I loved were delightfully impure forms of science fiction and fantasy; they were, in fact, science fantasy.

Perhaps I should define the term here. This is an age when the precision of our definitions is exceeded only by the vagueness of the philosophies behind them. But I find the exact demarcation of the limits of science fantasy happily impossible. Science fiction deals with the extrapolation of scientific possibilities. Fantasy is restricted to that which necessarily contains a strong element of what is known to be impossible. Between these two forms—or across, around and beyond them —lies the area of science fantasy. The boundaries are lost in the distance, but I can demarcate them roughly: North lies Physics; east, Elfland; south, Xenanthropology; west, Asgard; below is Cosmogeny, and above are the seven interlocked levels of Heaven and Hell.

A functional definition—after the custom of the times—is perhaps a bit simpler. Science fantasy provides the elements which the general reader seeks when he turns to an occasional volume of science fiction, without the grotesque technical jargon which is all too often added needlessly.

It is a surprisingly common form of literature, and yet one of the hardest to find regularly. Since I could first read, I've never failed to find occasional examples of science fantasy scattered casually through the general magazines under the by-lines of some of our finest writers. Much of this has been too quaint or too routine. Yet the few good examples have caught the fancy of the readers so strongly that the editors still search for it and accept even lesser forms rather than use none.

Unlike straight fantasy or science fiction, however, it has won little attention from the more specialized magazines, perhaps because it requires an editorial mind freed from the formulae that beset specialized publishing ventures. I know of only two magazines, both existing in the last decade, which have devoted themselves to this form of writing consistently.

And of the two, only one has had the courage to indicate by its name that it dealt with this particular type of fiction. The magazine, of course, is *Fantastic Universe,* from which these stories are happily chosen by the same man who was responsible for their original publication.

English has lost a word sadly needed now to describe one of the essential characteristics of these stories, as I see it. That word is *eclecticism:* the process of choosing the best from the widest variety of sources, of selecting from the most divergent and generalized study. During the Nineteenth Century, it was a word in great favor and with almost no application, which may be why its abuse led to its virtual disappearance. But what other word could so well describe the philosophy needed for a truly fantastic universe?

The other element I look for in science fantasy is that of empathy, the ability to project one's consciousness into the consciousness of another; it is the opposite of sympathy, which is an external and condescending thing. This is a word which has come into great vogue and is tossed around with a usual lack of meaning, while the art behind it seems to be vanishing. But it is the *sine qua non* of all good literature, and particularly of any branch of fantasy.

Eclectic empathy—or empathic eclecticism. There you have my impression of what good science fantasy's formula must be—and you have also my impression after reading carefully through this volume of stories. It's a rare and delightful impression, too.

It is not surprising that it should be so, however. Hans Stefan Santesson, who has been the guiding genius of *Fantastic Universe* for some four years, could not have failed to assemble such an anthology. The formula which has guided the magazine and this choice of stories is the same formula which seems to have shaped his own character. His tastes and interests are eclectic to an extent which I have only just begun to discover after a dozen years of acquaintance that ripened slowly into friendship. His empathy must be known to every struggling writer who ever sent him a not-quite-good story, as well as

to many who have come to him with far more diverse troubles.

It's a highly eclectic table of contents, isn't it? There are the old faithful writers who have proved their talent over the years. William Tenn, Isaac Asimov in the role of Asenion, Arthur C. Clarke, Robert Bloch, Bertram Chandler, L. Sprague de Camp, and Judith Merril. There are newer writers and fans, since Hans has always worked with passion and deep affection to give all authors an even chance. Sam Moskowitz, Harry Harrison, Robert Silverberg, Avram Davidson, Henry Slesar. There is even a name new to me, but now to be well remembered—Myrle Benedict. And from other fields of writing, there come Dorothy Salisbury Davis and William Campbell Gault. There is equal variety to the fiction itself, from the vigor of *Title Fight*, the grimness of *Road to Nightfall*, through the yearning of *Exile from Space* and the warmth of *The Amazing Mrs. Mimms* to the charm of *My Father, the Cat.*

The only similarity I find in the long list of stories here is the universal empathy with the characters, whether robot, alien, elfin form, or merely human. Perhaps, though, I should have said supremely human, since our power to identify fully through the skill of a writer with any life form is a way to deepen the humanity we find within ourselves. If the mechanics of plotting, the technical accuracy of scientific argot and the missionary point of view that would place cults before us for sale were lacking in this anthology, I didn't miss them.

In all honesty, I must admit that my opinion of the stories herein isn't very critical. I must confess to a deep bias, in fact. What started out to be a task of reading through the stories dutifully again turned out to be a wonderful interlude of pleasant browsing and genuine delight. I can't be critical of any anthology that gives so much pleasure.

Perhaps I still haven't justified the seeming contradiction of the term, *science fantasy*. But after all, is there any contradiction? Surely there must be a science of fantasy outside of the *Golden Bough*. And can we, today, honestly doubt that there is a fantasy to science? I'll leave the justification to the stories themselves, convinced that no more is needed.

To My Mother

INTRODUCTION *by Hans Stefan Santesson*

THE present anthology is a sampling of what I have tried to do, in *Fantastic Universe*, these past four years. Rightly or wrongly, I have proceeded on the assumption that I was not editing for myself (few publishers can afford such luxuries) but that I was putting together a magazine which would be read by people whose opinions might differ from mine on many subjects but who expected, from a magazine like *FU*, an editorial awareness of the potentialities of these times in which we live which has, disturbingly so, been lacking in the writing of some we can all think of.

Our own uncertainties—our own fears—our own insecurity as the Sixties neared—have of course contributed to this curi-

ous and all too prevalent blending of technical competence and simultaneous absence of dedication.

By dedication I do not, naturally, mean the conviction that Science Fiction is "a way of life," but I *do* mean the feeling that Science Fiction has stature and maturity and that it is a medium through which the history of Today and Tomorrow can come to life, resulting in stories such as CANTICLE FOR LEIBOWITZ (not an *FU* story, I hasten to add), in Robert F. Young's ROBOT SON (*FU*, Sept., 1959) and in many of the stories you will find in this volume.

The possibility that in our time, or in our children's time, we may yet reach the stars, is no longer a prediction found solely in the writings in our field. The stars are no longer our exclusive stamping ground. Reality has, apparently, caught up with us, although much of this is still simply words to the man in the street.

There is a danger here, a danger which I believe has been repeatedly pointed out by John W. Campbell, that we who work professionally in this field may allow ourselves to sit back, aghast at the "reality" that history has now caught up with us, convinced that nothing can be done about it.

This is of course nonsense.

We must now recognize, as Campbell points out, what the realization of these earlier dreams—these earlier hopes—mean to us. As Anthony Boucher wrote some time ago: "The science of tomorrow will, unquestionably, outrun the science fiction of today, just as today's science rapidly outran Poe and much of Gernsback. Conceivably, even time travel and speeds faster than light will, as science advances, turn out not to be fantasies after all. But, as creative imaginative minds keep thinking ahead to the step beyond the next, it is *exceedingly* unlikely that tomorrow's science will outrun the science fiction of tomorrow!"

In other words, what was impossible yesterday is possible today and will be history tomorrow.

As Judith Merril points out in her introduction to her SF—

THE YEAR'S GREATEST (Dell, 1958), "the interest of the better s-f writers has shifted steadily since the war years toward the field of human behavior." You still find rocket ships and alien planets and robots "but the *science* under examination here is not primarily physics or chemistry. It is biology, psychology, anthropology, sociology, politics, economics—*people*."

And in the course of writing about people, attempting to gage how people will react to given situations in an unpredictable Tomorrow, we *may* legitimately consider off-trail matters, discussion of which in *FU* by Dr. Ivan T. Sanderson and others, has disturbed some. This, I submit, is to have a *rather* narrow approach to the field and to, in effect, deny the potentials of this field.

History is *not*, after all, the recital of dates.

History is the recital of happenings participated in by flesh and blood people who were *very* much alive.

Similarly the history of Tomorrow will not be a recital of dates—the history of isolated events reflecting, in their sameness, the pressures and the problems with which we are confronted. It will be the story of people—as insane or as magnificent or as heroic or as foolish as people have always been and will always be.

To recognize this is to recognize that Science Fiction has no limitations, and that the incredible can happen. As it has.

It is in this spirit that I have edited *Fantastic Universe* and, of course, this book.

ISAAC ASIMOV

FIRST LAW

Isaac Asimov, First Citizen of Science Fiction and Professor Emeritus of Robotics, describes the one time when a robot may perhaps violate the First Law,—"A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm . . ."

MIKE DONOVAN looked at his empty beer-mug, felt bored, and decided he had listened long enough. He said, loudly, "If we're going to talk about unusual robots, *I* once knew one that disobeyed the First Law."

And since that was completely impossible, everyone stopped talking and turned to look at Donovan.

Donovan regretted his big mouth at once and changed the

subject. "I heard a good one yesterday," he said, conversationally, "about—"

MacFarlane in the chair next to Donovan's said, "You mean you knew a robot that harmed a human being?" That was what disobedience to First Law meant, of course.

"In a way," said Donovan. "I say I heard one about—"

"Tell us about it," ordered MacFarlane. Some of the others banged their beer-mugs on the table.

Donovan made the best of it. "It happened on Titan about ten years ago," he said, thinking rapidly. "Yes, it was in twenty-five. We had just recently received a shipment of three new-model robots, specially designed for Titan. They were the first of the MA models. We called them Emma One, Two and Three." He snapped his fingers for another beer and stared earnestly after the waiter. Let's see, what came next?

MacFarlane said, "I've been in robotics half my life, Mike. I never heard of an MA serial order."

"That's because they took the MA's off the assembly lines immediately after—after what I'm going to tell you. Don't you remember?"

"No."

Donovan continued hastily. "We put the robots to work at once. You see, until then, the Base had been entirely useless during the stormy season, which lasts eighty percent of Titan's revolution about Saturn. During the terrific snows, you couldn't find the Base if it were only a hundred yards away. Compasses aren't any use, because Titan hasn't any magnetic field.

"The virtue of these MA robots, however, was that they were equipped with vibro-detectors of a new design so that they could make a beeline for the Base through anything, and that meant mining could become a through-the-revolution affair. And don't say a word, Mac. The vibro-detectors were taken off the market also, and that's why you haven't

heard of them." Donovan coughed. "Military secret, you understand."

He went on. "The robots worked fine during the first stormy season, then at the start of the calm season, Emma Two began acting up. She kept wandering off into corners and under bales and had to be coaxed out. Finally she wandered off-Base altogether and didn't come back. We decided there had been a flaw in her manufacture and got along with the other two. Still, it meant we were short-handed, or short-roboted anyway, so when toward the end of the calm season, someone had to go to Kornsk, I volunteered to chance it without a robot. It seemed safe enough; the storms weren't due for two days and I'd be back in twenty hours at the outside.

"I was on the way back—a good ten miles from Base—when the wind started blowing and the air thickening. I landed my air-car immediately before the wind could smash it, pointed myself toward the Base and started running. I could run the distance in the low gravity all right, but could I run a straight line? That was the question. My air-supply was ample and my suit heat-coils were satisfactory, but ten miles in a Titanian storm is infinity.

"Then, when the snow-streams changed everything to a dark, gooey twilight, with even Saturn dimmed out and the sun only a pale pimple, I stopped short and leaned against the wind. There was a little dark object right ahead of me. I could barely make it out but I knew what it was. It was a storm-pup; the only living thing that could stand a Titanian storm, and the most vicious living thing anywhere. I knew my space-suit wouldn't protect me, once it made for me, and in the bad light, I had to wait for a point-blank aim or I didn't dare shoot. One miss and he would be at me.

"I backed away slowly and the shadow followed. It closed in and I was raising my blaster, with a prayer, when a bigger shadow loomed over me suddenly, and I yodeled with relief.

It was Emma Two, the missing MA robot. I never stopped to wonder what had happened to it or worry why it had. I just howled, 'Emma, baby, get that storm-pup; and then get me back to Base.'

"It just looked at me as if it hadn't heard and called out, 'Master, don't shoot. Don't shoot.'

"It made for that storm-pup at a dead run.

" 'Get that damned pup, Emma,' I shouted. It got the pup, all right. It scooped it right up and *kept on going*. I yelled myself hoarse but it never came back. It left me to die in the storm."

Donovan paused dramatically, "Of course, you know the First Law: A robot may not injure a human being, or through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm! Well, Emma Two just ran off with that storm-pup and left me to die. It broke First Law.

"Luckily, I pulled through safely. Half an hour later, the storm died down. It had been a premature gust, and a temporary one. That happens sometimes. I hot-footed it for Base and the storms really broke next day. Emma Two returned two hours after I did, and, of course, the mystery was then explained and the MA models were taken off the market immediately."

"And just what," demanded MacFarlane, "was the explanation?"

Donovan regarded him seriously. "It's true I was a human being in danger of death, Mac, but to that robot there was something else that came first, even before me, before the First Law. Don't forget these robots were of the MA series and this particular MA robot had been searching out private nooks for some time before disappearing. It was as though it expected something special—and private—to happen to it. Apparently, something special had."

Donovan's eyes turned upward reverently and his voice trembled. "That storm-pup was no storm-pup. We named it

Emma Junior when Emma Two brought it back. Emma Two *had* to protect it from my gun. What is even First Law compared with the holy ties of mother-love?"

WILLIAM TENN

SHE ONLY GOES OUT AT NIGHT . . .

A number of things and people live in the shadows of this strange and fantastic universe of ours. William Tenn, author of some superb material in this field, introduces us here to the lonely and lovely Tatiana. . . .

IN THIS PART of the country, folks think that Doc Judd carries magic in his black leather satchel. He's *that* good.

Ever since I lost my leg in the sawmill, I've been all-around handyman at the Judd place. Lots of times when Doc gets a night call after a real hard day, he's too tired to drive, so he hunts me up and I become a chauffeur too. With the shiny plastic leg that Doc got me at a discount, I can stamp the gas pedal with the best of them.

We roar up to the farmhouse and, while Doc goes inside to deliver a baby or swab grandma's throat, I sit in the car and listen to them talk about what a ball of fire the old Doc is. In Groppa County, they'll tell you Doc Judd can handle *anything*. And I nod and listen, nod and listen.

But all the time I'm wondering what they'd think of the way he handled his only son falling in love with a vampire . . .

It was a terrifically hot summer when Steve came home on

vacation—real blister weather. He wanted to drive his father around and kind of help with the chores, but Doc said that after the first tough year of medical school anyone deserved a vacation.

"Summer's a pretty quiet time in our line," he told the boy. "Nothing but poison ivy and such until we hit the polio season in August. Besides, you wouldn't want to shove old Tom out of his job, would you? No, Stevie, you just bounce around the countryside in your jalopy and enjoy yourself."

Steve nodded and took off. And I mean took off. About a week later, he started coming home five or six o'clock in the morning. He'd sleep till about three in the afternoon, lazy around for a couple of hours and, come eight-thirty, off he'd rattle in his little hot-rod. Road-houses, we figured, or some sleazy girl . . .

Doc didn't like it, but he'd brought up the boy with a nice easy hand and he didn't feel like saying anything just yet. Old buttinsky Tom, though— I was different. I'd helped raise the kid since his mother died, and I'd walloped him when I caught him raiding the ice-box.

So I dropped a hint now and then, kind of asking him, like, not to go too far off the deep end. I could have been talking to a stone fence for all the good it did. Not that Steve was rude. He was just too far gone in whatever it was to pay attention to me.

And then the other stuff started and Doc and I forgot about Steve.

Some kind of weird epidemic hit the kids of Groppa County and knocked twenty, thirty, of them flat on their backs.

"It's almost got me beat, Tom," Doc would confide in me as we bump-bump-bumped over dirty back-country roads. "It acts like a bad fever, yet the rise in temperature is hardly noticeable. But the kids get very weak and their blood count

goes way down. And it stays that way, no matter what I do. Only good thing, it doesn't seem to be fatal—so far."

Every time he talked about it, I felt a funny twinge in my stump where it was attached to the plastic leg. I got so uncomfortable that I tried to change the subject, but that didn't go with Doc. He'd gotten used to thinking out his problems by talking to me, and this epidemic thing was pretty heavy on his mind.

He'd written to a couple of universities for advice, but they didn't seem to be of much help. And all the time, the parents of the kids stood around waiting for him to pull a cellophane-wrapped miracle out of his little black bag, because, as they said in Groppa County, there was nothing could go wrong with a human body that Doc Judd couldn't take care of some way or other. And all the time, the kids got weaker and weaker.

Doc got big, bleary bags under his eyes from sitting up nights going over the latest books and medical magazines he'd ordered from the city. Near as I could tell he'd find nothing, even though lots of times he'd get to bed almost as late as Steve.

And then he brought home the handkerchief. Soon as I saw it, my stump gave a good, hard, extra twinge and I wanted to walk out of the kitchen. Tiny, fancy handkerchief, it was, all embroidered linen and lace edges.

"What do you think, Tom? Found this on the floor of the bedroom of the Stopes' kids. Neither Betty nor Willy have any idea where it came from. For a bit, I thought I might have a way of tracing the source of infection, but those kids wouldn't lie. If they say they never saw it before, then that's the way it is." He dropped the handkerchief on the kitchen table that I was clearing up, stood there sighing. "Betty's anemia is beginning to look serious. I wish I knew . . . I wish . . . Oh, well." He walked out to the study, his shoulders bent like they were under a hodful of cement.

I was still staring at the handkerchief, chewing on a fingernail, when Steve bounced in. He poured himself a cup of coffee, plumped it down on the table and saw the handkerchief.

"Hey," he said. "That's Tatiana's. How did it get here?"

I swallowed what was left of the fingernail and sat down very carefully opposite him. "Steve," I asked, and then stopped because I had to massage my aching stump. "Stevie, you know a girl who owns that handkerchief? A girl named Tatiana?"

"Sure. Tatiana Latianu. See, there are her initials embroidered in the corner—T. L. She's descended from the Rumanian nobility; family goes back about five hundred years. I'm going to marry her."

"She the girl you've been seeing every night for the past month?"

He nodded. "She only goes out at night. Hates the glare of the sun. You know, poetic kind of girl. And Tom, she's so *beautiful* . . ."

For the next hour, I just sat there and listened to him. And I felt sicker and sicker. Because I'm Rumanian myself, on my mother's side. And I knew why I'd been getting those twinges in my stump.

She lived in Brasket Township, about twelve miles away. Tom had run into her late one night on the road when her convertible had broken down. He'd given her a lift to her house—she'd just rented the old Mead Mansion—and he'd fallen for her, hook, line and whole darn fishing rod.

Lots of times, when he arrived for a date, she'd be out, driving around the countryside in the cool night air, and he'd have to play cribbage with her maid, an old beak-faced Rumanian biddy, until she got back. Once or twice, he'd tried to go after her in his hot-rod, but that had led to trouble. When she wanted to be alone, she had told him, she wanted to be *alone*. So that was that. He waited for her night after night. But when she got back, according to Steve, she really

made up for everything. They listened to music and talked and danced and ate strange Rumanian dishes that the maid whipped up. Until dawn. Then he came home.

Steve put his hand on my arm. "Tom, you know that poem—*The Owl and the Pussy-Cat*? I've always thought the last line was beautiful. *'They danced by the light of the moon, the moon, they danced by the light of the moon.'* That's what my life will be like with Tatiana. If only she'll have me. I'm still having trouble talking her into it."

I let out a long breath. "The first good thing I've heard," I said without thinking. "Marriage to *that* girl—"

When I saw Steve's eyes, I broke off. But it was too late.

"What the hell do you mean, Tom: *that* girl? You've never even met her."

I tried to twist out of it, but Steve wouldn't let me. He was real sore. So I figured the best thing was to tell him the truth.

"Stevie. Listen. Don't laugh. Your girl friend is a vampire."

He opened his mouth slowly. "Tom, you're off your—

"No, I'm not." And I told him about vampires. What I'd heard from my mother who'd come over from the old country, from Transylvania, when she was twenty. How they can live and have all sorts of strange powers—just so long as they have a feast of human blood once in a while. How the vampire taint is inherited, usually just one child in the family getting it. And how they go out only at night, because sunlight is one of the things that can destroy them.

Steve turned pale at this point. But I went on. I told him about the mysterious epidemic that had hit the kids of Groppa County—and made them anemic. I told him about his father finding the handkerchief in the Stopes' house, near two of the sickest kids. And I told him—but all of a sudden I was talking to myself. Steve tore out of the kitchen. A second or two later, he was off in the hot-rod.

He came back about eleven-thirty, looking as old as his father. I was right, all right. When he'd wakened Tatiana

and asked her straight, she'd broken down and wept a couple of buckets-full. Yes, she was a vampire, but she'd only got the urge a couple of months ago. She'd fought it until her mind began to crack. Then she'd found that she could make herself invisible, when the craving hit her. She'd only touched kids, because she was afraid of grown-ups—they might wake up and be able to catch her. But she'd kind of worked on a lot of kids at one time, so that no one kid would lose too much blood. Only the craving had been getting stronger . . .

And still Steve had asked her to marry him! "There must be a way of curing it," he said. "It's a sickness like any other sickness." But she, and—believe me—I thanked God, had said no. She'd pushed him out and made him leave. "Where's Dad?" he asked. "He might know."

I told him that his father must have left at the same time he did, and hadn't come back yet. So the two of us sat and thought. *And thought.*

When the telephone rang, we both almost fell out of our skins. Steve answered it, and I heard him yelling into the mouthpiece.

He ran into the kitchen, grabbed me by the arm and hauled me out into his hot-rod. "That was Tatiana's maid, Magda," he told me as we went blasting down the highway. "She says Tatiana got hysterical after I left, and a few minutes ago she drove away in her convertible. She wouldn't say where she was going. Magda says she thinks Tatiana is going to do away with herself."

"*Suicide?* But if she's a vampire, how—" And all of a sudden I knew just how. I looked at my watch. "Stevie," I said, "drive to Crispin Junction. And drive like holy hell!"

He opened that hot-rod all the way. It looked as if the motor was going to tear itself right off the car. I remember we went around curves just barely touching the road with the rim of one tire.

We saw the convertible as soon as we entered Crispin Junction. It was parked by the side of one of the three roads that cross the town. There was a tiny figure in a flimsy nightdress standing in the middle of the deserted street. My leg stump felt like it was being hit with a hammer.

The church clock started to toll midnight just as we reached her. Steve leaped out and knocked the pointed piece of wood out of her hands. He pulled her into his arms and let her cry.

I was feeling pretty bad at this point. Because all I'd been thinking of was how Steve was in love with a vampire. I hadn't looked at it from her side. She'd been enough in love with him to try to kill herself the *only* way a vampire could be killed—by driving a stake through her heart on a crossroads at midnight.

And she was a pretty little creature. I'd pictured one of these siren dames: you know, tall, slinky, with a tight dress. A witch. But this was a very frightened, very upset young lady who got in the car and cuddled up in Steve's free arm like she'd taken a lease on it. And I could tell she was even younger than Steve.

So, all the time we were driving back, I was thinking to myself *these kids have got plenty trouble.* Bad enough to be in love with a vampire, but to be a vampire in love with a normal human being . . .

"But how *can* I marry you?" Tatiana wailed. "What kind of home life would we have? And Steve, one night I might even get hungry enough to attack *you!*"

The only thing none of us counted on was Doc. Not enough, that is.

Once he'd been introduced to Tatiana and heard her story, his shoulders straightened and the lights came back on in his eyes. The sick children would be all right now. That was most important. And as for Tatiana—

"Nonsense," he told her. "Vampirism might have been an

incurable disease in the fifteenth century, but I'm sure it can be handled in the twentieth. First, this nocturnal living points to a possible allergy involving sunlight and perhaps a touch of photophobia. You'll wear tinted glasses for a bit, my girl, and we'll see what we can do with hormone injections. The need for consuming blood, however, presents a somewhat greater problem."

But he solved it.

They make blood in a dehydrated, crystalline form these days. So every night before Mrs. Steven Judd goes to sleep, she shakes some powder into a tall glass of water, drops in an ice-cube or two and has her daily blood toddy. Far as I know, she and her husband are living happily ever after.

●

ARTHUR C. CLARKE

THE PACIFIST

Arthur C. Clarke, past Chairman of the British Interplanetary Society and author of classics such as ACROSS THE SEA OF STARS, THE EXPLORATION OF SPACE, THE DEEP RANGE, etc., etc., contributes one of his famous 'White Hart' stories—the truth about what happened when a computer sassed a sensitive General. . . .

I GOT TO the "White Hart" late that evening, and when I arrived everyone was crowded into the corner under the dartboard. All except Drew, that is: he had not deserted his post, but was sitting behind the bar reading the collected T. S. Eliot. He broke off from "The Confidential Clerk" long enough to hand me a beer and to tell me what was going on.

"Eric's brought in some kind of games machine—it's beaten everybody so far. Sam's trying his luck with it now."

At that moment a roar of laughter announced that Sam

had been no luckier than the rest, and I pushed my way through the crowd to see what was happening.

On the table lay a flat metal box the size of a checkerboard, and divided into squares in a similar way. At the corner of each square was a two-way switch and a little neon lamp: the whole affair was plugged into the light socket (thus plunging the dartboard into darkness) and Eric Rodgers was looking round for a new victim.

"What does the thing do?" I asked.

"It's a modification of naughts and crosses—what the Americans call Tic-Tac-Toe. Shannon showed it to me when I was over at Bell Labs. What you have to do is to complete a path from one side of the board to the other—call it North to South—by turning these switches. Imagine the thing forms a grid of streets, if you like, and these neons are the traffic lights. You and the machine take turns making moves. The machine tries to block your path by building one of its own in the East-West direction—the little neons light up to tell you which way it wants to make a move. Neither track need be a straight line: you can zig-zag as much as you like. All that matters is that the path must be continuous, and the one to get across the board first wins."

"Meaning the machine, I suppose?"

"Well, it's never been beaten yet."

"Can't you force a draw, by blocking the machine's path so that at least you don't lose?"

"That's what we're trying; like to have a go?"

Two minutes later I joined the other unsuccessful contestants. The machine had dodged all my barriers and established its own track from East to West. I wasn't convinced that it was unbeatable, but the game was clearly a good deal more complicated than it looked.

Eric glanced round his audience when I had retired. No one else seemed in a hurry to move forward.

"Ha!" he said. "The very man. What about you, Purvis? You've not had a shot yet."

Harry Purvis was standing at the back of the crowd, with a far-off look in his eye. He jolted back to earth as Eric addressed him, but didn't answer the question directly.

"Fascinating things, these electronic computers," he mused. "I suppose I shouldn't tell you this, but your gadget reminds me of what happened to Project Clausewitz. A curious story, and one very expensive to the American taxpayer."

"Look," said John Wyndham anxiously. "Before you start, be a good sport and let us get our glasses filled. Draw!"

This important matter having been attended to, we gathered round Harry. Only Charlie Willis still remained with the machine, hopefully trying his luck.

"As you all know," began Harry, "Science with a capital S is a big thing in the military world these days. The weapons side—rockets, atom bombs and so on—is only part of it, though that's all the public knows about. Much more fascinating, in my opinion, is the operational research angle. You might say that's concerned with brains rather than brute force. I once heard it defined as how to win wars without actually fighting, and that's not a bad description.

"Now you all know about the big electronic computers that cropped up like mushrooms in the 1950's. Most of them were built to deal with mathematical problems, but when you think about it you'll realize that War itself is a mathematical problem. It's such a complicated one that human brains can't handle it—there are far too many variables. Even the greatest strategist cannot see the picture as a whole: the Hitlers and Napoleons always make a mistake in the end.

"But a machine—that would be a different matter. A number of bright people realized this after the end of the war. The techniques that had been worked out in the building of ENIAC and the other big computers could revolutionize strategy.

"Hence Project Clausewitz. Don't ask me how I got to know about it, or press me for too many details. All that matters is that a good many megabucks worth of electronic

equipment, and some of the best scientific brains in the United States, went into a certain cavern in the Kentucky hills. They're still there, but things haven't turned out exactly as they expected.

"Now I don't know what experience you have of high-ranking military officers, but there's one type you've all come across in fiction. That's the pompous, conservative, stick-in-the-mud careerist who's got to the top by sheer pressure from beneath, who does everything by rules and regulations and regards civilians as, at the best, unfriendly neutrals. I'll let you into a secret: he actually exists. He's not very common nowadays, but he's still around and sometimes it's not possible to find a safe job for him. When that happens, he's worth his weight in plutonium to the Other Side.

"Such a character, it seems, was General Smith. No, of *course* that wasn't his real name! His father was a Senator, and although lots of people in the Pentagon had tried hard enough, the old man's influence had prevented the General from being put in charge of something harmless, like the coast defense of Wyoming. Instead, by miraculous misfortune, he had been made the officer responsible for Project Clausewitz.

"Of course, he was only concerned with the administrative, not the scientific, aspects of the work. All might yet have been well had the General been content to let the scientists get on with their work while he concentrated on saluting smartness, the coefficient of reflection of barrack floors, and similar matters of military importance. Unfortunately, he didn't.

"The General had led a sheltered existence. He had, if I may borrow from Wilde (everybody else does) been a man of peace, except in his domestic life. He had never met scientists before, and the shock was considerable. So perhaps it is not fair to blame him for everything that happened.

"It was a considerable time before he realized the aims and objects of Project Clausewitz, and when he did he was quite

disturbed. This may have made him feel even less friendly towards his scientific staff, for despite anything I may have said the General was not entirely a fool. He was intelligent enough to understand that, if the Project succeeded, there might be more ex-generals around than even the combined boards of management of American industry could comfortably absorb.

"But let's leave the General for a minute and have a look at the scientists. There were about fifty of them, as well as a couple of hundred technicians. They'd all been carefully screened by the F.B.I., so probably not more than one or two were active members of the Communist Party. Though there was a lot of talk of sabotage later, for once in a while the comrades were completely innocent. Besides, what happened certainly wasn't sabotage in any generally accepted meaning of the word . . .

"The man who had really designed the computer was a quiet little mathematical genius who had been swept out of college into the Kentucky hills and the world of Security and Priorities before he'd really realized what had happened. He wasn't called Dr. Milquetoast, but he should have been and that's what I'll christen him.

"To complete our cast of characters, I'd better say something about Karl. At this stage in the business, Karl was only half-built. Like all big computers, most of him consisted of vast banks of memory units which could receive and store information until it was needed. The creative part of Karl's brain—the analyzers and integrators—took this information and operated on it, to produce answers to the questions he was asked. Given all the relevant facts, Karl would produce the right answers. The problem, of course, was to see that Karl *did* have all the facts—he couldn't be expected to get the right results from inaccurate or insufficient information.

"It was Dr. Milquetoast's responsibility to design Karl's

brain. Yes, I know that's a crudely anthropomorphic way of looking at it, but no one can deny that these big computers have personalities. It's hard to put it more accurately without getting technical, so I'll simply say that little Milquetoast had to create the extremely complex circuits that enabled Karl to think in the way he was supposed to do.

"So here are our three protagonists—General Smith, pining for the days of Custer; Dr. Milquetoast, lost in the fascinating scientific intricacies of his job; and Karl, fifty tons of electronic gear, not yet animated by the currents that would soon be coursing through him.

"Soon—but not soon enough for General Smith. Let's not be too hard on the General: someone had probably put the pressure on him, when it became obvious that the Project was falling behind schedule. He called Dr. Milquetoast into his office.

"The interview lasted more than thirty minutes, and the doctor said less than thirty words. Most of the time the General was making pointed remarks about production times, deadlines and bottlenecks. He seemed to be under the impression that building Karl differed in no important particular from the assembly of the current model Ford: it was just a question of putting the bits together. Dr. Milquetoast was not the sort of man to explain the error, even if the General had given him the opportunity. He left, smarting under a considerable sense of injustice.

"A week later, it was obvious that the creation of Karl was falling still further behind schedule. Milquetoast was doing his best, and there was no one who could do better. Problems of a complexity totally beyond the General's comprehension had to be met and mastered. They *were* mastered, but it took time, and time was in short supply.

"At his first interview, the General had tried to be as nice as he could, and had succeeded in being merely rude. This time, he tried to be rude, with results that I leave to your im-

agination. He practically insinuated that Milquetoast and his colleagues, by falling behind their deadlines, were guilty of un-American inactivity.

"From this moment onwards, two things started to happen. Relations between the Army and the scientists grew steadily worse; and Dr. Milquetoast, for the first time, began to give serious thought to the wider implications of his work. He had always been too busy, too engaged upon the immediate problems of his task, to consider his social responsibilities. He was still too busy now, but that didn't stop him pausing for reflection. "Here am I," he told himself, "one of the best pure mathematicians in the world—and what am I doing? What's happened to my thesis on Diophantine equations? When am I going to have another smack at the prime number theorem? In short, when am I going to do some *real* work again?"

"He could have resigned, but that didn't occur to him. In any case, far down beneath that mild and diffident exterior was a stubborn streak. Dr. Milquetoast continued to work, even more energetically than before. The construction of Karl proceeded slowly but steadily: the final connexions in his myriad-celled brain were soldered: the thousands of circuits were checked and tested by the mechanics.

"And one circuit, indistinguishably interwoven among its multitude of companions, leading to a set of memory cells apparently identical with all the others, was tested by Dr. Milquetoast alone, for no one else knew that it existed.

"The great day came. To Kentucky, by devious routes, came very important personages. A whole constellation of multi-starred generals arrived from the Pentagon. Even the Navy had been invited.

"Proudly, General Smith led the visitors from cavern to cavern, from memory banks to selector networks to matrix analyzers to input tables—and finally to the rows of electric typewriters on which Karl would print the results of his deliberations. The General knew his way around quite well: at least, he got most of the names right. He even managed to

give the impression, to those who knew no better, that he was largely responsible for Karl.

" 'Now,' said the General cheerfully. 'Let's give him some work to do. Anyone like to set him a few sums?'

"At the word 'sums' the mathematicians winced, but the General was unaware of his *faux pas.* The assembled brass thought for a while: then someone said daringly, 'What's 9 multiplied by itself twenty times?'

"One of the technicians, with an audible sniff, punched a few keys. There was a rattle of gunfire from an electric typewriter, and before anyone could blink twice the answer had appeared—all twenty digits of it."

(I've looked it up since: for anyone who wants to know it's:—

12157665459056928801

But let's get back to Harry and his tale.)

"For the next fifteen minutes Karl was bombarded with similar trivialities. The visitors were impressed, though there was no reason to suppose that they'd have spotted it if all the answers had been completely wrong.

"The General gave a modest cough. Simple arithmetic was as far as he could go, and Karl had barely begun to warm up. 'I'll now hand you over,' he said, 'to Captain Winkler.'

"Captain Winkler was an intense young Harvard graduate whom the General distrusted, rightly suspecting him to be more a scientist than a military man. But he was the only officer who really understood what Karl was supposed to do, or could explain exactly how he set about doing it. He looked, the General thought grumpily, like a damned schoolmaster as he started to lecture the visitors.

"The tactical problem that had been set up was a complicated one, but the answer was already known to everybody except Karl. It was a battle that had been fought and finished almost a century before, and when Captain Winkler concluded his introduction, a general from Boston whispered to

his aide, 'I'll bet some damn Southerner has fixed it so that Lee wins this time.' Everyone had to admit, however, that the problem was an excellent way of testing Karl's capabilities.

"The punched tapes disappeared into the capacious memory units: patterns of lights flickered and flashed across the registers; mysterious things happened in all directions.

" 'This problem,' said Captain Winkler primly, 'will take about five minutes to evaluate.'

"As if in deliberate contradiction, one of the typewriters promptly started to chatter. A strip of paper shot out of the feed, and Captain Winkler, looking rather puzzled at Karl's unexpected alacrity, read the message. His lower jaw immediately dropped six inches, and he stood staring at the paper as if unable to believe his eyes.

" 'What is it, man?' barked the General.

"Captain Winkler swallowed hard, but appeared to have lost the power of speech. With a snort of impatience, the General snatched the paper from him. Then it was his turn to stand paralyzed, but unlike his subordinate he also turned a most beautiful red. For a moment he looked like some tropical fish strangling out of water: then, not without a slight scuffle, the enigmatic message was captured by the five-star general who outranked everybody in the room.

"His reaction was totally different. He promptly doubled up with laughter.

"The minor officers were left in a state of infuriating suspense for quite ten minutes. But finally the news filtered down through colonels to captains to lieutenants, until at last there wasn't a G.I. in the establishment who did not know the wonderful news.

"Karl had told General Smith that he was a pompous baboon. That was all.

"Even though everybody agreed with Karl, the matter could hardly be allowed to rest there. Something, obviously,

had gone wrong. Something—or someone—had diverted Karl's attention from the Battle of Gettysburg.

" 'Where,' roared General Smith, finally recovering his voice, 'is Dr. Milquetoast?'

"He was no longer present. He had slipped quietly out of the room, having witnessed his great moment. Retribution would come later, of course, but it was worth it.

"The frantic technicians cleared the circuits and started running tests. They gave Karl an elaborate series of multiplications and divisions to perform—the computer's equivalent of 'The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.' Everything seemed to be functioning perfectly. So they put in a very simple tactical problem, which a Lieutenant J.G. could solve in his sleep.

"Said Karl: 'Go jump in a lake, General.'

"It was then that General Smith realized that he was confronted with something outside the scope of Standard Operating Procedure. He was faced with mechanical mutiny, no less.

"It took several hours of tests to discover exactly what had happened. Somewhere tucked away in Karl's capacious memory units was a superb collection of insults, lovingly assembled by Dr. Milquetoast. He had punched on tape, or recorded in patterns of electrical impulses, everything he would like to have said to the General himself. But that was not all he had done: that would have been too easy, not worthy of his genius. He had also installed what could only be called a censor circuit—he had given Karl the power of discrimination. Before solving it, Karl examined every problem fed to him. If it was concerned with pure mathematics, he cooperated and dealt with it properly. But if it was a military problem—out came one of the insults. After twenty times, he had not repeated himself once, and the WACs had already had to be sent out of the room.

"It must be confessed that after a while the technicians were almost as interested in discovering what indignity Karl

would next heap upon General Smith as they were in finding the fault in the circuits. He had begun with mere insults and surprising genealogical surmises, but had swiftly passed on to detailed instructions the mildest of which would have been highly prejudicial to the General's dignity, while the more imaginative would have seriously imperilled his physical integrity. The fact that all these messages, as they emerged from the typewriters, were immediately classified TOP SECRET was small consolation to the recipient. He knew with a glum certainty that this would be the worst-kept secret of the cold war, and that it was time he looked round for a civilian occupation.

"And there, gentlemen," concluded Purvis, "the situation remains. The engineers are still trying to unravel the circuits that Dr. Milquetoast installed, and no doubt it's only a matter of time before they succeed. But meanwhile Karl remains an unyielding pacifist. He's perfectly happy playing with the theory of numbers, computing tables of powers, and handling arithmetical problems generally. Do you remember the famous toast 'Here's to pure mathematics—may it never be of any use to anybody'? Karl would have seconded that. . . .

"As soon as anyone attempts to slip a fast one across him, he goes on strike. And because he's got such a wonderful memory, he can't be fooled. He has half the great battles of the world stored up in his circuits, and can recognize at once any variations on them. Though attempts were made to disguise tactical exercises as problems in mathematics, he could spot the subterfuge right away. And out would come another *billet doux* for the General.

"As for Dr. Milquetoast, no one could do much about him because he promptly had a nervous breakdown. It was suspiciously well timed, but he could certainly claim to have earned it. When last heard of he was teaching matrix algebra at a theological college in Denver. He swears he's forgotten

everything that had ever happened while he was working on Karl. Maybe he was even telling the truth . . ."

There was a sudden shout from the back of the room.

"I've won!" cried Charles Willis. "Come and see!"

We all crowded under the dartboard. It seemed true enough. Charlie had established a zig-zag but continuous track from one side of the checker-board to the other, despite the obstacles the machine had tried to put in his way.

"Show us how you did it," said Eric Rodgers.

Charlie looked embarrassed.

"I've forgotten," he said. "I didn't make a note of all the moves."

A sarcastic voice broke in from the background.

"But *I* did," said John Christopher. "You were cheating —you made two moves at once."

After that, I am sorry to say, there was some disorder, and Drew had to threaten violence before peace was restored. I don't know who really won the squabble, and I don't think it matters. For I'm inclined to agree with what Purvis remarked as he picked up the robot checker-board and examined its wiring.

"You see," he said, "this little gadget is only a simple-minded cousin of Karl's—and look what it's done already. All these machines are beginning to make us look like fools. Before long they'll start to disobey us without any Milquetoast interfering with their circuits. And then they'll start ordering us about—they're logical, after all."

He sighed. "When that happens, there won't be a thing that we can do about it. We'll just have to say to the dinosaurs: 'Move over a bit—here comes *homo sap!*' And the vacuum tube shall inherit the earth."

There was no time for further pessimistic philosophy, for the door opened and Police Constable Wilkins stuck his head in. "Where's the owner of CGC 571?" he asked testily. "Oh —it's *you,* Mr. Purvis. Your rear light's out."

Harry looked at me sadly, then shrugged his shoulders in resignation. "You see," he said, "it's started already." And he went out into the night.

AVRAM DAVIDSON

THE BOUNTY HUNTER

Gently ironic and bearded Avram Davidson (it's an impressive thing to see him and William Tenn arrive at Hydra together) is one of the most interesting among the newcomers to the field. A beautiful stylist, Davidson has gained rapid recognition for his sensitive studies of very human and very credible Tomorrows. . . .

THERE WAS a whirring noise and a flurry and part of the snow-bank shot up at a 45-degree angle—or so it seemed —and vanished in the soft gray sky. Orel stopped and put out his arm, blocking his uncle's way.

"It's a bird . . . only a bird . . . *get* on, now, Orel," Councillor Garth said, testily. He gave his nephew a light shove. "They turn white in the winter-time. Or their feathers do. Anyway, that's what Trapper says."

They plodded ahead, Orel, partly distracted by the pleasure of seeing his breath, laughed a bit. "A bird outside of a cage. . . ." The councillor let him get a few feet ahead, then he awkwardly compressed a handful of snow and tossed it at his nephew's face when he turned it back. The first startled cry gave way to laughter. And so they came to the trapper's door.

The old fellow peered at them, but it was only a thing he did because it was expected of him; there was nothing wrong with his eyes. Garth had known him for many years, and he was still not sure how many of his mannerisms were real,

how many put on. Or for that matter, how much of the antique stuff cluttering up the cabin was actually part of the trapper's life, and how much only there for show. Not that he cared: the trapper's job was as much to be quaint and amusing as to do anything else.

Orel, even before the introductions were over, noticed the cup and saucer on the top shelf of the cabinet, but not till his two elders paused did he comment, "Look, Uncle: earthenware!"

"You've got a sharp eye, young fellow," the trapper said, approvingly. "Yes, it's real pottery. Brought over by my who knows how many times removed grandfather from the home planet. . . . Yes, my family, they were pretty important people on the home planet," he added, inconsequentially. He stood silent for a moment, warmed with pride, then made a series of amiable noises in his throat.

"Well, I'm glad to meet you, young fellow. Knew your uncle before he was councillor, before you were born." He went to the tiny window, touched the defroster, looked out. "Yes, your machine is safe enough." He turned around. "I'll get the fire started, if there's no objections? And put some meat on to grill? Hm?"

The councillor nodded with slow satisfaction; Orel grinned widely.

The trapper turned off the heating unit and set the fire going. The three men gazed into the flames. The meat turned slowly on the jack. Orel tried to analyze the unfamiliar smells crowding around him—the wood itself, and the fire: no, fire had no smell, it was *smoke;* the meat, the furs and hides . . . he couldn't even imagine what they all were. It was different from the cities, that was sure. He turned to ask something, but his uncle Garth and Trapper weren't attending. Then he heard it—a long, drawn-out, faraway sort of noise. Then the trapper grunted and spit in the fire.

"What was it?" Orel asked.

The old fellow smiled. "Never heard it before? Not even recorded, in a nature studies course? That's one of the big varmints—the kind your uncle and the other big sportsmen come out here to hunt—in season—the kind I trap in any season." Abruptly, he turned to Councillor Garth. "No talk of their dropping the bounty, is there?" Smilingly, the councillor shook his head. Reassured, the trapper turned his attention to the meat, poked it with a long-pronged fork.

Orel compared the interior of the cabin to pictures and 3-D plays he had observed. Things looked familiar, but less —smooth, if that was the word. There was more disorder, an absence of symmetry. Hides and pelts—not too well cured, if the smell was evidence—were scattered all around, not neatly tacked up or laid in neat heaps. Traps and parts of traps sat where the old man had evidently last worked at mending them.

"Council's not in session, I take it?" the trapper asked. Orel's uncle shook his head. "But—don't tell me school's out, too? Thought they learned right through the winter."

Garth said, "I was able to persuade the Dean that our little trip was a genuine—if small—field expedition—and that Orel's absence wouldn't break the pattern of learning."

The trapper grunted. *Pattern!* Orel thought. The mention of the word annoyed him. Everything was part of a pattern: Pattern of learning, pattern of earning, pattern of pleasure. . . . Life in the city went by patterns, deviations were few; people didn't even *want* to break the patterns. They were afraid to.

But it was obvious that the trapper didn't live by patterns. This . . . disorder.

"Do you have any children, Trapper?" he asked. The old man said he didn't. "Then who will carry on your work?"

The trapper waved his hand to the west. "Fellow in the next valley has two sons. When I get too old—a long time from now," he said, defiantly; "—one of them will move in with me. Help me out. Split the bounties with me.

"I was married once." He gazed into the fire. "City woman. She couldn't get used to it out here. The solitude. The dangers. So we moved to the cities. *I* never got used to *that*. Got to get up at a certain time. Got to do everything a cerain way. Everything has to be put in its place, neatly. All the people would look at you otherwise. Breaking the patterns? They didn't like it. Well, she died. And I moved back here as fast as I could get the permission. And here I've stayed."

He took down plates, forks, knives, carved the meat. They ate with relish.

"Tastes better than something out of a factory lab, doesn't it?"

Orel's mind at once supplied him with an answer: that synthetics were seven times more nutritious than the foods they imitated. But his mouth was full and besides, it *did* taste better. Much better. . . . After the meal there was a sort of lull. The trapper looked at Councillor Garth in an expectant sort of way. The councillor smiled. He reached over into the pocket of his hunting jacket and took out a flask. Orel, as he smelled it (even before: after all, everyone knew that the bounty-hunters drank—the flask was part of every 3-D play about them), framed a polite refusal. But none was offered him.

"The purpose of this two-man field expedition," his uncle said, after wiping his mouth, "is to prepare a term paper for Orel's school showing how, in the disciplined present, the bounty-hunters maintain the free and rugged traditions of the past, on the Home Planet . . . let me have another go at the flask, Trapper."

Orel watched, somewhat disturbed. Surely his uncle knew how unhealthy. . . .

"My family, they were pretty important people back on the Home Planet." The Old Trapper, having had another drink, began to repeat himself. Outside—the dusk had begun to set in—that wild, rather frightening, sound came again.

The old man put the flask down. "Coming nearer," he said, as if to himself. He got to his feet, took up his weapon. "I won't be gone long . . . they don't generally come so near . . . but it's been a hard winter. This one sounds kind of hungry. But don't you be frightened, young fellow," he said to Orel, from the door; "there's no chance of its eating *me*."

"Uncle . . ." Orel said, after a while. The councillor looked up. "Don't be offended, but . . . does it ever strike you that we lead rather useless lives in the city—compared, I mean, to *him?*"

The councillor smiled. "Oh, come now. Next you'll be wanting to run away and join the fun. Because that's all it is, really: fun. These beasts—the big 'varmints,' as he calls them—are no menace to us any longer. Haven't been since we switched from meat to synthetics. So it's not a truly useful life the old man leads. It's only our traditional reluctance to admit things have changed which keeps us paying the bounty. . . ." He got up and walked a few steps, stretched.

"We *could* get rid of these creatures once and for all, do it in one season's campaign. Drop poisoned bait every acre through the whole range. Wipe them out."

Orel, puzzled, asked why they didn't.

"And I'll tell you something else—but don't put it in your report. The old fellow, like all the trappers, sometimes cheats. He often releases females and cubs. He takes no chance of having his valley trapped out. 'Why don't we?' you ask—why don't we get rid of the beasts once and for all, instead of paying bounties year after year? Well, the present cost is small. And as for getting an appropriation for an all-out campaign—who'd vote for it? *I* wouldn't.

"No more hunting—no more 3-D plays about the exciting life in the wild country—no more trappers—why, it would just about take what spirit is left away from us. And we are dispirited enough—tired enough—as it is."

Orel frowned. "But why are we like that? We weren't al-

ways. A tired people could never have moved here from the Home Planet, could never have conquered this one. Why are we so—so played out?"

The councillor shrugged. "Do you realize what a tremendous effort it was to move such a mass of people such a distance? The further effort required to subdue a wild, new world? The terrible cost of the struggle against colonialism —and finally, the Civil Wars? We don't even like to think about it—we create our myths instead out of the life out here in the wilds—and all the time, we retreated farther and farther, back into our cities. We are tired. We've spent our energies, we've mortgaged them, in fact. We eat synthetics because it's easier, not because it's healthier."

A gust of cold wind blew in on them. They whirled around. The Old Trapper came in, dragging his kill by the forelimbs. He closed the door. The two city folk came up close. The beast was a huge male, gaunt from the poor hunting which winter meant to the wild creatures.

"See here—" the trapper pointed. "Lost two toes there. *Old* wound. Must've gnawed his way out of a trap one time. *There*—got *these* scars battling over a mate, I suppose. This *here's* a burn. Bad one. When was the last big forest fire we had?—one too big to outrun—" He figured with moving lips. "*That* long ago? How the time does pass. . . . Let me have that knife there, young fellow—" Orel glanced around, located the knife, handed it to him; gazed down in fascination and revulsion. The wild life did not seem so attractive at this moment.

"Watch close, now, and I'll show you how to skin and dress a big varmint," the Old Trapper said. He made the initial incision. "Dangerous creatures, but when you know their habits as well as *I* do . . . Can't expect to wipe them out altogether—" He looked at the two guests. Orel wondered how much he knew or guessed of what had been said

in his absence. "No. Keep their numbers down, is all you can expect to do." He tugged, grunted. "I *earn* my bounty, I can tell you." He turned the creature on its back.

Orel, struck by something, turned to the councillor.

"You know, Uncle, if this beast were cleaned up and shaved and—" he laughed at the droll fancy—"and dressed in clothes, it—"

Councillor Garth finished the sentence for him. "Would bear a faint, quaint resemblance to *us?* Hm, yes . . . in a way . . . of course, but their external ears and their having only five digits on each—" He clicked his tongue and stepped aside. The Old Trapper, who didn't care how much blood he got on things or people, worked away, but the Councillor took his nephew closer to the fire to finish what he had to say.

DOROTHY SALISBURY DAVIS

THE MUTED HORN

A rare short story by the beautifully literate Dorothy Salisbury Davis, a former President of the Mystery Writers of America and author of several novels including THE GENTLE MURDERER (1951, Scribner).

THESE WERE the moments when it felt good to be a farmer, Jeb thought. From where he stood at the pump he could see the clean straight rows of young corn, unbroken in any direction he looked. A day's work.

He had cleared the field of thistle and he felt as though he had driven out a thousand devils.

The cat was watching him from the back porch while he filled the tub and lathered himself with soap. She smoothed

the fur on her breast. "Stepping out tonight, Cindy?" Jeb said. His own mind was filled with thoughts of Ellen and the music shop, and their evening together after the shop was closed. He whipped a handful of suds to the ground and the cat leaped into it. She bristled with disappointment and stiff-legged it back to the porch.

"That was a dirty trick, Cindy. I'll give you the real stuff in a minute."

"She's had her milk," his father said from the doorway. "Supper's on the table and there's company waiting."

"I'll be right in. How does the corn look, Dad?"

The old man looked down at the field. "It'll be choked again in a week," he said, turning back into the house.

Jeb emptied the tub and hung it up. He wondered if, twenty years from then, he would be like his father. He was the sixth generation of Sayers farming this stubborn New England soil, and he was still washing at an outdoor pump. No, he decided, he would not be like his father. The old man fought every improvement he tried to put into the place. He still distrusted electricity. Every time there was a thunder storm, the switch had to be thrown off before he would stay indoors. And he was not much worse than the majority of people in Tinton. Jeb tickled the cat's ear as he went up the steps. "It's a hell of a life, Cinderella. But we'll bring them round yet."

The company was Nathan Wilkinson, town moderator, deacon of the church, and publisher of the oldest weekly in the state. "I won't keep you from your supper," he said, shaking hands. "I've come to tell you I'm putting you up for elder in Tinton Church, Jeb."

"Oh," said Jeb, looking from Mr. Wilkinson who was examining the backs of his hands.

"It's a great honor, my boy," the deacon continued. "There's no more than half a dozen men received it at your age in the whole history of Tinton. Your father should be mightily pleased."

"Oh, aye," his father said without looking up.

Jeb moistened his lips before speaking. "I feel I must decline the honor, Mr. Wilkinson . . . Will you have a bite with us?"

"I will not, thank you. May I ask your reason for declining? If you're afraid the board won't confirm it, in all humility, I can say my word is . . ."

Before he had selected the delicate word to complete his thought, Jeb said: "If it's not impertinent, sir, I'd rather know your reason for nominating me."

"It is impertinent, Jeb. Most impertinent."

"There's always been a Sayers on the church board, Jeb," his father murmured uneasily.

"Nominated for good and true service," Jeb said, "and upright citizenry. Would you credit me with those virtues, Mr. Wilkinson?"

"I think you're capable of them, Jeb—when you're through sowing your wild oats."

"I think I was done with them when I draped the parish chains across the vicars' tombstone. That's a long time ago, sir."

"But you're still proud of it, aren't you, Jeb?"

"Not exactly. It was a stupid thing to do. But I'm not ashamed of the reason I did it. It's a long past time that Tinton outgrew its chains."

"The chains are nothing but a symbol, Jeb," Wilkinson said with paternal patience. "They're a symbol of sin and the bondage into which it sells a man. But I did not come to discuss either with you. Think over the honor I'm offering you. Give me your answer at services tomorrow. Good night, Martin." He nodded to Jeb's father and went out the back door.

"The meat's as hard as leather," the old man said, putting a portion on each of their plates.

"No harder than Wilkinson," said Jeb.

His father had nothing to say during the meal, but his face was tightened with pain. Finally Jeb could stand it no longer.

"Don't you see what he's trying to do, Dad? He wants me to get into line, into his line, and he figures if I'm an elder, I'll have to do it. I'm working for what I think is right for Tinton. There's nothing wrong in that. It used to be wrong to dance. Now there's even church dances. I want a town where people speak through their board members, instead of being spoken to or for."

His father shook his head. "I know nothing of politics, Jeb, and I want to know less."

"Damn it, Dad, you need to know more. We all do."

"You'll not swear in this house, boy."

Jeb got up from the table. "Then I'll swear out of it," he said, "if that's swearing."

He went to his room and changed his clothes. It was the only place in the house where he felt at home, there and in the fields and woods. At times he thought that it would be better for him to leave Tinton. For five years he had put every spare moment into the town and the church. He had organized study groups and bought the books with his own money, money he should have laid away for the time Ellen would marry him. Despairing of bringing Tinton into the world, he tried to bring the world into Tinton. There was not even a highschool in the town. Those who wanted it enough traveled eighteen miles morning and night.

"It's the chains," he said aloud, "the damned blasted chains."

There was a legend about the town that in the early days it had been a wicked place, so wicked that once the church elders had gone among the citizens in chains lest one of them fall into temptation. Thus bound together they had surrounded the maker of evil and captured him. Jeb could almost see them, so obsessed had he become with the story. He wondered what the poor devil had done. The chroniclers had left that out. Conveniently, he thought. But the chains still lay in the church belfry, and whenever a preacher was hard put for a subject, he was likely to stumble over the chains

that day. It was after one such sermon, that Jeb, at eighteen, had hauled the chains to the cemetery and strung them over the tombstones of the vicars buried there in the seventeenth century.

Downstairs, he stopped at the kitchen door. His father was still sitting there, in the semi-darkness now. "I'll be home late," he said gently. "I'm sorry if I disappoint you, Dad. But I'm trying to do what I think right."

The old man looked up at him. For all his stubborn blindness, he knew how hard it was for Jeb to stay sometimes. His gratitude was in his eyes. "I'm glad to hear you say that, Jeb. Whenever you want to reform something, you do it from the inside if you're honest. It isn't the easiest way, ever. The easiest way is starting something new. But first you've got to try and fix up what you've got. If you're honest, that is. And I don't know a more honest person than you, Jeb."

"Thanks, Dad. I'll try."

He decided to walk the two miles to Tinton. When he reached the main road the sun had already set and a heavy blue mist hung close to the ground, reminding him of the thistle he had hoed that day. In a way, it was the same with all his work. Thistle was quicker than corn. But he could not abandon it any more than he could abandon Tinton itself. He tried to buoy his spirits with the thought of Ellen. But she, too, was part of Tinton. For all that she admitted her love of him, she had not consented to marriage. It was as though she were in some sort of bondage.

The full moon was rising. It would be overhead by his return. Far below him he could see the lights going on in the town, and he could see the smoke of the seven-fifty train. The mist lay like a long sheet over a hollow that ended at Hank's woods. He could hear a car grinding to a start somewhere, and the long whistle of the train. He watched it come into view between the hills and then vanish again. When its sound was gone, there was only the burble of frogs.

The usual Saturday night crowd had congregated along

the main street, the men half-sitting on car fenders, waiting for their wives to finish shopping or the kids to get out of an early show. Jeb knew them all. He waved and said a word here and there. Outside Robbins' music store he stopped at the window. He had not seen Ellen for a week. She was showing a man and his two sons all the harmonicas in the place. As he watched her, Jeb's quarrel with Tinton fell away. There seemed to be an aura of goodness and happiness about her. A wisp of hair had strayed out of her braid. She kept brushing it away as she might a fly while she talked. By the time she noticed him, Jeb was pantomiming a hot harmonica player. Her eyes laughed at him. He went in, but Ellen did not leave her customers, not even for a moment to say a word to him. He was being over-sensitive, he told himself—hot and cold, like a kid with puppy love. He forced himself to watch her until she looked at him again. He winked. She came to him then.

"Silly Jeb. Where were you all evening?"

"Examining my conscience. Thinking of you."

"In that order?"

He nodded. "I still don't understand why you won't marry me."

"Sometimes I don't either," she said. There was a blast of sound from the counter. "Please boys, not unless you want to buy that one . . ." She turned back to him. "Jeb, will you do me a favor? Mrs. Robbins bought some more relics. They're in back. Would you dust them and put them in the case for me?"

As he walked to the rear of the store, he noticed other customers in the record booths. Ballet music and blues blended into each other as he passed. He was proud of the store. It was largely his idea. For years, Mrs. Robbins kept it as a curiosity shop to attract the tourists who came to Tinton because it was so "quaint." The relics, he found, were a mandolin without strings, a fife, and an ancient horn. All of them were clogged with dust, and the horn was tarnished black.

He rummaged through a cupboard and found rags and silver polish. He was depressed again. Ellen was casual, and he had needed something strong, something warm. She came to the back room a few minutes later.

"I'll close up soon. How are you coming, Jeb?"

"Almost done. Where'd she get these things?" he asked, but not really caring.

"The Rutherford place. I'm afraid Miss Hannah is hard up. That fife's supposed to have been used in the Revolution."

"It looks it," he said.

"You're an angel, Jeb." She brushed his cheek with her lips as she left him to return to her customers. And for some reason that hurt him even more than her indifference. "Be a good boy," everyone seemed to say. He had to shake off this pettiness. He returned to work and tried to distract himself by thinking of the Rutherford place. It was the oldest house in Tinton. In fact, it had all but survived the family, for in his time there was only Hannah left. She was older than his father and unmarried. Perhaps when all the old families died out Tinton would change. He, himself, was the last of six generations in the town, and still not married at twenty-seven. There might be a reason beyond random for that. Surely something more than fancy held him waiting for Ellen all these years, and her from marrying him. He felt now that they would never marry.

The blackened horn was taking color in his hands, a deep gold that glowed like a core of fire. Indeed, it seemed very warm to his touch as though it were a thing he was tempering instead of cleaning. It was a simple instrument, not quite as long as his arm, and wonderfully fragile-looking. He pushed the rag gently through the bell end, and taking a coat-hanger and bending it, he worked the cloth up to the mouth, cleaning away, perhaps, the dust of centuries. When he had finished he spread a cloth on the table and laid the horn on it. Its simple beauty enchanted him. He was impelled

to touch it, to run his fingers over its warm smoothness, around the notches which must have guided its tonal range. While he carried the fife and mandolin to the front of the store and made room in the case for them he felt an urgency to return to the horn.

"I'll be a few minutes more, Jeb," Ellen said.

He scarcely heard her. As he leaned down to lift the backboard of the case, he imagined he saw the horn glowing in the semi-darkness. He could close his eyes and see it, as one sees the sun long after having looked at it. Beside it again, he lost all sense of time and place, even of Ellen. He picked it up tenderly, with the feeling coming over him that he could take from it the music of heaven and earth, the stars, the sea, the grass, the birds, yesterday, tomorrow.

He moistened his lips and put them to the mouth of the horn. Against his lips the pressure was sweet and natural, as a kiss might be, and all the while the golden beauty of it enthralled him. He held it loosely for fear of injuring it, and then finally, like an impatient lover, he breathed into it his wish to give it life. The sound was no more than a whispered moan, the wind perhaps on a hushed night. But he could hear it still when he took the horn from his lips. Time being nothing to him, Ellen was beside him instantly.

"What are you doing, Jeb? That sound would raise the dead."

He showed her the horn but she saw nothing wondrous about it.

"You look flushed, Jeb. Do you feel well?"

"I'm all right," he said, running his fingers protectively over the horn. He was glad she had not commented on it, even on its beauty.

"If you must play that thing, please take it outside. I should be through soon. I think it's very inconsiderate of Mrs. Wells to buy records at this hour. She has all week . . . Really, Jeb. You don't look well."

He turned from her, the color driven higher in his face

with anger at her words, "that thing." "I'm all right, I tell you."

"All right, Jeb. I must go back," she said quietly. "I'm near the end of my patience too."

He waited until he was sure that she had left the room before he moved. Then he unbolted the back door and went out, carrying the horn beneath his coat.

The closing of the door behind him released Jeb from every tie that had ever held him. In the moment or two that he stood in the shadows of the building, he seemed to see the climaxes of his life turning like reflections in the facets of a diamond, and then the reflections were gone, and only the crystal deepness of the unmarked facets passed before him, filling him with the urge to touch each one with his personality, his power. The sweet, buoyant air seemed part of him. He felt that he could bring a blessed warmth to wastelands, a coolness to the desert . . . this by nothing more than impulse. And all the while, the horn was warm next to his breast and becoming more and more a part of him.

He drew it out and looked at it, a thin line of fire in the darkness. He lifted it to his lips and once more breathed into it. The sound now was like a lonesome bird call. He paused and heard a rustle, as of animals stirring in the night. Again he touched the horn to his lips, this time covering a notch with his finger, changing the pitch. Presently he alternated the two notes. When he stopped to listen, the sound of rustling heightened. For a moment he thought the sea had climbed beyond its walls and driven in upon the town. He moved away from the building and the rustling followed him. As he went he heard his name called out into the night at first behind him, and then to the left of him, and then to the right, starting as a familiar voice, and growing with each repetition more strange, more distant. He walked through the side streets stealthily, with catlike swiftness, and the rustling followed him, heightening all the while, and seeming at times to sweep above and past him. He could even feel

it wafting about him the way the wind might, although not a leaf was stirring among the trees he passed.

At the edge of town he paused and sounded the golden horn more boldly, swelling the tones until they were true and strong. He played his fingers down the tonal openings, exciting a soft, rich trill of music. The rustling intensified. He was in the center of a whirlwind. He pushed through it, fashioning the rhythm of the music to the step he took along the road. Presently he was half-stepping, half-skipping, and the rustling took on his rhythm. Somewhere ahead of him two round lights came out of the darkness like two strange moons traveling side by side. Almost upon him, they turned with fierce abruptness and were gone. He took the horn from his lips. The light of the true moon was everywhere, and among the rustling sounds came the burble of the frogs, the frenzied scolding of birds disturbed in their nests, and the chatter of scurrying animals. Jeb laughed aloud, and the hills picked up his laughter, and swung it back into the fury of sounds about him. Again he played. He did not pause until he came to the edge of Hank's woods. There the fog still lay like spun linen and he felt that he might bounce upon it as a child bounces on a bed. It was a passing fancy, but it drew him from the road along the edge of the woods, where, as he went the birds awakened and followed him, joining their song with his. He sat down on a stump and rested. The birds carried along the melody, a translucent sort of music: little bells, reeds, the long thin tremolo of hair-like strings. In his hand the horn was vivid gold, giving a light that was reflected in the eyes of the little forest animals watching him. He realized the rustling sound was gone. He laid the horn across his lap and put his hand upon it, its velvety warmth answering his tenderness. His breathing quickened and the smell of earth came to him and a mustiness that was almost sweatlike. The rustling sounds were returning, at first quietly on one side of him, and then surrounding him. He stood up and climbed onto the stump to breathe above the stifling air

near the ground. The rustling swept away in front of him toward the meadow. The horn in his hand seemed to quicken to the movement of his fingers on it, and he drew his other hand affectionately about it as though he were alone for a moment with his beloved, suffering an exquisite anticipation.

The music when he once more tilted the horn into the night had a quiet sadness that soon grew into melancholy. It was a lament that might have been winded over the last fires of a dead hero's camp. The birds grew still. In the meadow the fog seemed to break, wisping upward in a hundred little pyramids, the slow movement of them suggesting prayer or mourning, and in the midst of them a larger core of whiteness writhed and vibrated. The shadows deepened as the moon passed farther over the forest. Jeb played on, the melancholy in him growng deeper. Then the first fears of parting with the horn came to him when he saw a searchlight sweep the sky and was reminded of the dawn. His heart cried out against it, and his whole body shivered with the motion of the core of whiteness in the field. But, as becomes a lover who is still with his beloved, however imminent departure, he was moved to gayety.

The music changed, his fingers flying over the pitch-keys, provoking laughter in the throat of the horn. To this the birds responded, and soon the whole forest was merry. Even the frogs quickened their tympany. In the field the pyramids of mist were dissolving and gradually shaping into white swirls, churning, as if whirled about by many dancers. Inside himself, Jeb felt the growing of some struggle. It was his adolescence again, or more than that, it was a lifetime of adolescence, urging a definition or a freedom—a merging with the music. The field was vibrant. His mouth was burning with the heat of the horn against it, his whole body on fire with the wild white heat.

A sudden stillness came upon the creatures of the forest. Jeb was aware of it although he played on, feeling the climax of his music almost upon him, and feeling as he played

that he must be stronger than some force that would try to stop him. Whatever was happening in the field was happening to him, and there was a logic to it, in the ways of his logic that night. There was a presence there, and it was a part of him and his beloved horn. The birds flew out of the trees and about him, almost touching him with their wings, and still he played. There was a stirring somewhere behind him, as of the wind starting up suddenly among the leaves, and then came a rattle. It grew louder until he recognized it. The sound was the clanging of chains.

For a moment he stopped, but the horn clung to his lips, and while he listened to the clanging, almost upon him now, the horn grew cold to his touch, but clung still to his lips now like frosty metal in the winter. A terrible fear came on him. The birds were gone, and no small curious eyes stared up at him. In the field, the mist had taken the shapes of a hundred sheep tumbling out of the meadow, moving away from him faster and faster. Watching them go, he felt a great surge of anger that drove the clanging noise from his ears. He stiffened every muscle in his body and forced himself to the greatest height he could reach. He strained his head upward and tightened his grip on the horn until it was cutting into his flesh. Then, poising the dying instrument high above him, he poured the full breath of his lungs into it, and through it —a great long cry that tore through the night like the anguish of the betrayed.

As he sounded the horn a second time he turned and emptied its last fierce tones into the woods, into the face of whatever evil crept upon him there. The chains were silent. His arms fell to his sides, and he heard a tinkling sound as the horn fell from his hand upon the stump. The swishing noise came upon him again, and he thought, somehow of taffeta and buckskin trousers. With it came the musty smell of sweat and earth again. Something brushed him to the ground. His legs were too weak to hold him. He fell forward on his face, the ground sweet and steady beneath him. He

rolled over, and for a moment saw the mists sweep into the woods above him. Then he slept.

When Jeb awoke the glisten of dawn was all about him. He knew where he was presently, but it seemed that he had come there a long time before. There was a lightness in his head as though he were coming out of ether. From somewhere near him he heard the plaintive lowing of a cow. He stood up and listened for the lowing again, and then followed it through the long, wet grass. "C'boss, c'boss," he called softly. The forlorn answer came to him, and after it, the weak bleating of a newborn calf. He found them in the shelter of a grove of trees that separated his land from Hank Trilling's, the cow licking her baby and trying to nudge it closer to the warmth of her body. Jeb took off his coat and wrapped it around the calf. He picked it up and carried it home, its weary mother following after them.

In the barn he scattered fresh straw and threw a blanket over the cow. He prepared a hot mash which he was feeding her when his father came in. The old man watched a few moments without speaking. The calf had found its mother's milk.

"Came early, didn't she?" the old man said.

"Some."

"Where'd you find her?"

"Near Hank's woods," Jeb said.

His father was thoughtful for a moment. "I wonder if something could have frightened her?"

"Maybe," Jeb said.

"You ought to have changed you clothes before you went out to look for her, Jeb." He said no more and was gone about his chores when Jeb looked up.

The two men arrived early for church services that morning as was their custom. Jeb was weary, but he felt a contentment that he had not known before. The night was no more

than a dream to him, and Ellen was waiting at the church gate, as lovely as the spring itself. He got out of the truck and let his father park it.

"Are you all right, Jeb?" she asked, reaching out her hand to him.

"Yes."

She clung to his hand a moment. "Will you ask me again now to marry you?"

"I will, and I do ask you, Ellen. Will you marry me?"

"Yes, Jeb. Last night when you left me, and when I called and you didn't answer, I thought that I had lost you, and I knew then that if I had, I had lost my life."

He smiled at her and tightened her hand between his arm and his side, but he didn't speak. Near them a group of townsmen were talking.

". . . I tell you as sure as I'm standing here," one of them said, "there was a tornado last night. I saw the spiral on the road when I was going in town. I pulled off the road just ahead of it and the motor died. I jumped out of the car and lay in the ditch, and I heard the wind in it screeching and howling."

"You dreamt it," somebody said. "You didn't hear of any damage this morning, did you?"

Ellen's hand was pressing into Jeb's arm as they listened.

Hank Trilling took off his hat and scratched his head. "Well, there was something queer going on last night. The dog kept barking, and I'd go to the door and listen. The birds were singing all night long."

Nathan Wilkinson was standing among them. He noticed Jeb and excused himself. "Jeb," he started, having tipped his hat to Ellen, "I'm afraid I was premature in my proposition to you last night. There's a peculiar revolt in the Board of Elders. I'd find it a bit awkward if they refused to confirm . . . Well, you see my position?"

"Yes, sir," Jeb said. "I appreciate your confidence in me

anyway." Then he added with the same blandness: "Perhaps when I've proven myself worthy of the honor, you will propose me?"

"Of course, my boy. Of course I shall." He swept his hat off to Ellen.

Jeb and Ellen walked on toward the church. Among the women on the steps was old Hannah Rutherford. She caught Ellen by the arm and led her and Jeb apart. "Those things I gave Mrs. Robbins, Ellen, was there a horn among them?"

"Yes," Ellen said, the word scarcely getting out of her throat.

"I don't believe in superstitions, Ellen, but I think she ought to put that away where no one could try to play it."

"Why?" Jeb asked. "Why should no one play it, Miss Hannah?"

The old woman looked up at him. "Particularly you, young man. I remember your escapade with the chains. As I say, I put no store by it, but my grandfather found me with it in my hands once and he told me that a young man had brought it to the village in his grandfather's time when music wasn't allowed. They caught him playing the devil's tune on it, with the whole of Tinton dancing like the damned. He was executed as a witch, and he cursed them horribly. He wished them no rest until the chains were gone from Tinton. It's an old wives' tale, but I'd put the horn away just the same."

"Ellen, wait here for me," Jeb whispered.

He went into the church and up through the choir loft. He pulled the ladder from under the dusty pews stored there and tilted it to the trap door of the belfry. There was nothing but the church bell, which began to toll the service then. The floor was thick with dust except where lately something had been moved from it. But there were no footprints, and the chains were gone.

ROBERT BLOCH

A WAY OF LIFE

Robert Bloch, since writing this story, has become increasingly well known for his psychological suspense novels and for his studies of complicated minds. He is credited by his publishers with the apocryphal statement that he has the heart of a little child. "I keep it in a jar on my desk. . . .". Hm. . . .

TWIRLING THE TOP of his propeller beanie nervously, the next President of the United States peered through the curtain at Convention Hall.

"Now?" he murmured.

The girl beside him shook her head. "Not yet. Let them get the demonstration out of their systems." She smiled. "Are you happy, John?"

John Henderson nodded. "Yes, but scared, too."

"Don't forget, you're the next President," the girl reminded him.

"*If* I'm elected." Henderson grinned. "This was only the nomination, remember? And that NFFF crowd is tough."

"FAPA will win, though." Avis Drake squeezed his arm reassuringly. "How did you like Daddy's nominating speech?"

"Terrific. It really did the trick."

"Yes, didn't it? Listen to that demonstration."

Together they stared through the aperture in the curtain and watched the conventioneers parade through the hall.

Somewhere in the background the organ was playing a wild medley—everything from the religious *Kyrie Ellison* to the old traditional FAPA drinking-song. *Yes, Sir, That's My*

Burbee. But it was impossible to hear the melodies plainly, for the fans were on the march, spilling down the aisles of Gernsback Hall and shouting Henderson's name. They were tossing their beanies, spraying one another with zap-guns, waving copies of their state magazines. All of the delegations joined the demonstrations, clustering around the banners borne aloft by standard-bearers from every club in the land.

John Henderson peered at the legends. Here was the contingent from Silverbergh, there the flag of the Swamp Critters, and in the back of the hall rose the snowy emblem of a small group from the faraway North Pohl. Interspersed with the HENDERSON FOR PRESIDENT signs swirled other printed declarations—GRENNELL WAS A GOOD MAN BUT HENDERSON IS BETTER, and WHERE THERE'S A WILLIS THERE'S A WAY, and because there's always a joker in the crowd some place, BHEER IS THE ONLY TRUE GHOD!

But now Avis's father, Lionel Drake, had mounted the rostrum once more and was pounding for order, his gavel giving forth a rising rhythm.

Gradually the Big Name Fans found their seats. Lionel Drake was holding the microphone, uttering the short introduction.

"Ready?" Avis whispered.

John Henderson nodded. The girl put her arms around his neck and kissed his cheek. "Go out there and pour it on," she murmured.

He heard Lionel Drake speak his name, heard the roar of the crowd, then stepped through the aperture of the curtains and faced the convention.

They cheered him, and when the cheers subsided he began to speak. There was a mimeographed copy of his talk on the lectern in front of him, but John Henderson found himself ignoring it.

He talked slowly, at first, eying the faces in the crowd.

They were so young, so absurdly young! Many of them seemed scarcely out of their teens, and less than a third were in their thirties. Out of the entire assemblage there couldn't have been a dozen old people: Lionel Drake's gray head was singularly conspicuous. But then, Lionel Drake was one of the rare exceptions, one of the rare survivors. Why, he'd been alive in Ellison's day, in the actual time of Rog Phillips and Dave Kyle and Ackerman! Of course, he'd just been a baby and he'd never seen them, but he'd been alive. And so had hundreds of millions of others. What made old Lionel Drake so unusual was the fact that he'd stayed alive when the hundreds of millions perished. Lionel Drake had survived, and as a survivor he was one of the few remaining actual links with the distant past.

John Henderson found himself talking about that distant past now: speaking not from his prepared message, not from his head, but from his heart.

"You want to know my plans, my program," he was saying. "But the statement of my platform will have to wait. Today I have one thing, and only one thing to say to you. In the immortal words of the sainted Tucker—*Fandom Is a Way of Life*."

He paused until the cheering subsided.

"Strange, isn't it, how that phrase has survived in a shattered century? Incredible as it may seem to us here today, it was first uttered less than a hundred years ago. We do not know the circumstances which gave it birth. We do not even know too much concerning its creator. The man that was Wilson Tucker, or Arthur Tucker, or Bob Tucker is today merely a legend; we know less of the actual facts of his existence than we do of Shakespeare, or H. G. Wells, or Aldous Huxley and the other great fantasy and science writers of the more remote past.

"But the words survive. They survived in the old days, before fandom rose to bring light into the darkness of men's minds. When our ancestors—yours and mine—were a hum-

ble and persecuted minority—those words gave them strength. Strength to endure the jibes and the ridicule of the uneducated masses; the television-worshippers, the sports-lovers, the Cadillac-minded who ruled the world.

"You all know the story, of course; the story of fandom's early martyrs, gathering secretly in little bands to form the first fan-clubs and hold the first conventions. They had no power then, no recognition. They were jeered at and despised, mocked as wild-eyed visionaries and fanatics. And yet they persevered. They toiled over their crude mimeographs, turning out their magazines. Those magazines have long since crumbled into dust, but who amongst us can ever forget the names? *Grue* and *Hyphen: Amazing* and *Astounding: Galaxy* and *Quandry* and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction. Fantastic Universe, Startling, Confidential, Infinity, Dimensions*—these names will never die!

"Nor will the names of their creators. And yet, they were not famous then. There was a John W. Campbell, yes, but no Campbellites to follow him. There was an Aitchell Gold, but no Aitchellians. And when St. Anthony Boucher was writing, or painting those marvelous works under the pseudonym of Francois Boucher, canonization was far-distant from his thoughts. Why, then, did these men continue in the great work? I like to believe it was because all of them followed a single inspiration, the inspiration found in that great motto of theirs and ours—*Fandom Is a Way of Life.*

"Surely that motto must have inspired the great fan scientists of that era: men like Asimov, E. E. Smith, Arthur C. Clarke, Dr. Barrett and Willy Ley. The immortal Heinlein, or Einstein must have known it when he created Heinlein's Theory of Relativity which resulted in the development of thermonuclear weapons.

"And yet, at the time, the masses laughed. Today we know that all science, all invention, sprang directly from the work of these men. We still have their hardcover books at-

testing to their knowledge of nuclear fission, rocketry, radar and all the other marvels of the First Age of Fandom.

"But the power they possessed fell into evil hands. The bombs fell and the intercontinental missiles landed. And from Moscow—which we know today as Moskowitz—came the war that ended the First Age of Fandom and almost ended the existence of all fankind.

"We are well aware, all of us, of the black years that followed. The years when men of good will—the few who survived—went underground. The years of plague and radiation and ceaseless surface warfare; the years of almost total disintegration and destruction. Fankind's political structure, religious structure, social and economic structure vanished. Even the military structure could not long endure. And what was left? Only the faith of fandom. When they burned the universities, burned the libraries, burned the books—what remained? The treasured possessions of a handful of surviving fans. In the burrows beneath the ruins of cities; in rural fastnesses like buried Bloomington and faraway Weyauwega, the few existing mimeographs continued to turn.

"When survivors sought the surface of the world again, when the few millions left out of hundreds of millions walked the face of the earth once more, many found a fate worse than their fellows. They looked upon the shambles of civilization and went mad. There were those who turned upon their fellows and sought to enforce their rule through force. They warred upon one another and perished. There were those who tried vainly to re-establish the old order, but in vain. Fankind had lost faith in industrial science, in military science, in so-called political government and the religious creeds that sanctioned the horror of war.

"And it was then, we know, that Fandom came into its own at last. Fandom International—founded on friendship, on mutual knowledge and mutual faith in true brotherhood and true scientific knowledge. Fans did not go mad. Fans did

not resort to force. Fans were prepared for a new order, and a new day. Why? Because even through the time of darkness and destruction they clung to their motto—*Fandom Is a Way of Life.*

"It was Fandom, then, that rose to leadership. The children of the First Fans received the carefully-guarded knowledge of the past. They rallied to the organizations known as FAPA and—yes—the NFFF."

At the mention of the rival party's name, the crowd booed. John Henderson raised his hand for silence.

"Do not allow sentiment to overthrow reason," he cautioned. "We of the FAPA—the Fantasy Amateur Press Association—know that the NFFF is a deluded minority. The so-called National Fantasy Fan Foundation will never win a national or international election."

The crowd applauded, but Henderson overrode them. "Still, the NFFF are Fans. Fake-Fans, perhaps, but still Fans. They too believe that *Fandom Is a Way of Life.*"

He paused, clearing his throat. "Remember, we once worked together, all of us. Our fathers helped to rebuild the cities, helped to restore reason. Using the scientific knowledge and the wisdom preserved in the science-fiction books, they brought order out of chaos. It was the application of Fannish principles that rebuilt the world. In the past thirty years we have gone far. Our world is still woefully underpopulated. Great cities, entire nations, are yet in ruins. But we make progress. Under the guidance and leadership of our local Fan Clubs, under the supervision of Big Name Fans like yourselves, we are reshaping fankind.

"First Fandom's dream of reaching the stars is still a dream. But once again the jet planes are beginning to soar —the great silver Heinliners streak across our skies. Once more we are building factories and laboratories; training our future leaders at Fredric Brown University, peering up at the planets from the Mount Richard Wilson Observatory, creating new developments like the Bradbury Ray.

"There will be no more war. Fandom has seen to that. Now that all of us are united as True, Serious Constructive Fans, our racial and political differences will never matter. Nor will religion divide us. For whether we choose to worship Ghu or Foofoo, whether we exalt the Poo or the Yobber, we unite in one belief. And it is this belief I intend to carry forward; it is this belief which will become the keynote of the coming campaign. *Fandom Is a Way of Life!*"

John Henderson bowed his head and stepped behind the curtains, not waiting to acknowledge the roaring applause from the crowd below.

He faced Avis Drake and her father with a wry grin. "Well, that's that," he sighed. "Now—what about that little vacation you promised me?"

The farmhouse stood just outside what had once been the city of Reading, in Pennsylvania. It was Lionel Drake's own private headquarters, and here John Henderson found the weeks of rest he needed before embarking on the presidential campaign.

There was work to do, of course: the Big Name Fan delegations from every state came to lay out their plans and to pledge Henderson's attendance at their rallies—the Midwestcon, the Oklacon, the Westercon and all the rest. And in the evenings, Henderson plotted strategy with old Lionel Drake.

But there were long golden afternoons spent wandering with Avis hand in hand over the enchanted countryside. For this was Pennsylvania, and magic ground—the land of Harry Warner, of Bill Danner and Madle and Rothman and many another legendary figure from the distant past. The ghosts of Damon Knight and Judith Merril hovered in the haze.

Such notions were childish, Henderson realized, but at the same time he understood that he and Avis were in a sense seeking to capture childhood. They had never known what it was to be a child.

One day they talked about it.

"I never had anyone to play with," Avis confessed. "When I was born, just about everybody in Daddy's generation was sterile, because of living at the time of the radiation. Besides, Fandom was just getting established and sometimes we had to hide. There was still part of the old Armed Forces in existence, and their leaders were trying to take over the country. And the General Party was operating—you remember, General Motors and General Electric and all the rest?

"Daddy says that Fandom won because we were better organized for communication, with our tapes and shortwave and our mimeographs—but most of all, because fans *trusted* one another. And the military and industrial groups were always fighting amongst themselves. You must remember how it was when you were a boy; we had a new President every month or so, because of all the assassinations."

Henderson nodded. "That's why my folks went underground for a while," he said. "Out near Peoria. They say Philip Jose Farmer lived there, too, you know."

"Then you know what I mean," Avis told him. "Daddy was a psychologist and he helped found the new Fandom. Naturally, everybody was out to get him. Even some of the first Fan Clubs were against him—those Shaverites and Palmerites and the other religious sects. We kept moving from place to place, never stopping for years. So I never knew any other girls my age and I never had any toys. By the time I was seven or eight, Daddy had me slipsheeting and cutting stencils for fanzines. We must have sent out millions, before he really got an organization going and we took over the newspapers. Gradually his plans took hold, though, and we got our people into radio and general publishing. And with their help we won the first real election."

"Seems hard to realize that was only sixteen years ago," Henderson mused. "I was still in Peoria when it happened. Finishing up my courses in a private school run by an old fan named Shaw. Claimed to be a grandson of the great Shaw, but couldn't prove it, of course. Said his father had

been a member of the old Hydra Club. He was a bug on psychology: always talking about Hubbard and his disciple, Freud. He got me interested in the field—and that's how I met your father. And you."

"It worked out wonderfully, didn't it, darling?" The girl squeezed his hand. "And it's going to be even better from now on. You'll win the election, and we'll be together, and—"

John Henderson shook his head. "Don't oversimplify things," he answered. "You know, that's one of our big problems today. Everything is oversimplified. Did you know that there were over two billion people in the world at the time of the war, and almost a hundred and eighty million in this country alone? What's the population today? Maybe twenty million, at the most. Nobody knows, really, because we've never had a census. There are so many things we've never had, and must have. Public schools, for one thing. We can't go on educating our children in fan-groups forever. And we've got to teach them more facts and less legends. We've got to train more engineers and scientists and technicians and fewer artists and writers and multigraph operators. It's all very well to say we have half the population working the land and keeping us going, and that we have a few railroads running and some main highways in order, and even a fleet of Heinliners. But we need so much more! Why, it will take us another fifty years just to dig out the ruins of our cities, and then—"

"Please, you sound as if you were making a campaign speech," Avis protested. "You're talking like Daddy now."

"Your father is a wonderful man," Henderson said. "I don't know how I'll ever repay him for all he's done for me. He taught me, trained me, groomed me for this step by step ever since I was just a neo in the Beanie Brigade. He says he picked me for a future President, and I often suspect he picked me for your future husband."

"That happens to be *my* doing," Avis murmured. "Now, let's forget politics for a while."

And so they did, for the remainder of that afternoon and for the rest of a glorious week-end.

It was on the following Monday that disaster struck. Lionel Drake received the sudden short-wave message summoning him to FAPA Headquarters in Sturgeon—the new city which had risen on the outskirts of what had once been Philadelphia. And Avis accompanied him there for the day, leaving John Henderson alone at the farmhouse with a few servants and a secretary.

Henderson spent the morning going over his press notices in the current fanzines and preparing a statement denouncing the mutant theories of a rabid Van Vogt cult which had arisen to harass both FAPA and NFFF during the campaign. He did not go so far as to advocate the suppression of Van Vogt's books—it was a cardinal principle that everything rescued from the past be preserved and kept in print for educational purposes—but he cautioned fans everywhere not to take their reading too literally. "What would happen," he wrote, "if we accepted Bester and deCamp and Kornbluth as historians? We must remember that many of the Masters wrote in parable and allegory. Some of them, in their deep wisdom, saw fit to satirize their contemporaries and their times. Others, like the learned Poul, or Hans Christian Anderson, wrote outright fables. Van Vogt's extrapolations were not meant to be taken as gospel."

But were they?

Afterwards, in the early afternoon, Henderson slipped away and went for a walk. He did not choose the country path Avis had selected for their previous strolls, but struck off across the fields toward a cluster of abandoned farmhouses near what had once been a crossroads.

Henderson wanted to think. Here he was, a presidential candidate, a Big Name Fan among Big Name Fans, an authority who handed down pronouncements on the meaning of the scientific scriptures. But what did he know about it, really? Oh, he'd read all the books, of course—everything

that had been salvaged from the rubble. The torn and battered Gnome Press editions, the dog-eared Doubleday relics now carefully preserved in a few remaining collections had long since been reprinted in the standard editions which served as texts in every fan-group school in the country. He'd studied them, just as the small contingent of technicians studied them; for clues to the past, for knowledge and guidance.

Henderson had never been one to question their authority. When excavators had come across actual college texts in the razed archives of the universities, they had collated them with the work of the great fan-writer Masters and found that these men based their work on sound scientific principles. This was definite proof that they wrote out of revealed wisdom. But some of their more advanced concepts—this business of mutant powers, of ESP, PSI, of anti-gravity, of space-travel—seemed unknown to the textbook writers.

Henderson had asked Drake and some of the others about this point. Drake told him that undoubtedly men like Heinlein and Margulies and Howard Browne were in possession of still greater secrets than they had chosen to reveal at the time—given another thirty years and probably they would have gone to the government and offered formulae which could send men soaring to the stars. But they didn't have another thirty years. The governments of the world, misusing Heinlein's theory, had chosen atomic destruction instead.

That was the story.

But was it true?

Several things puzzled Henderson. He was no heretic, no Fake Fan, but he couldn't help wondering. If fans had been so persecuted and powerless in the old days, how was it that Heinlein had gone to the government in the first place?

Why was it that some of the Masters' work survived in hardcover books and the writings of others equally famous had never been found in the ruins? Why weren't there any copies of the first fanzines? Granted, almost everything had

been destroyed in the years of warfare, and paper was most perishable—but surely somewhere a few samples should have survived. The addresses of many of the Masters were known; why hadn't the reclamation parties and the excavators made special efforts to seek the collections of Don Ford, Bea Mahaffey, Redd Boggs?

As it was, nothing remained but their names. Henderson had to admit it was all hearsay. He didn't know if Don Ford had been related to Henry Ford, the automobile manufacturer. Was Bea Mahaffey a stern-faced old lady or a brassy blonde? Had there really been an omniscient genius like Redd Boggs or was he just a FAPA legend?

Henderson found himself approaching the crossroads. To his surprise he discovered that a small group of farmers and local citizens were engaged in clearing the area surrounding the demolished dwellings. An ancient bulldozer had swept a swath at one side and allowed access to the crumbling foundations of four or five structures.

He approached, idle curiosity mingling with sudden fancy. This was Eshbach country, wasn't it? Nobody remembered the exact location of the Lloyd Eshbach residence, but here the famous fan-publisher had lived and died. Suppose a miracle occurred, and one of these ruined houses turned out to be his home? Suppose the searchers uncovered a whole cache of fan-literature, something he could use in the campaign? It was a wild, impossible thought, of course, but suppose—

Henderson nodded at some of the diggers. "Need any help?" he asked.

A short, stocky man lifted his head and stared at him without recognition. He wore no beanie and was obviously just a farmer.

"Sure, if you want to lend a hand. Grab a shovel." He indicated a pile of implements at the side of the road.

Henderson selected a rusty specimen and clambered down gingerly into the nearest cleared foundation.

"What are you looking for?" he asked.

"Typewriters, I guess." The stocky farmer wheezed as he worked. "District headquarters had an idea we might find some business machines here. Gang of us been donating one afternoon a week to excavating, these past few years. Turned up quite a bit of stuff around Reading. Now we're getting at these villages and crossroads places. Been at this one a month. But we've got down far enough so's we may strike something today."

"Any idea who used to live here?"

"Dunno. Headquarters tells us this might have belonged to an old-timer name of Polk."

Henderson gulped.

Polk. Was his dream about to come true after all? He knew that name, knew it well. There had been a Polk in ancient fandom—Chester A. Polk.

Obviously the name meant nothing to the farmer or his companions. They were just doing an assigned job. They lent their muscles to a routine task, shoveling out debris, stooping to pick up battered artifacts. But Henderson dug like a demon.

He wasn't interested in the antique furniture, the broken springs, the shards of chinaware. He didn't join the group that puzzled over the wallpaper pieces, or even stop to examine what had once obviously been a television set. There was no more television today, Henderson knew, and ordinarily he'd have been interested in seeing what a machine had looked like.

But not now. Not when there was a possibility of finding something greater. Filing cabinets, perhaps, and maybe a desk with a locked drawer—

He dug, and the sweat poured down his face. The sun sank lower and the farmer climbed out of the pit to join his fellows.

"Guess we'd better call it a day," he said. "Mebbe we'll strike something next week. Getting right down to the base-

ment level: see where we can pry up the floorboards. This house must have been burned, not blasted."

Henderson nodded, but didn't look up from his digging.

"Aren't you coming out, fella?"

He shook his head. "I've got another hour to spare," he panted. "Mind if I just keep going?"

"Well, suit yourself." The farmer hesitated. "But remember, if you find any machinery, stuff like that, it's public property."

"I'll remember," Henderson promised. "If I turn anything up, I'll bring it in to your district offices."

They must have left, but he didn't pay any attention to their departure. Because he had reached the floorboards now, and he was prying them up, and then he was down in the basement area. He waded knee-deep in debris, and clouds of dust arose to choke him. He blinked in the gathering twilight. Here was the rusty remains of an old-fashioned furnace; there was a broken table and on it something that gleamed dully.

Typewriter? Henderson approached it, then gasped. It was a Gestetner. A mimeograph machine—its drum broken, its crank dangling! And beneath the table was a large metal box. He stooped and pulled it free of the rubble, wiped the dust from the top.

He read the lettering crudely daubed in black paint. *Chester A. Polk—Private.*

Files? This was a file, a portable, two-drawer file. And the drawers could be opened. Henderson tugged at the rusty handles, and it wasn't exertion that made his heart pound.

The top drawer came open. Yellowed folders cascaded forth. Henderson picked one up at random. It bulged with letters—typewritten letters, handwritten letters. He looked at the date of the topmost sheet. *April 1, 1956!* He glanced through the message, then turned the page hastily and sought the signature.

Jim Harmon!

Jim Harmon, one of the oldtime Masters—the man who had first advocated *Harmony*, or Universal Brotherhood in Fandom, in the pages of the old PEON magazine!

What if he found some copies of PEON itself?

Henderson hastily pulled open the second drawer.

He found PEON. He found PEON, and HYPHEN, and INSIDE, and a complete mailing—a FAPA mailing, the 75th. This was the fanzine collection, the fabulous fanzine collection of Chester A. Polk!

There was no thought in Henderson's mind now concerning district managers or the necessity of turning this material in. There was only the need of gathering up the magazines, gathering up the few hardcover books at the back of the file, and taking them to a safe place where he could read them. The sun wouldn't set for over an hour yet. If he carried everything to that spot under the trees where he and Avis usually rested, he could go through his find at leisure. And then, when he went back to the farmhouse, he'd find Avis and Lionel Drake and tell them, show them. An hour was all he needed. Just one hour, and then—

It was almost three hours later that John Henderson staggered into the farmhouse.

Lionel Drake and his daughter heard the heavy footsteps in the hall, and Avis ran to meet Henderson as he leaned against the doorway.

"John, where have you been?" she murmured. "Daddy and I got back hours ago—nobody knew what had happened to you." She paused and stared up at his face. "What's the matter?"

Henderson didn't answer. He brushed past her, stumbled to the sofa, sat down, and buried his face in his trembling hands.

"For the love of Leiber, what's wrong?" the girl gasped.

Lionel Drake rose and walked over to the young man.

"Yes, what's the trouble?" he demanded. He nearly added,

"You look as though you've seen a ghost," but there was no need to. For Henderson had produced a ghost. He pulled it out from his jacket pocket and extended it: a solid, palpable *revenant* in the form of a battered book.

Drake took it and read the title. "THE IMMORTAL STORM," he whispered. "A History of Science-Fiction Fandom by Sam Moskowitz." There was silence, then a sharp intake of breath. "Where did you find this?"

"Where I found the rest of the stuff," Henderson said, dully. "The copies of *Oopsla* and *Inside* and *Skybook* and *A Bas* and all the others. In Chester Polk's basement." He nodded. "Yes, *the* Chester Polk. The one who got letters from Nancy Share and Joe Gibson and Earl Kemp and even William Rotsler. He went to Conventions. He played poker with Tucker, once. It's all there. Everything."

"Tell us about it," Avis soothed. "From the beginning. Daddy, isn't this marvelous?"

There was nothing in Lionel Drake's demeanor to indicate that he agreed. He stood there for a minute, holding "THE IMMORTAL STORM" in his gnarled hands. Then he put it down on the table.

"How about a drink?" he suggested. "After that we can talk."

Henderson accepted a drink, and downed a second one without an invitation. Then he just sat there and stared.

"Come on," Avis urged. "Tell us, now."

He didn't look at the girl when he replied. He stared at Lionel Drake.

"What is there to say?" he whispered. "You're not surprised, are you, Drake? You knew about the magazines—what they contained?"

The older man nodded silently.

"Other copies have been found before, I suppose; even copies of "THE IMMORTAL STORM"? And you and a few Big Name Fans have kept the discoveries from the rest —from fools like myself."

Avis Drake glanced at the two men in bewilderment. "What's all this about?" she asked.

Lionel Drake made a sudden gesture, but Henderson shook his head. "She might as well know the truth," he said. "It's about time somebody learned the facts. The way I learned them, this afternoon."

He faced the girl now, talked to her directly. "I found the old fanzines," he said. "And I read them. Oh, I couldn't go through everything thoroughly, and there are a lot of old letters, too, but I read enough to know what I'm talking about. For the first time in my life, I *do* know what I'm talking about. And that means everything I've ever believed in, everything I've been taught, everything I've tried to tell others as a candidate—is a lie.

"No, don't stop me. Your father knows. He and a few others have known all along, and deliberately withheld and distorted that knowledge, deliberately upheld the lies.

"First of all, fandom was never a persecuted minority. There were no martyrs, no dedicated group of scientists seeking a solution to the problems of the future. There were just men who wrote stories for publication—in the hardcover books that survived and in the commercial magazines that have all been destroyed. Perhaps some of them were found again, but hidden away by your father and his friends.

"The men who wrote these stories were called 'pros' or even 'dirty pros' by the fans of their day. Some of them were talented writers, some of them even possessed sound scientific backgrounds—but they were not the inventors of the things they described. They were not even the greatest writers of their time.

"And the fans themselves were another, separate group. The legend has mixed up the commercial magazines with the fanzines. But fanzines were just amateur publications, privately mimeographed and distributed amongst a small circle. Most of the fans were quite young. Some of them were serious, yes, but not all of them. And they weren't bent on sav-

ing the world. They poked fun at themselves half of the time. Do you know what I read in one fan magazine? It said, *Fandom is just a goddam hobby.*"

Henderson paused and glanced at the copy of "THE IMMORTAL STORM." "There's more in the book. It tells about the very earliest fan organizations—how they fought and feuded, quarreled among themselves. The Big Name Fans weren't supermen. Tucker was a motion picture projectionist. Wollheim became an editor. So did Lowndes—he never was a doctor, and 'Doc' was just a nickname.

"So you see, it's all a myth, this story of Fandom keeping the torch of knowledge lighted in the darkness. They weren't saints, they weren't dedicated—just a gang of people who joked and bickered about a hobby. Yes, they had clubs and they had conventions, and they formed close friendships, and sometimes fans even married one another. But the rest is delusion. Lies and propaganda to feed the silly multitude—to elevate men like your father to power on the shoulders of stupid dupes like myself."

Henderson poured himself another drink. Avis began a silent sobbing. Lionel Drake sighed heavily and sat down in the armchair opposite the younger man.

"There's an old fannish saying," he murmured. "Where ignorance is Blish, 'tis folly to be wise." He paused, then continued. "What you say is true, of course. That's the way things were, and a small group of us has always known. We did find fanzines from time to time, and we have concealed them. Also we deliberately helped to create the myth of Fandom. But not because we wanted personal power."

"What other purpose could you possibly have had?" John Henderson demanded. "Setting up a falsified version of history, suppressing the facts, making what almost amounts to a religious cult out of Fandom?"

"We had one purpose," Lionel Drake replied. "To restore the world to sanity."

"You call this sanity? Elevating juvenile antics to heroic status, putting laurel-wreaths on the brows of money-grubbing writers, inventing a Golden Age out of whole cloth?"

"I do," said Drake. "Remember, I'm a psychologist. Oh, not one of the old-time, orthodox psychotherapists you read about. My field is mass-psychology, sociology perhaps. What I've done, and the others have done, is necessary.

"It's true we invented part of the story—the part concerning life before the coming of atomic warfare. But the rest, my boy, is true. You know it. Fandom *did* constitute the sole reliable nucleus remaining after the world was razed and ruined. As such, it formed a small operating-force that could help to restore order; at that time a very few men capable of operating a hand-cranked mimeograph could become a potent force. Remember, they trusted one another in an age where all men seemed surrounded by enemies.

"But rudimentary skill and simple trust were not enough. As a student of history, of sociology, we knew that. Every important group, every important political or religious or social movement, gains its strength from other sources; from legend. It is belief in legend that made the old-time movements strong—in the labor unions it was the story of Joe Hill and the Wobblies; in the Nazi Party it was the story of Hitler languishing despised and ignored in prison; I needn't remind you of the early Christian martyrs, or of the Young Republicans and their stories of Lincoln the rail-splitter. Out of the legends come the songs and stories, the fables and the folklore that gives men faith. Faith in their destiny, faith in their future. Fandom had to find its legends in order to grow strong and succeed. An old psychiatrist named Jung pointed out the pattern common to all mythologies; demonstrated that men need heroes and sagas and epics to believe in, in order to survive in a civilized state."

"But you can't found a firm future on the basis of lies," Henderson whispered.

"Who says we can't?" Drake countered. "Our country was founded on the myths which sprung up around the Founding Fathers—Washington and the cherry tree, and all the rest of it. From the time of Romulus and Remus in ancient Rome, the myths have played their part in progress; giving men something greater than themselves to cherish as a heritage. And more important, in this instance, the legend has done its work.

"Fandom *did* help rebuild our world. Fannish forms of government *have* succeeded in restoring order. We no longer need armies in the nations founded on International Fandom. We have a working economy, yes, but it no longer rules the world through monetary power. For the first time since the days of Greece under Pericles, the artist and the creator play a respected and important role in life. Our commerce and our industry is slowly being rebuilt, but under sounder concepts than before. Educational facilities are increasing."

"You mean you're organizing means to spread more lies," Henderson retorted bitterly. "You've no real newspapers, no motion pictures, no television—"

"In time they will be restored," Drake said, calmly. "And so will the knowledge that we've retained for ourselves. Don't you think we know more than we've seen fit to reveal? We have the data with which to build atomic powerplants once more, to continue our rocketry experiments, perhaps to build an actual Moon-rocket within a generation. But our first concern must be to build a foundation for the better world to come. Yes, we choose to build it upon a myth—but surely it's a better myth than that which upheld the civilizations which have gone before. Would you want us to return to the old ways and the old myths—the Divine Right of Kings, the myth of Communism, or our own mind-crushing myth of the past which proclaimed that the Customer Is Al-

ways Right? Should we choose military mass-murderers as our new heroes, or exalt those who perverted pure science to the ways of destruction? The legend of the Big Name Fans preserved sanity in the world for the past generation. We can't abandon it now.

"I know what you're thinking, my boy. You'd like to quit the campaign, or go before the FAPA group and blurt out the truth. But what could you possibly gain? Isn't it better to aid in the cause—knowing that in the generation to come, men will continue to grow in knowledge and in achievement? The time will come when we can allow the legends to die; when we can take pride in present achievement, learn to dream about the future instead of the past. But for the moment mankind needs a dream of the past to counteract the nightmare reality of what actually occurred. That is the purpose of Fandom, the true and only purpose—to give men that dream and keep them sane."

Henderson glanced at Avis. The girl wasn't crying any longer. She was looking at him, waiting for his answer. In her eyes he read a curious mixture of love and loyalty, shame and fear. These emotions, he knew, were mirrored in his own gaze.

"If I go along with you," he said, softly, "I'm choosing the easiest way."

Drake opened his mouth to reply, but the girl spoke before him.

"No you aren't, darling," she murmured. "It will be the hardest way. To know the truth and yet not tell it. To carry the burden of guilt and deceit because it's necessary. To live a lie so that all other men can live the truth."

"Part of the truth," Henderson said.

"Yes, part of the truth. But their children—our children—can know it all."

Henderson rose and went to her. "Perhaps," he whispered. "We can try, anyway. I suppose we must try."

They walked outside together, out under the stars. Far overhead a Heinliner thundered across the sky. Henderson thought of the dreams that had made it a reality—the dreams, shattered for him forever, which he must help preserve for his fellow men.

Lionel Drake would help, Avis would help, and maybe he could endure the years to come. Fandom was still a way of life. Quite suddenly, John Henderson remembered another saying that had survived from the olden days—a saying he had read again in a fanzine just this afternoon. Now, for the first time, he grasped the ironic truth of its meaning.

Softly, still staring up at the stars, he quoted it aloud:

"It is a proud and lonely thing to be a fan."

●

HARLAN ELLISON

IN LONELY LANDS

Still in his mid-twenties, Harlan Ellison has published more than a million words and is the author of RUMBLE (Pyramid), THE DEADLY STREETS and SOUND OF A SCYTHE (both Ace). Here, however, in this story, is testimony to the lasting qualities of this remarkable young writer.

PEDERSON KNEW night was falling; the harp crickets had come out. The halo of sun's warmth that had kept him golden through the long day had dissipated, and he could feel the chill of the darkness now. Despite his blindness there

was an appreciable *changing* in the shadows that lived where sight had once long ago been.

"Pretrie," he called into the hush, and the answering echoes from the moon valleys answered and answered, "Pretrie, Pretrie, Pretrie," down and down, almost to the foot of the small mountain.

"I'm here, Pederson old man. What do you want of me?"

The silken overtones of the alien's voice were soothing. Though Pederson had never seen the tall, utterly ancient Jilkite, he had passed his arthritic, spatulate fingers over the alien's hairless, teardrop head, had seen by feeling the deep round sockets where eyes glowed, the pug nose, the thin, lipless gash that was mouth. Pederson knew this face as he knew his own, with its wrinkles and sags and protuberances. He knew the Jilkite was so old no man could estimate it in Earth years.

"Do you hear the Grey Man coming yet?"

Pretrie sighed, a lung-deep sigh, and Pederson could hear the inevitable crackling of bones as the alien hunkered down beside the old man's pneumorack.

"He comes but slowly, old man. But he comes. Have patience."

"Patience," Pederson chuckled ruminatively. "I got that, Pretrie. I got that and that's about all. I used to have time, too, but now that's about gone. You say he's coming?"

"Coming, old man. Time. Just time."

"How are the blue shadows, Pretrie?"

"Thick as fur in the moon valleys, old man. Night is coming."

"Are the moons out?"

There was a breathing through wide nostrils—ritualistically slit nostrils—and the alien replied, "Only two this night. Tayseff and Teei are below the horizon. It grows dark swiftly. Perhaps this night old man."

"Perhaps," Pederson agreed.

"Have patience."

Pederson had not always had patience. As a young man, the blood warm in him, he had fought with his Presby-Baptist father, and taken to space. He had not believed in Heaven, Hell, and the accompanying rigors of the All-Church. Not then. Later, but not then.

To space he had gone, and the years had been good to him. He had aged slowly, healthily, as men do in the dark places between dirt. Yet he had seen the death, and the men who had died believing, the men who had died not believing. And with time had come the realization that he was alone, and that some day, one day, the Grey Man would come for him.

He was always alone, and in his loneliness, when the time came that he could no longer tool the great ships through the star-spaces, he went away.

He went away and found Jilka, where the days were warm and the nights were mild. For blindness had found him, and the slowness that forewarned him of the Grey Man's visit. Blindness from too many glasses of vik and scotch, from too much hard radiation, from too many years of squinting into the vastnesses. Blind, and unable to earn his keep.

So alone, he had found Jilka; as the bird finds the tree, as the winter-starved deer finds the last bit of bark, as the water quenches the thirst. He had found it, there to wait for the Grey Man, and it was there that the Jilkite Pretrie had found him.

They sat together, silently, on the porch with many things unsaid, yet passing between them.

"Pretrie?"

"Old man."

"I never asked you what you get out of this. I mean—"

Pretrie reached and the sound of his claw tapping the formica tabletop came to Pederson. Then the alien was pressing a bulb of water-diluted vik into his hand. "I know what

you mean, old man. I have been with you close on two harvestings. I am here. Does that not satisfy you?"

Two harvestings. Equivalent to four years Earth-time, Pederson knew. The Jilkite had come out of the dawn one day, and stayed to serve the old blind man. Pederson had never questioned it. One day he was struggling with the coffee pot (he dearly loved old-fashion brewed coffee and scorned the use of the coffee briquettes) and the heat controls on the hutch . . . the next he had an undemanding, unselfish manservant who catered with dignity and regard to his every desire. It had been a companionable relationship; he had made no great demands on Pretrie, and the alien had asked nothing in return.

He was in no position to wonder or question.

Though he could hear Pretrie's brothers in the chest-high floss brakes at harvesting time, still the Jilkite never wandered far from the hutch.

Now, it was nearing its end.

"It has been easier with you here. I—uh—thanks, Pretrie," the old man felt the need to say it clearly, without embroidery.

A soft grunt of acknowledgment. "I thank you for allowing me to remain with you, old man, Pederson," the Jilkite answered softly.

A spot of cool touched Pederson's cheek. At first he thought it was rain, but no more came, and he asked, "What was that?"

The Jilkite shifted—with what Pederson took for discomfort—and answered, "A custom of my race."

"What?" Pederson persisted.

"A tear, old man. A tear from my eye to your body."

"Hey, look . . ." he began, trying to convey his feelings, and realizing *look* was the wrong word. He stumbled on, an emotion coming to him he had long thought dead inside himself. "You don't have to be—uh—you know, sad, Pretrie. I've lived a good life. The Grey Man doesn't scare me."

His voice was brave, but it cracked with the age in the cords.

"My race does not know sadness, Pederson. We know gratitude and companionship and beauty. But not sadness. That is a serious lack, so you have told me, but we do not yearn after the dark and the lost. My tear is a thank you for your kindness."

"Kindness?"

"For allowing me to remain with you."

The old man subsided then, waiting. He did not understand. But the alien had found him, and the presence of Pretrie had made things easier for him in these last years. He was grateful, and wise enough to remain silent.

They sat there thinking their own thoughts, and Pederson's mind winnowed the wheat of incidents from the chaff of life spent.

He recalled the days alone in the great ships, and how he had at first laughed to think of his father's religion, his father's words about loneliness: "No man can walk the road without companionship, Will," his father had said. He had laughed, declaring he was a loner, but now, with the unnameable warmth and presence of the alien here beside him, he knew the truth.

His father had been correct.

It was good to have a friend. Especially when the Grey Man was coming. Strange how he knew it with such calm certainty, but that was the way of it. He knew, and he waited placidly.

After a while, the chill came down from the High Blue Mountains, and Pretrie brought out the treated shawl. He laid it about the old man's thin shoulders, where it clung with warmth, and hunkered down on his triple-jointed legs once more.

"I don't know, Pretrie," Pederson ruminated, later.

There was no answer. There had been no question.

"I just don't know. Was it worth it all? The time aspace,

the men I've known, the lonely ones who died and the dying ones who were never lonely."

"All peoples know that ache, old man," Pretrie philosophized. He drew a deep breath.

"I never thought I needed anyone. I've learned better, Pretrie."

"One never knows." Pederson had taught the alien little; Pretrie had come to him speaking English. It had been one more puzzling thing about the Jilkite, but again Pederson had not questioned it. There were many missionaries and spacers in this sector of the Rim.

"Everybody needs somebody," Pederson went on.

"You will never know," Pederson agreed in emphasis. Then added, "Perhaps you will."

Then the alien stiffened, his claw upon the old man's arm. "He comes, Pederson old man."

A thrill of expectancy, and a shiver of near-fright came with it. Pederson's grey head lifted, and despite the warmth of the shawl he felt cold. So near now. "He's coming?"

"He is here."

They both sensed it, for Pederson could feel the awareness in the Jilkite beside him; he had grown sensitive to the alien's moods, even as the other had plumbed his own. "The Grey Man," Pederson spoke the words softly on the night air, and the moon valleys did not respond.

"I'm ready," said the old man, and he extended his left hand for the grasp. He set down the bulb of vik with his other hand.

The feel of hardening came stealing through him, and it was as though someone had taken his hand in return. Then, as he thought he was to go, alone, he said, "Good-bye to you, Pretrie, friend."

But there was no good-bye from the alien beside him. Instead, the Jilkite's voice came to him as through a fog softly descending.

"We go together, friend Pederson. The Grey Man comes to all races. Why do you expect me to go alone? Each need is a great one.

"I am here, Grey Man. Here. I am not alone." Oddly, Pederson knew the Jilkite's claw had been offered, and taken in the clasp.

He closed his blind eyes.

After a great while, the sound of the harp crickets thrummed high once more, and on the porch before the hutch, there was the silence of peace.

Night had come to the lonely lands; night, but not darkness.

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A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

FALL OF KNIGHT

We've all been guilty of the tendency to ascribe to British SF a sobriety of outlook and a pessimistic approach to the World of Tomorrow natural to a people as close to the historical realities as they are. Here is proof that this is an unwise generalization.

IT IS CUSTOMARY for the spacemen serving in the Federation's star ships to sneer at the titles bestowed, with a lavish hand, by the Kingdom of Waverley upon its spacefaring subjects. An officer who rises to become Master of one of the Empress Class vessels—equivalent to the Federation's Alpha Class—is invariably, after a short period of probation, dubbed Knight. His Chief Engineers—Reaction and Interstellar Drives—usually are given the title of Esquire, as is the First Mate. There are quite a few Dames among the senior Pursers and Catering Officers.

A spaceman is a spaceman, however, no matter what fancy handle he has to his name. He has to know his stuff, otherwise he would not be where he is. He has to be efficient, otherwise he would never wear upon his shoulders the four gold stripes of captaincy.

So it was with Captain Sir Ian MacLachlan Stuart, Master of the interstellar liner *Empress of Skye*. When things went wrong he coped, and nobly, and saw to it that his officers coped. It was Sir Ian who had the gas turbine and the tractor wheels broken out of the cargo and with them rigged a makeshift, but effective governor for the racing, almost uncontrollable Mannschen Drive unit. It was Sir Ian who caught James Murdoch, the ship's Bio-Chemist, in the act of introducing poisons into the hydroponics tanks that would have destroyed every plant aboard the ship—and with them her air purifying and regenerating plant. (Murdoch later confessed to other acts of sabotage, including the damage done to the Interstellar Drive unit, claiming that he was actuated by hatred for the Stuart dynasty and love for the Hanoverians.) It was Sir Ian who brought his almost unmanageable ship down to the inhospitable surface of Rob Roy, one of the less important planets ruled by King James VI of Waverley, making a landing which, in the circumstances, could not have been bettered by any space captain in the Galaxy.

Rob Roy is an unimportant planet. There is only one city —Ballantrae—and that, on any other world, would be called a village. There are no important industries. The colonists rear sheep and cattle, and distill whiskey. There is something about the radiations from the sun—Epsilon Aurigae—about which Rob Roy revolves, that has a peculiar effect upon non-indigenous animal life—the sheep, the cattle, and other imported beasts—but not upon human beings. It is said that the amount of whiskey consumed by the colonists has an inhibiting effect upon the effects of the radiation. This may well be true. Somebody once said that if the quality of

the Rob Roy mutton were affected to the same extent as the quantity then Rob Roy would be famous throughout the Galaxy. This may well be true, too.

Incredible though it may seem, *Empress of Skye* succeeded in dropping unobserved through the Rob Roy atmosphere. It had been Captain Sir Ian's intention to make his landing at the Ballantrae spaceport, but this intention he had to abandon—the Hanoverian saboteur had contrived, before his detection and imprisonment, to make such a mess of the ship's controls that, during the final, ticklish phases of the landing, officers were having to make hasty, last minute repairs with string and chewing gum, and Sir Ian was concerned only with setting his ship down anywhere in safety, without overmuch worry as to the precise location. A further complicating factor was that *Empress of Skye*'s frantic signals to the spaceport radio station were unanswered. Sir Ian should, perhaps, have remembered that it was Burns Night —but he had, during his descent to the surface, more things to concern him than dates.

So the big ship dropped through the night and the rain, the flare of her exhausts shrouded by cloud and storm. She landed in a field, incinerating a half dozen or so of the giant sheep and starting a short-lived fire in the sodden grass. She rocked gently for a few seconds on her vaned landing gear, then quivered for a few seconds more before coming to rest.

After a minute or so the airlock door high on her sleek side opened and the long, telescopic ramp extended itself. Down the ramp came Sir Ian, a tall, spare man bearing himself with knightly dignity, followed by his Mate and his two Chief Engineers. The beams of their torches fell upon the charred shapes that had once been sheep, were reflected from the clouds of dirty steam still rising from the grass. The Captain led his officers to the road running beside the field.

"Ballantrae," said Malcolm Macdonald, Esquire, pointing with his torch, "must be that way, Sir Ian."

"And how far, Esquire Macdonald?" asked the Captain.

"All of a hundred miles, Sir Ian," replied the Mate.

"We must have help from Ballantrae to effect permanent repairs," said the Reaction Chief.

"I am aware of that, Esquire Hendry," said the Captain. "If Ballantrae had answered our signals I should feel happier about our chances of help coming with daylight."

"They have only one ship a year here," volunteered Interstellar Chief Fleming. "They'll not be manning their station when there's no ship due."

"Regulations . . ." began Macdonald.

"And who's to enforce regulations on this ball of rock and mud?" asked Fleming.

"Somebody," said Sir Ian, "will have to ride into Ballantrae."

"*Ride*, Sir Ian?" asked the Mate.

"Perhaps, Esquire Macdonald, it has escaped your memory that there is a horse in the cargo."

"But we're spacemen, Sir Ian. Horse riding is not a thing that we know anything about. Perhaps one of the passengers . . ."

"*We* are the crew of the ship, Esquire Macdonald. *We* must do all we can to make her spaceworthy once more, and we must not call upon her passengers for help. You, Esquire Macdonald, will make enquiries among your juniors and see if any of them know anything of the art of horse riding. You, Esquires Hendry and Fleming, will do the same."

"And supposing we find nobody, Sir Ian?" asked Hendry.

"Then, gentlemen," said Captain Sir Ian MacLachlan Stuart, "I shall ride the horse."

The first twenty miles weren't too bad. After its initial hostility the animal seemed to have become resigned to its fate as a beast of burden and was proceeding along the road at a brisk trot. Sir Ian, apart from a feeling of soreness in that portion of his body in contact with the saddle, was beginning

to enjoy himself. He remembered the reluctance with which he had mounted a horse during his last leave—he had been staying with a distant cousin, the Laird of Troon—never thinking that the experience thus gained would be advantageous to him in the exercise of his profession. He began to think that, after all, horseback was the only suitable means of transportation for a knight—in olden days a knight was automatically a man on horseback.

The day was fine—but with a fineness that seemed too good to last. The air was abnormally clear, the distant, forested hills standing out in detail as though viewed through a telescope. Here and there rose thin threads of blue smoke, signs of human habitation. The Captain was tempted to deviate from the main road and to ride up to one of the farmhouses where he could use a telephone. He resisted the temptation without much effort—the other temptation, to ride into Ballantrae, a spaceman-knight on horseback, was so much stronger.

At noon he halted. There was a stream running by the road from which the horse could drink. Sir Ian dismounted clumsily, stood stiffly and watched the animal slaking its thirst. He was too stiff to leap forward in time to catch the reins as the beast, throwing up its head, galloped skittishly back along the road. Sir Ian shouted—and if the horse had had any intelligence it would never have returned after being called the things that it was called. It never returned in any case.

The Captain decided to sit by the roadside to think things out—then changed his mind. He did his thinking standing. He would walk on, he told himself. Sooner or later he must come to a house either with a telephone or transport, or both. Sooner or later some other wayfarer would overtake him and offer assistance. Sooner or later, even if he had to make the entire journey by foot, he would come to Ballantrae.

As he trudged doggedly on the afternoon deteriorated. A

smeary gray veil was drawn over the sky, obscuring the sun. It started to rain—a persistent, chill drizzle at first, coalescing into larger and colder drops with the rising of the wind. With the fall of dusk a half gale was sweeping in from the north and the rain had turned to a gelid sleet. Sir Ian thought of the warmth and the comfort of his ship—far more real to him than the hypothetical warmth and comfort to be found in Ballantrae.

When he saw the light he was, as he admitted himself, ready to lay down and die in the ditch. He drove his tired, frozen muscles over the last mile of the road, at last was hammering at the stout wooden door of the house from which the light had shone. Over his head creaked the sign, the lettering barely distinguishable in the dim glow from an upstairs, shuttered window—*The Duke of Cameron.*

The door opened slowly. Sir Ian staggered inside. He looked up at the big man, taller even than Sir Ian, who was looking down at him with a certain distaste. He looked past the big man to the golden haired girl standing behind him. He was absurdly warmed by the shy, half smile that she gave him, by the pity that he saw in her blue eyes.

"I don't usually take in tramps," said the big man.

Sir Ian straightened himself. His once smart uniform must be, he knew, a sorry mess—but, even so, surely this clod should be able to see who and what he was.

"I," said Sir Ian, "am the Captain of the star ship, *Empress of Skye.* We were obliged to make a forced landing on this planet and we have been unable to get into touch with the spaceport at Ballantrae. I was riding into Ballantrae to get help to effect repairs, and I lost my horse . . ."

"Your *horse?*" asked the innkeeper incredulously.

"Give him a drink, father," insisted his daughter. "Canna ye see the poor man is half frozen?"

"All right."

Without much ceremony Sir Ian was shown into a warm parlor, seated in a chair before a roaring fire. It was the inn-

keeper's daughter who poured him a generous slug of whiskey and handed it to him.

The whiskey hit Sir Ian hard. He knew that it would be foolish to essay to speak for a while, that he would be bound to say something silly. He resolved not to open his mouth until he felt better.

"Your *horse?*" asked the innkeeper again.

"I am a knight," replied Sir Ian. "Why shouldn't I have a horse?"

"A knight?" asked the girl. Her incredulity was not so offensive as her father's.

"Yes. I am Captain Sir Ian MacLachlan Stuart, Master of the interstellar liner *Empress of Skye.*"

"It could just be true, father. It could be a Captain's uniform under the mud. You remember that young spaceman who stayed here a couple of nights last year—the Second Mate of the *Countess of Stornoway*?"

"Ay, my girl. I remember him right well. And I swore that I'd never let another spaceman set foot in my house."

"Let me finish, father. He was telling me that the Captains of the big ships, the Empress ships, were often knights. He was saying that he hoped to be one himself one day . . ."

"And filled up your silly mind with ideas that you'd be his lady."

"Forgive me for interrupting a family discussion," said Sir Ian, "but I have to look after the interests of my ship. Have you a telephone?"

"Ay. But it's broken."

"Then have you a ground car, or a 'copter?"

"No."

"Then have you a horse?"

"No."

"The mail 'copter calls in," said the girl, "tomorrow."

"Then tomorrow it will have to be," said Sir Ian. He

pulled out his notecase. "I have money with me. I should like a hot bath, a meal, and a bed . . ."

"I swore," growled the innkeeper, "that I'd never let another spaceman stay in this house."

"But a *knight*, father. He's more than a spaceman."

"Oh, all right. Come with me, *Sir* Ian, and I'll show ye the bathroom and lend ye a change of dry clothes. There'll be a meal ready down here when ye're dressed."

Sir Ian thawed out slowly in the hot bath. It was obvious, he thought, why the innkeeper disliked spacemen. That daughter of his would appeal to a man straight in from Deep Space—even to one who, like Sir Ian, had enjoyed the social life of a big ship. That daughter of his would appeal to a man. Period.

After all, thought Sir Ian, I'm not old. And after all, I'll never see this world again, ever. The girl herself looks clever enough to handle things so that her father could never do more than suspect. I hope.

He got out of the bath, looked around vainly for the hot air blowers to dry his body. He realized at last what the big towel was for, used it. He dressed in the slacks and shirt left out for him by the innkeeper, managed by taking in a reef in the waistband of the trousers and turning up the bottoms of them to look fairly presentable. He made his way slowly downstairs.

The meal was good, made all the more enjoyable by the sound of the wind and the driving rain outside. But Sir Ian was not as comfortable as he should have been. It was the fault of the girl—she was making it all too obvious what her feelings were and what her hopes were for the night. The Captain did not object to the pressure of a feminine knee against his under the table—what he did object to was that the innkeeper would have had to be blind not to see what was going on.

It was the innkeeper who interrupted Sir Ian in the middle of a story that he was telling about his service in the Survey ships as a young man.

"I think," he said slowly, "that you should consider the interests of your ship."

"My officers," said Sir Ian, "are capable of looking after her. Besides—what can I do?"

"I have remembered," said the innkeeper, "that I can, after all, offer you transport. As you may know, certain animals on this planet grow to what would be considered abnormal sizes elsewhere. Frankly, I bore in mind at first both your knightly dignity and the fact that you are not native to this world—but I have decided now that you ride to Ballantrae tonight."

"I am content," said Sir Ian, "to wait for tomorrow's mail 'copter."

"In this weather," said the innkeeper, "it may not fly."

"Tomorrow will be time enough to find that out," said the girl.

"Tomorrow," said her father, "may be too late."

"For what?" she flared.

"I have pride," he replied, "even if you haven't."

"Pride?" she asked. "In what?"

"Enough!" he roared. He got to his feet, towering over the seated Sir Ian. "I will furnish you an animal, sir, more intelligent and sure-footed than any horse ever foaled, an animal that will deliver you safely at Ballantrae, even if he has to carry you there by the scruff of your neck!"

He whistled.

He whistled again.

Something whined outside. There was the sound of claws scrabbling and clicking on the polished floor. And then the thing that had made the noises was looking at them with big, mournful eyes, its head and shoulders completely blocking the doorway—and it was not a small door. Sir Ian felt the

shock that one always feels when seeing something familiar blown up to many times its normal size.

Telling the story afterwards, he was ever to maintain that he would have refused the innkeeper's offer of a steed, ignoring all possibility of ensuing complications, but for one thing. It was, he always said, utterly fantastic how attractive women had the knack of destroying all their charm with one ill-considered word or action. It was not, Sir Ian would take pains to point out, that he was deficient in a sense of humor—it was just that he considered some forms of humor—alleged humor, that is—to be singularly unfunny. The pun, or any play on words, was a case in point.

He left the inn, said Sir Ian, without regret, in spite of the shrieking wind and the driving sleet, in spite of the weirdness of his mount. He could do nothing else after what that girl had said.

"Father," she had complained, "surely you wouldn't send a knight out on a dog like this?"

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MYRLE BENEDICT

SIT BY THE FIRE

Myrle Benedict's more poetical friends say she looks like Ondine; others say Lillith. Not having met her, I can only report that this unusually sensitive writer, who now lives in Corpus Christi, is described as tall and green-eyed—and partial to cats. . . .

'TWASN'T the fust time I'd seen her—the strange wild girl trampin' over the hills, but 'twas the fust time she'd come close enough so's I could actual see whut she looked like.

She didn't look mean, like the stories folks tole made her

out to be. She looked kinda lost, and awful young, like. She was just a little bitty thing, too.

Now, I take that back about her lookin' lost. She didn't exactly. She looked more like somebody had done gone off an' left her, an' she was jest bound to make do as best she could.

She didn't run off when she seen me. She helt her ground an' stared at me, long an' hard, like 'twas her as owned the meader an' not me. She was right spunky, too. Didn't look like the sight of a ol' codger like me scairt her none.

Lookin' at her up close like that I could see she mighty close 'sembled my middle girl Virgie, her whut died when she warn't much older than this here girl.

I helt out my hand an' I spoke to her. I says, "Lookie here, girl, whut you doin' on my propitty?" Only I says it real gentle like.

When she seen me holdin' my hand out like that, she jumped a few steps back, like she was scairt I was gonna throw somethin' at her.

"Now hold on, girl," I says. "I ain't gonna hurt ya none. Now whut's a pritty leetle thing like you a-doin' out in the open all the time? Ain't you 'fraid you'll get hurt, or maybe et up by a mountain-lion or somethin'?"

For the first time her face kinda softened, like she'd heard an' understood all I was sayin' only she didn't want to let on none.

"No," she says, so soft I could scarce hear her. "I ain't a-feared o' that."

Then, like it had just dawned on her she'd said a spoken word, she turned an' woulda scooted back into the brush if I hadn't said anythin'.

"Wait a minute," I says. "You don't have to run off. Not from me. Shecks, I'm jest a ol' man, livin' up here on the side o' the mountain, all alone. You don't have to be a-feared o' me."

She turned, an' kinda looked at me, like she didn't know whether to b'lieve me or not.

"Come on," I says. "Whyn't you an' me go down to my cabin an' talk? There's a mite o' corn pone and I got some ice-cole buttermilk back in th' spring-house. Won't hurt you none, by the looks o' you."

She opened her mouth an' then closed it again.

"I ain't tryin' to force you, girl," I says. "I'm a-goin' back, an' if'n you want to come, come, an' if'n you want to go without supper, do."

I turned around an' started back down the path to my little cabin. I'm a ol' man, an' all my children have gone off an' married. My ol' woman, she died some years back, an' I live up here all alone. I tend my field an' the garden patch, an' I'm a sight better off than a lot o' old men whut goes an' lives off'n their kids. Folks say I'm crotchety, but I ain't. I got a real nice life up here, an' I don't want no meddlin' busybody from down in the village messin' it up tryin' to "help." That Miz Perkins, in partic'lar. She's th' do-goodinist woman I ever seen. Thinks it's a cryin' shame my kids "neglect" their pa like they do. Well, I don't call it neglectin'. I raised 'em up to stand on their two hind legs an' look after themselves, an' I expect them to let me do th' same thing.

I got inside my cabin, an' left th' door open a little. It was nice an' cool, after the heat of Indian Summer. I went out to th' spring-house an' got th' pitcher o' cole buttermilk an' brung it back to th' house. I poured out two glasses full, an' set the pan o' corn pone on th' table. I didn't bother none to look an' see if'n th' wild girl follered me or not.

Pretty soon I heard a little rustlin' sound, like a mouse makes in a corncrib, only a lot softer, an' then I heard her a-gulpin' that buttermilk like she was starved. I pushed the pitcher toward her a little, an' let her be. She'd drank down three glasses o' buttermilk afore she said anythin'.

"That was good," she says.

I turned around an' looked at her. She was a-sittin' on the edge o' her chair, like she was a-measurin' the distance to th' door in case she had to run for it. She had a milk moustache on her, where she'd been too greedy with th' buttermilk, like a kid. She had on a darkish sort of dress an' it was all dirty an' tore from th' brambles. She didn't have on no shoes, an' I could tell she was used to wearin' shoes, 'cause her feet was little an' white an' looked soft, even though they was pretty dirty right now. She was kinda pale, an' had dark hair, all wild an' tumbled lookin'.

She saw me lookin' at her feet an' drew them up under her, like she was a-shamed.

"Whut's your name, chile?" I says. "Whut'r you doin' out roamin' the mountain? Ain't you got no folks?"

"N-No, I ain't," she says. "I ain't got nobody."

"Whut are you so scared about? I ain't gonna hurt you."

"You ain't for sure?" she asks like a kid.

"I ain't for sure. Now, how come you're actin' like a rabbit caught in a snare?"

"I—I don't like this place."

"Well, I don't blame you none, if'n all you've done lately is run away from ever'body, an' not let any of 'em get in hailin' distance."

"I know. But they was all so big . . . an' I was scared."

"Why ain't you so scared o' me?"

"I dunno. You don't seem like th' other folks I've seen. You ain't never yelled at me, nor flang a stone at me. You know when to let a body be."

"Who'd want to throw a stone at you?"

"Oh, one o' them kids from over on th' yonder side o' th' hill."

"Well, I ain't gonna let nobody harm you, neither. Fact is, you c'n stay right here, if'n you've a mind to. 'Tain't nobody here close 'cept me, an' I'm a ol' man, an' I wouldn't mind havin' a purty young thing like you to sorta liven up th' place."

She looked at me, suspicious-like. "Why?" she says.

"Oh, I dunno. Maybe it's cause you look like Virgie, a little. That's my middle girl. She died some years back, when she warn't much older 'n you. B'sides, you need some place to stay, don't you?"

"I reckon."

"Wull, that's settled, then. You c'n sleep up in the loft. I'll fix Virgie's ol' bed for you up there, an' you can have it all for yourself. Whut's your name, anyway, bein' as how you'll be livin' here?"

"I don't rightly have no proper name," she says real soft. "If'n you don't care, I'd 'preciate it if'n you'd just call me . . . Virgie."

So the strange wild girl come to live with me. Once she'd gentled down an' decided to stay, she was a real joy to have around. She fixed up some of th' ol' dresses she'd found in a trunk, an' I went down to th' gen'rl store an' bought her some bright stuff so's she could sew some dresses for herself. She fixed up that loft so bright an' purty, an' give the walls a fresh coat o' whitewash, an' even whitewashed th' walls in th' rest o' th' cabin. She put up green curtains at th' winders an' put a red-an'-white checkered cloth on the table. She even made me change m' overhauls twicet a week an' trim m' hair an' beard, too, an' made me wash m' hands b'fore I eat. She was a tol'ble cook, an' she got better as she went along.

We give out down at the store that she was a distant relation, with no parents, so she'd come to live with me. There was a few who knew in their hearts that she was th' wild girl, but they never knew for certain, 'cause we never told.

But even them as thought they knew, stopped their talk in time an' come to look on her as my actual kin. She even called me "Uncle Reb." That's m' name, Rebel. M' folks named me that 'cause I was borned whilest th' War was goin' on.

Warn't no surprise t' me, when spring come 'round again

that some o' th' young whelps down in th' village decided to come a-courtin' Virgie.

Now, Virgie, she'd done got over all her wildness an' shyness when she was around me, but when them lazy louts started drapin' themselves over th' porch rail, it come right back.

She'd sit there, pleased in a female way with all th' attention, but scairt, too, o' them big lumberin' boys. An' one evenin', after 'Kiah Piersall had been there, she come in a-cryin'.

"Virgie, what's that big ox done to you?" I says.

"Oh, Uncle Reb, he ain't done nothin', exactly," she says. "Only he—he tr-tried to kiss me, an' he was so hot an' the flesh around his eyes was so swollen, an' I was afeared!" She set down in the chair I'd made her an' huddled up in a heap. "He says he wants t' marry me, an' Uncle Reb, I just caint! I caint!"

"Whut do you mean, you caint? Now it's a fact that these menfolks hereabouts ain't whut you'd 'xactly call prizes, but you're gonna have t' marry somebody, some o' these days, Virgie."

"Oh, no, I ain't," she says, lookin' up sudden. "I ain't gonna marry nobody!"

"Why sure you are, Virgie. I knowed that when I took you in. You caint spend the rest o' your life lookin' after a ol' man. You gotta have a life o' your own, with a husbin' to look after you, an' kids, maybe. I ain't gonna be here always, an' you just cain't go through life without nobody. 'Tain't natural."

Her face went real white, an' I thought she was a-goin' t' swoon, but she didn't. There was two spots o' red in her cheeks, an' her voice shook a little. "Uncle Reb, I didn't know whut I was gettin' myself into, when I come here. I don't like it much, but I'm here, an' there's not much I c'n do about it now. But I just want t' be left alone! That's why I come to live with you. You let me be. I thought you understood maybe, but you don't neither."

"Don't understand whut?" I says, but she didn't 'pear to hear me.

"I c'n always go back an' roam th' hills. I c'n go far away, an' maybe find somebody else who'll take me in for a while, but I don't want to. I like it here, an' I like you, Uncle Reb. Only don't make me mix with other folks!"

"You don't seem to mind goin' down to th' store, or goin' t' meetin', or to th' barndance once in a while."

"That kinda mixin' isn't too bad, Uncle Reb. It's th' springtime mixin' I'm a-talkin' about—th' kind o' spring an' fall mixin' that's in th' blood."

I laughed. "Honey, if'n it's in your blood, it's not anythin' to be afeared of."

"But, Uncle Reb, you don't understand! It ain't in my blood . . . the folks I come from, they don't even remember it, 'xcept as it was writ down in books. But you folks, you got it so strong it likes to make a body faint from just bein' close to it!"

"Virgie, I don't understand what you're sayin', for a fact."

"Uncle Reb, listen to me. I'm not like folks around here. I'm not like anybody you ever met. I—I don't think it's quite proper for me t' mix too close with you folks. All I want is a roof over my head, an' good food, an' to be let alone!"

She meant it, I could tell. "Aw right, Virgie," I says. "I don't rightly understand why, but I'll go 'long with you, if'n that's whut you want."

"It is, Uncle Reb," she says, an' she lowered her eyes so's they caught the light for a minute an' shone out like two amber stones.

Springtime come an' went, an' when summer had come, th' young menfolk settled down a little. Virgie took t' going t' th' barndance once in a while again. But she quit it whenever th' autumn moon started shinin' big an' yeller along th' ridge o' th' hills.

When th' fust snow come, she really settled in for th' win-

ter. Of an evenin', she'd sit by the fire, all skwoonched up with her eyes shut, for all th' world like th' ol' red cat whut come t' live with us.

Virgie hadn't been with me too long when a ol' red mamma-cat come trailin' by an' took up with her. I didn't care if'n Virgie kept it, 'cause it could keep down th' mice in th' house, so long as it didn't bring in too many kittens.

So anyhow, of an evenin' them two'd curl up afore th' fire an' toast themselves an' th' cat'd purr an' hold its head up for Virgie to pet it. She never give it no name, just called it Cat, but it seemed to know that's who she meant when she called it.

I think that's the time Virgie was happiest, when th' snow lay deep on th' ground, an' there was no call to go outdoors, nor no call for nobody else to, neither.

Come spring again, Virgie started to shed the good, healthy plump she'd built up in th' winter. Th' young men started comin' back, jest the same as last year, an' Virgie, she got as snappy as a ol' turtle.

"Uncle Reb, it's gettin' me, too," she says one day. "I c'n feel this spring-thing, almost like you-all can."

"Oh, hush your mouth," I says. "I'm gettin' just a little tired o' your complainin' 'cause the boys is after you. There's more'n one gal down to th' village whut would give a pretty to be in your shoes, let me tell you."

"I don't want th' boys after me!" she says, an' run off to hide.

I couldn't help snortin'. She was a silly little thing, not t' 'preciate that she had th' whole part o' th' young men at her heels. I couldn't see it, m'self. She was too little. Man lives in th' hills, needs a woman big an' strong 'nough to help 'im. But she did have a strange sort o' face, with th' big eyes an' little chin, an' with that cloudy dark hair an' the pretty way she had o' talkin', she didn't need to say more'n

a dozen words b'fore th' boy she was a-talkin' to was plumb gone.

I didn't pay it too much mind when she didn't come home to supper. But she was gone all th' next day, too, an' didn't come in 'til 'way after dark. I could tell she'd been cryin'.

"You et supper?"

"No, Uncle Reb. I ain't hungry."

She looked at me, an' her eyes caught in th' candlelight, like they had a way o' doin'.

"Uncle Reb, whut would you say if'n I told you I wasn't one o' your folks?"

"Honey, I know that. You ain't any more kin to me than . . ."

"No, I mean, I ain't like nobody around here. Nobody a-tall."

"Virgie, are you startin' that again? I declare, chile, you got the funniest notions in your head o' anybody . . ."

"Uncle Reb, I mean it. Set down here." She took th' candle an' lighted the gasoline lantern I don't hardly never use. She went over to th' chest an' got m' readin' glasses for me. "Here, put these on. I want you to see me good."

I put 'em on, an' she set down in front o' me. "Look close at m' eyes, Uncle Reb."

I looked at 'em, an' it was a minute afore it sunk in whut I was seein'. They wasn't like ordinary eyes, they wasn't. I still couldn't see 'em too plain, even with m' glasses, but I could see 'em well enough to see they was like that ol' red mamma-cat's eyes.

"Whut are you, Virgie?" I says.

"I'm a . . . visitor, Uncle Reb," she says. "Me an' some more like me. We come from somewheres a far off. Th' others, they wanted to come a lot more'n me, an' they talked me into it. I was feelin' awful fearful when you found me an' took me in."

"Where are th' others like you?"

"I dunno. We went all over. Most o' us is scattered through the hill countries, though, 'cause it's more dangerous for us in th' cities. Th' people there are more likely t' notice that we're diff'rent."

"I reckon you're right. But how come th' folks 'round here ain't seen how you're so diff'rent? Seems like they c'd look at them eyes an' see right off."

"I got some little bitty pieces o' special-made glass I wear on m' eyes, whenever I got to go among people. They don't hurt none, when you get used to 'em, an' they make my eyes look like ever'body else's. I ain't wore 'em too much with you, 'cause your eyesight is awful poor anyhow. M' skin is diff'rent colored, too. I keep some dye rubbed in t' give it color. That is, I did. I don't need to very much anymore."

"Why not, Virgie?"

"Uncle Reb, th' longer I stay, th' more I get like th' folks here. I guess I ain't strong 'nough t' keep m'self like I was. If'n I stay out in th' sun long anymore, I get brown. I never did before. My skin don't look silvery no more, even without the dye. O' course, there's some things I can't change, like m' eyes, an' m' feet." She stuck her feet out, with no shoes. I couldn't see anythin' diff'rent, 'til she wiggled her toes, an' there wasn't but four of 'em.

"But, Uncle Reb, I catch m'self thinkin' strange thoughts, like you folks. An' in th' springtime . . ." She started cryin' an' hid her head in her skirt. She looked up again. "I ain't used to th' feelin'. With us, it's a quiet thing, but with you-all, it's like a rollin' wave that don't never quite go down but climbs higher all th' time."

I didn't say nothin'. I jest set quiet for a while, thinkin'. After a little, Virgie got up an' went to her room in th' loft. Pretty soon she come down, dressed in th' old ragged dress she had on when I found her.

"I reckon you'll want me t' go," she says real quiet.

"No such thing," I says. "I been thinkin' long an' hard. You're a stranger, for sure, but you've lived under my roof

an' you've eat my bread. I've come t' love you like one o' my own, an' you're welcome t' stay as long as you want."

She looked at me, an' those strange eyes o' hers lit up like candles. "Oh, Uncle Reb! Thank you so much!" She swooped over t' me an' give me a kiss on th' cheek, th' fust one I've had in years.

So Virgie stayed. As th' seasons o' the year passed, I c'd tell, little by little, she was losin' her strange ways.

I'm a-gettin' old, an' a little feeble, an' I worry 'bout Virgie sometimes, an' whut'll happen t' her when I'm gone. After she told me whut she did, I can't see that it would be good, crossin' her strain an' ours.

I jest hope she c'n maybe find one o' her own kind afore she gets so much like us he wouldn't be able t' tell who she was.

He'd better hurry. Last week I caught her kissin' 'Kiah Piersall, out in th' autumn moon. And this time, she warn't scairt.

●

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP

A THING OF CUSTOM

Tall and dignified L. Sprague de Camp, who somehow always seems very much the Republican—in the new *sense of the word, I hasten to add—has written some thoroughly delightful novels and stories, such as ROGUE QUEEN and this story, which reflect his warm interest (a most un-Republican interest, I can hear heathens add) in the world around him.*

RAJENDRA JAIPAL, liaison officer of the Terran Delegation to the Associated Planets, said fluently but with a strong Hindustani accent: "Parson to parson, please . . . I wish to speak to Milan Reid, at Parthia 6-0711, Parthia, Pennsylvania . . . That is right."

While he waited, Jaipal looked at the telephone as if it were a noxious vine that had invaded his garden. An unreconstructed antimechanist, he regarded most features of the Western world with a dour, gloomy, and suspicious air.

"Here's your party," said the telephone.

Jaipal said: "Hello, Milan? This is R. J. How are you? . . . Oh, no worse than usual. Millions of calls to make and letters to write and hands to shake. Ugh! Now, listen. The railroad has given us two special sleepers and a baggage-car through from New Haven to Philadelphia. We shall put the delegates aboard Friday evening, and a train will pick these cars up and drop them off at Thirtieth Street at seven-thirty Saturday morning. Have you got that? Seven-thirty a.m., daylight saving. Write it down, please. You will have your people there to pick them up. The baggage-car will contain the Forellians, as they are too large for a sleeper. You will have a truck at the station for them. How are things doing at your end?"

A plaintive voice said: "Mrs. Kress got sick, so as vice-chairman of the Hospitality Committee I have to—to do all the work, rush around and check up and pump hands. I wish I'd known what I was getting into."

"If you think you have something to complain about, you should have my job. Have you got that letter with the list of delegates?"

"Yes . . . Um . . . Right here."

"Well, cross off the Moorians and the Koslovians, but add one more Oshidan."

"What's his name?"

"Zla-bzam Ksan-rdup."

"How do you spell it?"

Jaipal spelled. "Got it?"

"Uh-huh. You—you'll stay with us, of course?"

"Sorree, but I can't come."

"Oh, dear! Louise and I were counting on it." The voice was pained. Jaipal had met the Reids a year before when a

similar week-end visit had been arranged with families of Ardmore. Jaipal and Reid were drawn together at once by a common dislike of the rest of the world.

"So was I," said Jaipal, "but a ship from Sirius is due Saturday. Now, there is one couple I want you to assign to yourself."

"Who?"

"The Osmanians."

There was a rustle of paper as Reid consulted his list. "Mr. and Mrs. Sterga?"

"Yes, or Sterga and Thvi. No children."

"What are they like?"

"Something like octopi, or perhaps centipedes."

"Hm. They don't sound pretty. Do they talk?"

"Better than we do. They have a—what do you call it? —a knick-knack for languages."

"Why do you want me to take them?"

"Because," explained Jaipal, "their planet has natural transuranic elements in quantity, and we are negotiating a mining-lease. It's veree delicate, and it wouldn't do for the Stergas to pfall into the wrong hands. Like—who was that uncouth buffoon I met at the Kresses'?"

"Charlie Ziegler?"

"That's the one." Jaipal snorted at the memory of Ziegler's tying a napkin around his head and putting on a burlesque swami-act. As Jaipal had no sense of humor, the other guests' roars at Ziegler's antics rubbed salt in the wound. He continued: "Those people would not do for hosts at all. I know you are tactful, not one of these stupid ethnocentrics who would act horrified or superior. Now, have you got the diet-lists?"

Mumble, mumble. "Yes, here's the list of those who can eat any human food, and those who can eat some human food, and those who can't eat any."

"The special pfood for the last group will be sent along on the train. Be sure it's delivered to the right houses."

"I'll have a couple of trucks at the station. You be sure each crate is clearly marked. But say, how—how about these Osmanians? I mean, what are they like aside from their looks?"

"Oh, quite jolly and convivial. High-spirited. They eat anything. You won't have any trouble." Jaipal could have told more about the Osmanians but forbore for fear of scaring Reid off. "Now, be sure not to send the Chavantians to anybody with a phobia about snakes. Remember that the Steinians eat in seclusion and consider any mention of food obscene. Be sure the Forellians go where there's an empty barn or garage to sleep in . . ."

"Louise!" called Milan Reid. "That was R. J. Can you help me with the lists now?"

Reid was a slight man who combined a weakness for aggressively stylish clothes with a shy, preoccupied, nervous, hurried air, all of which made him a natural target for the jeers of any gang of street-corner slopeheads. He was an engineer for the Hunter Bioresonator Corporation. He was a natural choice to manage the visiting extraterrestrials, being one who found foreigners easier to deal with than his own countrymen.

His wife entered, a slender woman of much his own type. They got to work on the list of delegates to the Associated Planets who were going to visit Parthia, and the lists of local families who would act as hosts. This was the third year of giving A. P. personnel an informal weekend in Terran homes. These three visits had all been to American homes because the A. P. headquarters was in New Haven. The success of the project, however, had made other nations demand that they, too, be allowed to show what nice people they were. Hence Athens, Greece, was the tentative choice for next year.

Milan Reid said: ". . . the Robertsonians have no sense

of time, so we'd better give them to the Hobarts. They haven't any either."

"Then none of them will arrive for anything," said Louise.

"So what? How about the Mendezians? Jaipal's note says they can't bear to be touched."

"Rajendra can't either, though he tries to be polite about it. Some Hindu tabu."

"Uh-huh. Let's see, aren't Goldthorpes fanatics on sanitation?"

"Just the people! They wouldn't want to touch the Mendezians either. Their children have to wash their hands every time they handle money, and Beatrice Goldthorpe puts on rubber gloves to read a book from the public library for fear of germs."

"How about the Oshidans?" he asked.

"What are they like, darling?"

"R. J. says they're the most formal race in the Galaxy, with the most elaborate etiquette. As he puts it here, 'they are what you call puffed shirts, only they don't wear shirts.' "

"I didn't know Rajendra could make much of a joke," said Louise Reid. "How about Dr. McClintock? He's another puffed shirt."

"Darling, you're wonderful. The Reverend John R. McClintock shall have them."

"How about the Zieglers? Connie Ziegler called to remind us they'd applied well in advance."

Reid scowled. "I'm going to juggle this list to put the Zieglers too far down to get any e.t.'s."

"Please don't do that, sweetheart. I know you don't like them, but living next door we have to get along."

"But R. J. said he didn't want the Zieglers as hosts."

"Oh, dear! If they ever find out we cheated them out of their guests . . ."

"Can't be helped. R. J.'s right, too. They're—they're typical ethnocentrics. I've squirmed in embarrassment while

Charlie told bad jokes about our own minority groups here, feeling I ought to stop him but not knowing how. Can't you just see Charlie calling some sensitive extraterrestrial a bug in that loud Chicago bray of his?"

"But they did go out of their way to get on the list . . ."

"It's not that they like e.t.'s; they just can't bear to be left out."

"Oh, well, if we must . . . Who's next?" she asked.

"That's all, unless R. J. calls up again. Now, what shall we do with Sterga and Thvi?"

"I suppose we can put them in George's room. What do they enjoy?"

"It says here they like parties, sight-seeing, and swimming."

"We can take them to the pool."

"Sure. And since they're arriving early, we could drive 'em home for breakfast and then out to Gettysburg for a picnic."

During the next few days, Parthia was convulsed by preparations for the exotic visitors. Merchants filled their windows with interplanetary exhibits: artwork from Robertsonia, a stuffed fhe:gb from Schlemmeria, a photomontage of scenes on Flahertia.

At the Lower Siddim High School, performers at the forthcoming celebration rehearsed on the stage while volunteers readied the basement for the strawberry festival. Mrs. Carmichael, chairman of the Steering Committee, swept about supervising:

". . . Where's that wretched man who was going to fix the public address system? . . . No, the color-guard mustn't carry rifles. We're trying to show these creatures how peaceful we are . . ."

The Quaker rolled into Thirtieth Street. The hosts from Parthia clustered about the three rearmost cars at the north

end of the platform. While the trainmen uncoupled these cars, the doors opened and out came a couple of earthmen. After them came the extraterrestrials.

Milan Reid strode forward to greet the taller earthman. "I'm Reid."

"How d'you do; I'm Grove-Sparrow and this is Ming. We're from the Secretariat. Are your people ready?"

"Here they are."

"Hm." Grove-Sparrow looked at the milling mass of hosts, mostly suburban housewives. At that instant the Chavantians slithered off the train. Mrs. Ross gave a thin scream and fainted. Mr. Nagle caught her in time to keep her from cracking her skull on the concrete.

"Pay no attention," said Reid, wishing that Mrs. Ross had fallen on the tracks and been run over. "Which of our guests is which?"

"Those are the Oshidans, the ones with faces like camels."

"Dr. McClintock!" called Reid. "Here's your party."

"You take it, Ming," said Grove-Sparrow. Ming began a long winded formal introduction, during which the Oshidans and the Reverend McClintock kept up a series of low bows as if they were worked out by strings. Grove-Sparrow indicated three large things getting off the baggage-car. They were something like walruses and something like caterpillars, but two were as big as small elephants. The third was smaller. "The Forellians."

"Mrs. Meyer!" shouted Reid. "Is the truck ready?"

"The Robertsonians." Grove-Sparrow referred to four badger-like creatures with respirators on their long noses.

Reid raised his voice: "Hobart! No, their hosts aren't here yet."

"Let them sit on their kit; they won't mind," said Grove-Sparrow. "Here come the Osmanians."

"They-uh-they're mine," said Reid, his voice raising to a squeak of dismay. A group of gawkers had collected farther

south on the platform to stare at the extraterrestrials. None came close.

The Osmanians (so called because their planet was discovered by a Dr. Mahmud Osman) were built something on the lines of saw-horses. Instead of four legs, they had twelve rubbery tentacles, six in a row on each side, on which they scuttled briskly along. They were much alike fore and aft, but one could tell their front end by the two large froglike eyes on top and the mouth-opening between the foremost pair of tentacles.

"You are our host?" said the leading Osmanian in a blubbery voice. "Ah, such a pleasure, good dear Mr. Reid!"

The Osmanian flung itself upon Reid, rearing up on its six after tentacles to enfold him in its six forward ones. It pressed a damp kiss on his cheek. Before he could free himself from this gruesome embrace, the second Osmanian swarmed up on him and kissed his other cheek. As the creatures weighed over two hundred pounds apiece, Reid staggered and sank to the concrete, enveloped in tentacles.

The Osmanians released their host. Grove-Sparrow helped Reid to his feet, saying in a low voice:

"Don't look so bloody horrified, old boy. They're only trying to be friendly."

"I forget," blubbered the larger Osmanian. "Your method of greeting here is to shake the anterior limb, is it not?" It extended a tentacle.

Reid gingerly put out a hand. The Osmanian caught the hand with three tentacles and pumped Reid's arm so vigorously that he was nearly jerked off his feet.

"Let's dance!" cried the Osmanian, slithering around in a circle and swinging Reid opposite him. "Guk-guk-guk!" This last was a horrid coughing, cackling sound that served the Osmanians for laughter.

"No, no, Sterga!" said Grove-Sparrow. "Let him go! He has to sort out the delegations."

"Oh, all right," said Sterga. "Maybe somebody would like to wrestle. You, madam?" The Osmanian addressed Mrs. Meyer, who was fat and of mature years.

"No, please," said Mrs. Meyer, paling and dodging behind Grove-Sparrow. "I—I have to see to the Forellians."

"Quiet down, you two," said Grove-Sparrow. "You'll get exercise later."

"I hope so," said Sterga. "Perhaps Mr. Reid will wrestle with us at his home, guk-guk. It is the main sport of Nohp." This was the name of Osmania in Sterga's language. The Osmanian spoke to his mate in this tongue while Reid frantically paired off guests and hosts. The rest of the Quaker rumbled off.

When each set of guests had been sent off with its host, and the Forellians had crawled up on to their truck-trailer, the four little Robertsonians were left sitting on the platform. There was still no sign of the Hobarts. The employees of the railroad wheeled crates out of the baggage-car, marked FOOD FOR FORELLIANS, FOOD FOR STEINIANS, and so forth. Reid said to Grove-Sparrow:

"Look, I—I've got to find my truck-drivers and give them these addresses. Will you keep an eye on the Osmanians and Robertsonians till I get back?"

"Righto."

Reid dashed off, followed by two porters pushing a hand-truck piled with crates. When he returned, the Robertsonians were still sitting in a disconsolate circle. There was no sign of Grove-Sparrow, Ming, the Hobarts, or the Osmanians. There was broken glass on the concrete, a smear of liquid, and an alcoholic smell.

As he stared about wildly, Reid felt a tug at his trouser-leg. A Robertsonian said: "Please, is dere any sign of our host?"

"No, but he'll be along. What's happened to the others?"

"Oh, dat. Dey were lying on de platform, waiting, when

an eart'man came along, walking dis way and dat as if he were sick. He saw Mr. Ming and said somet'ing about dirty foreigners. Mr. Ming pretended he didn't hear, and de man said he could lick anybody in de place. I suppose he meant dat custom you call kissing, dough he didn't look as if he loved anybody."

"What *happened?*"

"Oh, de Osmanians got up, and Sterga said: 'Dis nice fellow wants to wrestle. Come on, Thvi.'

"He started for de man, who saw him for de first time. De man took a bottle out of his pocket and trew it at Sterga, saying: 'Go back to hell where you belong!' De bottle broke. De man ran. Sterga and Thvi ran after him, calling to him to stop and wrestle. Mr. Grove-Sparrow and Mr. Ming ran after. Dat's all. Now please, can you find de people who are going to take us?"

Reid sighed. "I'll have to find the others first. Wait here . . ."

He met the missing members of the expedition returning to the platform. "The drunk is on his way to the police-station," said Grove-Sparrow. "Still no sign of your Hobarts?"

"Not yet, but that's not unusual."

"Why don't you take the Robertsonians to the Hobart place?"

"We'd probably pass the Hobarts on their way here. Tell you, though; I'll 'phone to see if they've left."

The Hobart telephone answered. Clara Hobart said: "Oh, Milan! We were just ready to go. I'm sorry we're late, but you know how it is."

Reid, resisting an impulse to grind his teeth, did indeed know how it was with the Hobarts. They had a way of arriving at parties just as everybody else was leaving. "Stay where you are and I'll deliver your guests in about an hour."

He went back and bid good-bye to Grove-Sparrow and Ming, who were returning to New Haven. Then he herded his two groups of extra-terrestrials up the ramps to his car.

To a man who hated to be made conspicuous, the drive to Parthia left much to be desired. The Robertsonians curled up in one large furry ball on the front seat and slept, but the Osmanians bounced around in back, excited and garrulous, pointing with their tentacles and sticking them out the windows to wave at passers-by. Most people had read about extraterrestrials and seen them on television enough not to be unduly surprised, but an octopoid tentacle thrust in the window of your car while you are waiting for a light can still be startling.

After the Osmanians had almost caused a collision, Reid ordered them sternly to keep their tentacles inside the car. He envied Nagle and Kress, who had flown their guests home from the roof of the Post Office Building in their private helicopters.

West of the Susquehanna, the Piedmont Expressway turns south towards Westminster, to swoop past Baltimore and Washington. Milan Reid turned off and continued west. In response to his pleas, the Osmanians had been fairly quiet.

Near York he found himself stuck behind an Amishman's buggy, which the heavy eastbound traffic kept him from passing.

"What is that?" asked Thvi.

"A buggy," said Louise Reid.

"Which, the thing with the wheels or the animal pulling it?"

"The thing with the wheels. The animal is called a horse."

"Isn't that a primitive form of transportation here?" said Sterga.

"Yes," said Louise. "The man uses it because of his religion."

"Is that why he wears that round black hat?"

"Yes."

"I want that hat," said Sterga. "I think I should look pretty in it, guk-guk-guk."

Reid glanced around. "If you want a Terran hat you'll have to buy one. That hat belongs to the man."

"I still want it. If Terra is going to get this mining-lease, it can afford me that one little hat."

The eastbound traffic ceased for the moment. Reid passed the buggy. As the automobile came abreast, Sterga thrust his front end out the quadrant-window. A tentacle whisked the black hat from the head of the Amishman.

The sectarian's broad ruddy chin-whiskered face turned towards the car. His blue eyes popped with horror. He gave a hoarse scream, leaped from the buggy, vaulted a split-rail fence, and ran off across a field. As the car drew ahead of the buggy, the horse had a view of Sterga too. The horse shrieked and ran off in the other direction, the buggy bouncing wildly behind it.

Reid braked to a stop. "Damn it!" he yelled.

In the back seat, Sterga was trying to balance the Amishman's hat on his head, if he could be said to have a head. Reid snatched the hat. "What kind of trouble are you trying to make?"

"No trouble; just a little joke," bubbled Sterga.

Reid snorted and got out. The Amishman had disappeared. His horse was in sight across a plowed field, eating grass. It was still attached to the buggy. Reid crossed the road, holding the hat, and started across the field. His feet sank into the soft earth, and the soil entered his shoes. The horse heard him coming, looked around, and trotted off.

After several tries, Reid plodded back to his automobile, hung the hat on a fence-post, shook the dirt out of his shoes, and drove off. Fuming, he promised Rajendra Jaipal some hard words.

The Osmanians were subdued for a while. At Gettysburg they went into the exhibition-building. From the gallery they looked down upon a relief-map of the Gettysburg region covered with colored electric lights. A phonograph-record gave an account of the battle while a young man

worked a set of keys that lit the lights to show the positions of the Federal and Confederate troops at various times:

"Now, at the beginning of the second day, Longstreet spent the morning ranging his artillery around the salient where the Third Corps occupied the peach orchard." (Lights blinked on.) "At noon the Confederates began a bombardment, and McLaws' Division advanced . . ."

There was a stir among the spectators as the Osmanians wormed their way into the front row and hung their tentacles over the rail. The young man working the lights lost track of his keys and sat gaping while the recording ground on. Then he tried to catch up, became confused, and for a time had Meade's Federals in full retreat.

Reid led his guests outside. They climbed the observation-tower, from which they saw the Round Tops and the Eisenhower Memorial rising from the farm which that President had owned. When Reid and his wife started down, Sterga blubbered something at Thvi. The next thing, the Osmanians were scrambling down the outside of the steelwork.

"Come back! You'll be killed!" yelled Reid, who hated high places.

"No danger," called back Sterga. "This is more fun."

The Reids clattered down the stairs. Reid expected to hear the plop of an Osmanian striking the concrete. He got to the bottom just ahead of the Osmanians, who slid from girder to girder with the greatest ease.

Milan Reid sat down on the bottom step and pressed his fists against his head. Then he said in a hollow voice: "Let's eat lunch."

At the Rose Hill Swimming Pool, Wallace Richards, the lifeguard, was showing off his dives. He was a young man of vast thews and vaster vanity. Girls sat around the pool watching, while other young men, all looking either skinny or pot-bellied by contrast, gloomed in the background. The Forellians had swum in the morning but now had gone away.

While they were there, there had been no room for anybody else in the pool. Now there were no extraterrestrials until Milan and Louise came out in bathing-suits, followed by Sterga and Thvi. Reid spread a blanket and prepared to settle down to a sun-bath.

The Osmanians aroused the usual stir. Wallace Richards never noticed. He stood tautly, tapering from shoulders to ankles like an inverted isosceles triangle, while he gathered his forces for a triple flip.

Thvi slipped into the pool and shot across it with a swirl of tentacles. Richards bounded off the board, clasped his knees, turned over three times, and straightened out. He came down on top of Thvi.

Sterga shouted in his own language, but too late. Then he too entered the water. The watchers cried out.

The surface of the pool was beaten by thrashing limbs and tentacles. Richards' head appeared, shouting:

"Damn it, give me back my trunks!"

The Osmanians whipped across the pool and shot out. Thvi waved Richards' trunks (little more than a G-string) in one tentacle and called: "You will jump on top of me, will you?"

"I didn't do it on purpose!" screamed Richards. The audience began to laugh.

"Knocked all the breath out of me, guk-guk-guk," bubbled Thvi, trying to work a couple of her tentacles through the leg holes.

Sterga scrambled up the ladder to the high-diving board. "Earthman!" he called down. "How did you do that jump?"

"Give me back my trunks!"

"Like this?" Sterga leaped off the board.

However, instead of diving, he spread all twelve tentacles and came down on Richards like a pouncing spider. Richards ducked before the hideous apparition descended on him and began to swim away. But his speed in the water was as nought

compared to the Osmanian's. Sterga caught him and began tickling him.

Reid said to Thvi: "For God's sake, make that mate of yours let the man go. He'll drown him."

"Oh, all right. You Earthmen never want any fun." Thvi swam over to where the pair were struggling.

A limp Richards was hauled out and laid on the concrete. Somebody pumped his lungs for ten minutes until he came around and sat up, coughing and gasping. When he pulled himself together he glared about and wheezed: "Where are those God-damned octopussies? I'll . . ."

But Reid and his charges had left.

For cocktails, the Reids had an older couple in: Professor and Mrs. Hamilton Beach, of Bryn Mawr College. Beach, a sociologist, wanted to talk about such serious matters as interspecies relations, but Sterga and Thvi had other ideas. They swallowed their cocktails so fast that Reid could do little but mix new ones. They made horrible noises which, they explained, were an Osmanian song.

Reid worried lest they get drunk and become even more obstreperous, but Sterga reassured him: "These are nothing to what we drink on Nohp. There anything less than four-fifths alcohol is a—how would you say it—a light-wines-and-beer."

The Reids eased the Beaches out at seven so as to have time to eat and get to the strawberry festival. Reid went back into the livingroom to find Sterga and Thvi drinking alternately out of the shaker. Sterga said:

"Mr. Reid, I understand you people have the same reproductive methods we have."

"Uh—well—that depends on your method," said Reid, appalled by the turn of the conversation.

"You do reproduce bisexually, don't you? The male carries . . ."

"Yes, yes, yes."

"Why haven't you and Mrs. Reid done so?"

Reid bit his lip. "We have. Our son is away at camp, as a counsellor."

"Ah, that is fine. Then you can comply with the custom of the Hliht."

"What custom?"

"We always trade mates with our guests. It is inhospitable not to."

"What?"

Sterga repeated.

Reid goggled. "You—you're not serious?"

"Certainly. It will be—"

"But that's physically impossible, even if our customs allowed it."

"No, we are not so different as you might think. I have investigated the matter. Anyway, we can have a lot of fun experimenting, guk-guk."

"Out of the question!" snapped Reid. "Our customs forbid it."

"You Earthmen want that mining-lease, don't you?

"Excuse me," said Reid, and went into the kitchen. There Louise was helping the temporary maid to put the final touches on the dinner. He drew her aside and explained the latest demand of their guests.

Louise Reid goggled in her turn. She opened the door to get a glimpse of Sterga in the living-room. Sterga caught her eye and winked. This was an unnerving spectacle, as the Osmanians blinked their eyes by withdrawing them into their heads and popping them up again.

She turned away and pressed her hands over her face. "What shall we *do*?"

"Well, I—I can tell you one thing. I'm going to get rid of these so-called guests. If I ever catch R. J. . . ."

"But what about the mining-concession?"

"To hell with the mining-concession. I don't care if it causes an interplanetary war; I won't put up with these rubber jokers any longer. I hate the sight of them."

"But how? You can't just push them out the front door to wander the streets!"

"Let me think." Reid glanced out the window to make sure the Zieglers' lights were on. "I know; we'll give them to the Zieglers! It'll serve both of them right."

"Oh, darling, do you think we ought? After all . . ."

"I don't care if we ought or not. First you'll get a wire that your mother is sick and you have to pack and leave for Washington tonight . . . Start serving; I'll set the wheels in motion."

Reid went to the telephone and called his friend Joe Farris. "Joe?" he said in a low voice. "Will you ring me back in fifteen minutes? Then don't pay any attention to what I say; it's to get me out of a jam."

Fifteen minutes later, the telephone rang. Reid answered it and pretended to repeat a telegraphic message. Then he came into the dining room and said sadly:

"Bad news, sweetheart. Your mother is sick again, and you'll have to go to Washington tonight." He turned to Sterga. "I'm sorry, but Mrs. Reid has to leave."

"Oh!" said Thvi. "We were so looking forward—"

"Now, I can't be properly hospitable by myself," continued Reid. "But I'll find you another host."

"But you are such a fine host—" protested Sterga.

"Thanks, I really can't. Everything will be all right, though. Finish your dinner while I make arrangements. Then we'll go to the festival together."

He slipped out and walked to the Zieglers' house next door. Charles Ziegler, wiping his mouth, answered the bell. He was stout and balding, with thick hairy forearms. He wrung Reid's hand in a crushing grip and bellowed: "Hey

there, Milan old boy! Whatcha doing these days? We ought to get together more often, hey? Come on in."

Reid forced a smile. "Well, Charlie, it's like this. I—I'm in a predicament, but with a little help from you we can fix it up to please everybody. You wanted A. P. guests on this visit, didn't you?"

Ziegler shrugged. "Connie felt she had to get into the act, and I guess I could have put up with a houseful of lizard-men to please her. Why, whatcha got in mind?"

Reid told of his mother-in-law's illness as if it were real. "So I thought you could come to the celebration and pick up my Osmanians . . ."

Ziegler slapped Reid on the back. "Sure, Milan old boy, I'll take care of your double-ended squids. I'll fill 'em full of G-bombs." This was a lethal gin-drink of Ziegler's own concoction. "Hey, Connie!"

At the strawberry-festival, people and extraterrestrials stood in a line that wound past a counter. There they were served strawberry ice-cream, cake, and coffee, cafeteria-style. Strips of colored paper festooned the ceiling; planetary flags draped the walls. Some guests, either because they could not eat Terran food or because they were not built for standing in line with trays, made other arrangements. The Forellians occupied one whole corner of the basement while their hosts fed them special provender with shovels.

The extraterrestrials were identified by tags pinned to the clothes of those species who wore them, or hung around their necks otherwise. As the Osmanians had neither clothes nor necks, the tags were fastened to straps, tied around their middles, with the tags uppermost like the brass plates on dog-collars.

Reid found himself opposite a Chavantian coiled up on a chair. The Chavantian reared up the front yard of its body and daintily manipulated its food with the four appendages that grew from the sides of its neck.

"I," squeaked the Chavantian, "am fascinated by the works of your Shakespeare. Such insight! Such feeling! I taught Terran literature, you know, before I entered the diplomatic service."

"So?" said Reid. "I used to teach, too." He had become a high-school mathematics-teacher under the mistaken belief that teaching was an occupation for timid, ineffectual people who feared to face the world. He soon learned that it called for brawn and brutality far beyond anything demanded by the business world. "Have you been well treated so far?"

"Oh, we are sometimes made aware of our unfortunate resemblance to an order of Terran life towards whom most of you do not feel very friendly." (Reid knew the Chavantian meant snakes.) "But we make allowances."

"How about the other guests?" Reid craned his neck to see who was present. The Hobarts and their Robertsonians had not arrived.

"All fine. The Steinians are of course not here, as this would be a revolting spectacle to them. 'Just a thing of custom: 'tis no other; only it spoils the pleasure of the time.' "

The Reids and their guests finished eating and went up to the auditorium, which was already half full. The young of several species had rubber balloons, each balloon straining gently upward on its string. They made so thick a cloud that those in the rear found their view of the stage obscured.

The program opened with a concert by the high-school band. Then the local Boy Scout troop presented colors. The Reverend McClintock officially welcomed the guests and introduced them, one by one. As they were introduced, those who could, stood up and were applauded.

Then followed songs by a local choral society; dances by a square-dancing club; more songs; American Indian dances by a cubscout pack; awards of prizes to Associated Planets essay-contest winners . . .

The trouble with amateur shows of this sort is not that the

acts are bad. Sometimes they are quite good. The real difficulty is that each performer wants to give his all. This means he wants to put on all the pieces in his repertory. As a result, each act is twice as long as it should be. And, because the contributors are unpaid volunteers, the manager can't insist on drastic cuts. If he does, they get hurt and pull out altogether.

The show was still grinding on at ten-thirty. Balloons, escaped from their owners, swayed gently against the ceiling. The young Forellian snored like a distant thunderstorm at the back of the hall. The young of several other species, including *Homo sapiens,* got out of hand and had to be taken away. The Osmanians fidgeted on seats never designed for their kind and twiddled their tentacles.

Milan Reid ostentatiously looked at his watch and whispered to Sterga: "I have to take my wife to the train. Good-night. Good-night, Thvi."

He shook their tentacles, led Louise out, and drove off. He did not, however, drive to the railroad station or the airport. He did not think that the situation called for Louise's actually going to Washington. Instead, he left her at the apartment of one of her girl-friends in Merion. Then he went home.

First he went up to the Zieglers' front door. He put out his thumb to ring, to make sure his plans had gone through. Then he drew back. From within came screams of laughter: Connie's shrill peals, Charlie's belly-roars, and the Osmanians' hideous cackle.

His guests had obviously made contact with their new hosts. There was no need for him to go in. If he did, Charlie would insist on his joining the party, and he loathed raucous parties.

Reid went to his own house and got ready for bed. Though not much of a late-evening drinker, he mixed him-

self a strong rye-and-soda, turned on the radio to a good-music station, lit his pipe, and relaxed. From next door, outbursts of crazy laughter rose up from time to time, with odd thumping sounds and once the crash of breaking glass. Reid smiled quietly.

The telephone rang. Reid frowned and lifted the handset.

"New Haven calling," said the operator. Then came the nasal tones of Rajendra Jaipal: Hello, Milan? This is R. J. I didn't know if you would be home yet from the celebration. How are your guests?"

"I got rid of them," said Reid.

"You *what?*"

"Got rid of them. Gave them away. I couldn't stand them."

"Where are they now?" Jaipal's voice rose tautly.

"Next door, at the Zieglers'. They seem—"

"Oh, you did *not!*"

"Damn right I did. They seem to be having a high old time."

"*Ai Ram Ram!* I thought I could trust you! You have upset interplanetary relations for centuries! My God, why did you do that? And why the Zieglers, of all people?"

"Because the Zieglers were handy, and because these squids are a pair of spoiled brats; impulsive, irresponsible children, with no manners, no morals, no sense, no nothing. If—"

"That does not matter. You have your dutee to humanity."

"My duty doesn't include trading wives with a space-octopus—"

"Oh, you could have found a way around that—"

"And why—why didn't you warn me of their cute little ways? My day has been pure hell."

Jaipal's voice rose to a scream. "You selfish, perpidious materialist—"

"Oh, go jump in the lake! You're the perfidious one, palm-

ing these interstellar zanies off on me. I suppose you neglected to tell me what I was getting into for fear I'd back out, huh? Well, didn't you? Didn't you?"

The telephone was silent. Then Jaipal said in a lower voice: "My dear friend, I admit that I too am a sinful, imparfect mortal. Please forgive my hasty remarks. But now let us see if we can repair the damage. This is most serious. The economic future of our planet depends on this mining-lease. I shall ply down at once."

"It won't do you any good to get here before seven. I'm going to bed, and I won't even answer the doorbell till then."

"Then I shall be on your doorstep at seven. Good-bye."

When Reid looked out next morning, there was Rajendra Jaipal in a gray-flannel suit sitting on his doorstep. As the door opened, Jaipal's gaunt, somber figure arose. "Well, are you readee to show me the wreckage of mankind's hopes?"

Reid looked across at the Zieglers' house, where all was silent. "I think they're still asleep. Uh—have you had breakfast?"

"No, but—"

"Then come in and have some."

They ate in gloomy silence. Since awakening, Reid had begun to worry. In morning's cold light, his bold stroke of last night no longer seemed so dashing. In fact it might prove a colossal blunder. Of course one couldn't submit one's wife to an extraterrestrial's amatory experiments. (Or could one, for the sake of one's planet?) In any case, he could surely have gotten around that. He could have sent Louise away but himself put up with the Osmanians for a few more hours. It was his cursed lack of social skill again. Why did the fate of planets depend on a wretched caricature of a man like him?

It was after nine of a bright sunshiny day when Reid and Jaipal approached the Ziegler house. Reid rang. After a while the door opened. There stood Charles Ziegler, wearing

a pair of purple-and-white checkered shorts. For an instant he glowered through bloodshot eyes. Then he grinned.

"Hel-lo there!" he cried. "Come on in!"

Reid introduced Jaipal and went in. The living room was a shambles. Here lay an overthrown floor-lamp; there a card-table with a broken leg teetered drunkenly. Cards and poker-chips bespangled the floor.

From the kitchen came sound of breakfast-making. Sterga slithered in, balancing an ice-bag on his head with two tentacles, and said, "Such a night! My dear Mr. Reid, how can I thank you enough for finding such a congenial host? I did not think any being in the Galaxy could drink me down, guk-guk!"

Reid looked questioningly at Ziegler, who said: "Yeah, we sure hung one on."

"It meant we could not carry out the experiment as I hoped," said Sterga. "But that is all right. Next year, even if the rest go to Athens, Thvi and I will come here to the Zieglers'." The Osmanian reared up and clutched Ziegler's neck, while Ziegler patted the rubbery hide. "We love them. He is a good wrestler, too. And don't worry about your mining-lease, R. J. There will be no difficulty."

Reid and Jaipal excused themselves. Outside, they looked at each other. Each made the same gesture, raising his shoulder while spreading his hands with the palms up. Then they saluted each other with a wave of the hand, while their faces expressed despairing incomprehension. Reid turned back to his house, and Jaipal walked swiftly away.

●

JUDITH MERRIL

EXILE FROM SPACE

Judith Merril is unique in a field which, as most would agree, has more than its share of "personalities." Warmly human, generous, a devoted and good mother, and a fine anthologist and as fine a novelist, all that is left to say is that Judy Merril is a remarkable woman. . . .

I DON'T KNOW where they got the car. We made three or four stops before the last one, and they must have picked it up one of those times. Anyhow, they got it, but they had to make a license plate, because it had the wrong kind on it.

They made me some clothes, too—a skirt and blouse and shoes that looked just like the ones we saw on television. They couldn't make me a lipstick or any of those things, because there was no way to figure out just what the chemical composition was. And they decided I'd be as well off without any driver's license or automobile registration as I would be with papers that weren't exactly perfect, so they didn't bother about making those either.

They were worried about what to do with my hair, and even thought about cutting it short, so it would look more like the women on television, but that was one time I was way ahead of them. I'd seen more shows than anyone else, of course—I watched them almost every minute, from the time they told me I was going—and there was one where I'd seen a way to make braids and put them around the top of your head. It wasn't very comfortable, but I practiced at it until it looked pretty good.

They made me a purse, too. It didn't have anything in it except the diamonds, but the women we saw always seemed to carry them, and they thought it might be a sort of superstition or ritual necessity, and that we'd better not take a chance on violating anything like that.

They made me spend a lot of time practicing with the car, because without a license, I couldn't take a chance on getting into any trouble. I must have put in the better part of an hour starting and stopping and backing that thing, and turning it around, and weaving through trees and rocks, before they were satisfied.

Then, all of a sudden, there was nothing left to do except *go*. They made me repeat everything one more time, about selling the diamonds, and how to register at the hotel, and what to do if I got into trouble, and how to get in touch with them when I wanted to come back. Then they said good-bye, and made me promise not to stay *too* long, and said they'd keep in touch the best they could. And then I got in the car, and drove down the hill into town.

I knew they didn't want to let me go. They were worried, maybe even a little afraid I wouldn't want to come back, but mostly worried that I might say something I shouldn't, or run into some difficulties they hadn't anticipated. And outside of that, they knew they were going to miss me. Yet they'd made up their minds to it; they planned it this way, and they felt it was the right thing to do, and certainly they'd put an awful lot of thought and effort and preparation into it.

If it hadn't been for that, I might have turned back at the last minute. Maybe they were worried; but *I* was petrified. Only of course, I wanted to go, really. I couldn't help being curious, and it never occurred to me then that I might miss them. It was the first time I'd ever been out on my own, and they'd promised me, for years and years, as far back as I could remember, that some day I'd go back, like this, by myself. But . . .

Going back, when you've been away long enough, is not

so much a homecoming as a dream *deja vu*. And for me, at least, the dream was not entirely a happy one. Everything I saw or heard or touched had a sense of haunting familiarity, and yet of *wrongness*, too—almost a nightmare feeling of the oppressively inevitable sequence of events, of faces and features and events just not-quite-remembered and not-quite-known.

I was born in this place, but it was not my home. Its people were not mine; its ways were not mine. All I knew of it was what I had been told, and what I had seen for myself these last weeks of preparation, on the television screen. And the dream-feeling was intensified, at first, by the fact that I did not know *why* I was there. I knew it had been planned this way, and I had been told it was necessary to complete my education. Certainly I was aware of the great effort that had been made to make the trip possible. But I did not yet understand just *why*.

Perhaps it was just that I had heard and watched and thought and dreamed too much about this place, and now I was actually there, the reality was—not so much a disappointment as—just sort of *unreal*. Different from what I knew when I *didn't* know.

The road unwound in a spreading spiral down the mountainside. Each time I came round, I could see the city below, closer and larger, and less distinct. From the top, with the sunlight sparkling on it, it had been a clean and gleaming pattern of human civilization. Halfway down, the symmetry was lost, and the smudge and smoke began to show.

Halfway down, too, I began to pass places of business: restaurants and gas stations and handicraft shops. I wanted to stop. For half an hour now I had been out on my own, and I still hadn't seen any of the people, except the three who had passed me behind the wheels of their cars, going up the road. One of the shops had a big sign on it, "COME IN AND LOOK AROUND." But I kept going. One thing I under-

stood was that it was absolutely necessary to have money, and that I must stop nowhere, and attempt nothing, till after I had gotten some.

Farther down, the houses began coming closer together, and then the road stopped winding around, and became almost straight. By that time, I was used to the car, and didn't have to think about it much, and for a little while I really enjoyed myself. I could see into the houses sometimes, through the windows, and at one, a woman was opening the door, coming out with a broom in her hand. There were children playing in the yards. There were cars of all kinds parked around the houses, and I saw dogs and a couple of horses, and once a whole flock of chickens.

But just where it was beginning to get really interesting, when I was coming into the little town before the city, I had to stop watching it all, because there were too many other people driving. That was when I began to understand all the fuss about licenses and tests and traffic regulations. Watching it on television, it wasn't anything like being in the middle of it!

Of course, what I ran into there was really nothing; I found that out when I got into the city itself. But just at first, it seemed pretty bad. And I still don't understand it. These people are pretty bright mechanically. You'd think anybody who could *build* an automobile—let alone an atom bomb—could *drive* one easily enough. Especially with a lifetime to learn in. Maybe they just like to live dangerously . . .

It was a good thing, though, that I'd already started watching out for what the other drivers were doing when I hit my first red light. That was something I'd overlooked entirely, watching street scenes on the screen, and I guess they'd never noticed either. They must have taken it for granted, the way I did, that people stopped their cars out of courtesy from time to time to let the others go by. As it was, I stopped because the others did, and just happened to notice that they began

again when the light changed to green. It's really a very good system; I don't see why they don't have them at all the intersections.

From the first light, it was eight miles into the center of Colorado Springs. A sign on the road said so, and I was irrationally pleased when the speedometer on the car confirmed it. Proud, I suppose, that these natives from my own birthplace were such good gadgeteers. The road was better after that, too, and the cars didn't dart in and out off the side streets the way they had before. There was more traffic on the highway, but most of them behaved fairly intelligently. Until we got into town, that is. After that, it was everybody-for-himself, but by then I was prepared for it.

I found a place to park the car near a drugstore. That was the first thing I was supposed to do. Find a drugstore, where there would likely be a telephone directory, and go in and look up the address of a hock shop. I had a little trouble parking the car in the space they had marked off, but I could see from the way the others were stationed that you were supposed to get in between the white lines, with the front of the car next to the post on the sidewalk. I didn't know what the post was for, until I got out and read what it said, and then I didn't know what to do, because I didn't *have* any money. Not yet. And I didn't dare get into any trouble that might end up with a policeman asking to see my license, which always seemed to be the first thing they did on television, when they talked to anybody who was driving a car. I got back in the car and wriggled my way out of the hole between the other cars, and tried to think what to do. Then I remembered seeing a sign that said "Free Parking" somewhere, not too far away, and went back the way I'd come.

There was a sort of park, with a fountain spraying water all over the grass, and a big building opposite, and the white lines here were much more sensible. They were painted in diagonal strips, so you could get in and out quite easily,

without all that backing and twisting and turning. I left the car there, and remembered to take the keys with me, and started walking back to the drugstore.

That was when it hit me.

Up to then, beginning I guess when I drove that little stretch coming into Manitou, with the houses on the hills, and the children and yards and dogs and chickens, I'd begun to feel almost as if I belonged here. The people seemed so *much* like me—as long as I wasn't right up against them. From a little distance, you'd think there was no difference at all. Then, I guess, when I was close enough to notice, driving through town, I'd been too much preoccupied with the car. It didn't really get to me till I got out and started walking.

They were all so *big* . . .

They were big, and their faces and noses and even the pores of their skin were too big. And their voices were too loud. And they *smelled.*

I didn't notice that last much till I got into the drugstore. Then I thought I was going to suffocate, and I had a kind of squeezing upside-down feeling in my stomach and diaphragm and throat, which I didn't realize till later was what they meant by "being sick." I stood over the directory rack, pretending to read, but really just struggling with my insides, and a man came along and shouted in my ear something that sounded like, "Vvvm trubbb lll-lll-lll ay-dee?" (I didn't get that sorted out for hours afterwards, but I don't think I'll ever forget just the way it sounded at the time. Of course, he meant, "Having trouble, little lady?") But all I knew at the time was he was too big and smelled of all kinds of things that were unfamiliar and slightly sickening. I couldn't answer him. All I could do was turn away so as not to breathe him, and try to pretend I knew what I was doing with the directory. Then he hissed at me ("Sorry, no offense," I figured out later), and said clearly enough so I could understand even then, "Just trying to help," and walked away.

As soon as he was gone, I walked out myself. Directory or no directory, I had to get out of that store. I went back to where I'd left the car, but instead of getting in it, I sat down on a bench in the park, and waited till the turmoil inside me began to quiet down.

I went back into that drugstore once before I left, purposely, just to see if I could pin down what it was that had bothered me so much, because I never reacted that strongly afterwards, and I wondered if maybe it was just that it was the first time I was inside one of their buildings. But it was more than that; that place was a regular snake-pit of a treatment for a stranger, believe me! They had a tobacco counter, and a lunch counter and a perfume-and-toiletries section, and a nut-roasting machine, and just to top it off, in the back of the store, an open-to-look-at (*and* smell) pharmaceutical center! Everything, all mixed together, and compounded with stale human sweat, which was also new to me at the time. And no air conditioning.

Most of the air conditioning they have is bad enough on its own, with chemical smells, but those are comparatively easy to get used to . . . and I'll take them *any* time, over what I got in that first dose of *Odeur d'Earth.*

Anyhow, I sat on the park bench about fifteen minutes, I guess, letting the sun and fresh air seep in, and trying to tabulate and memorize as many of the components of that drugstore smell as I could, for future reference. I was simply going to have to adjust to them, and next time I wanted to be prepared.

All the same, I didn't feel prepared to go back into the same place. Maybe another store wouldn't be quite as bad. I started walking in the opposite direction, staying on the wide main street, where all the big stores seemed to be, and two blocks down, I ran into luck, because there was a big bracket sticking out over the sidewalk from the front of a store halfway down a side street, and it had the three gold balls hang-

ing from it that I knew, from television, meant the kind of place I wanted. When I walked down to it, I saw too that they had a sign painted over the window: "We buy old gold and diamonds."

Just *how* lucky that was, I didn't realize till quite some time later. I was going to look in the Classified Directory for "Hock Shops." I didn't know any other name for them then.

Inside, it looked exactly like what I expected, and even the smell was nothing to complain about. Camphor and dust and mustiness were strong enough to cover most of the sweaty smell, and those were smells of a kind I'd experienced before, in other places.

The whole procedure was reassuring, because it all went just the way it was supposed to, and I knew how to behave. I'd seen it in a show, and the man behind the grilled window even *looked* like the man on the screen, and talked the same way.

"What can we do for you, girlie?"

"I'd like to sell a diamond," I told him.

He didn't say anything at first, then he looked impatient. "You got it with you?"

"Oh . . . yes!" I opened my purse, and took out one of the little packages, and unwrapped it, and handed it to him. He screwed the lens into his eye, and walked back from the window and put it on a little scale, and turned back and unscrewed the lens and looked at me.

"Where'd you get this, lady?" he asked me.

"It's mine," I said. I knew just how to do it. We'd gone over this half a dozen times before I left, and he was behaving exactly the way we'd expected.

"I don't know," he said. "Can't do much with an unset stone like this . . ." He pursed his lips, tossed the diamond carelessly in his hand, and then pushed it back at me across the counter. I had to keep myself from smiling. It was just the way they'd said it would be. The people here were still in

the Mech Age, of course, and not nearly conscious enough to communicate anything at all complex or abstract any way except verbally. But there is nothing abstract about avarice, and between what I'd been told to expect, and what I could feel pouring out of him, I knew precisely what was going on in his mind.

"You mean you don't *want* it?" I said. "I thought it was worth quite a lot . . ."

"Might have been once." He shrugged. "You can't do much with a stone like that any more. Where'd you get it, girlie?"

"My mother gave it to me. A long time ago. I wouldn't sell it, except . . . Look," I said, and didn't have to work hard to sound desperate, because, in a way, I was. "Look, it must be worth *some*thing?"

He picked it up again. "Well . . . what do you want for it?"

That went on for quite a while. I knew what it was supposed to be worth, of course, but I didn't hope to get even half of that. He offered seventy dollars, and I asked for five hundred, and after a while he gave me three-fifty, and I felt I'd done pretty well—for a greenhorn. I put the money in my purse, and went back to the car, and on the way I saw a policeman, so I stopped and asked him about a hotel. He looked me up and down, and started asking questions about how old I was, and what was my name and where did I live, and I began to realize that being so much smaller than the other people was going to make life complicated. I told him I'd come to visit my brother in the Academy, and he smiled, and said, "Your *brother*, is it?" Then he told me the name of a place just outside of town, near the Academy. It wasn't a hotel; it was a *mo*tel, which I didn't know about at that time, but he said I'd be better off there. A lot of what he said went right over my head at the time; later I realized what he meant about "a nice respectable couple" running the place. I found out later on, too, that he called them up to ask them

to keep an eye on me; he thought I was a nice girl, but he was worried about my being alone there.

But this time, I was getting hungry, but I thought I'd better go and arrange about a place to stay first, I found the motel without much trouble, and went in and registered; I knew how to do that, at least—I'd seen it plenty of times. They gave me a key, and the man who ran the place asked me did I want any help with my bags.

"Oh, no," I said. "No, thanks. I haven't got much."

I'd forgotten all about that, and they'd never thought about it either! These people always have a lot of different clothes, not just one set, and you're supposed to have a suitcase full of things when you go to stay anyplace. I said I was hungry anyway, and wanted to go get something to eat, and do a couple of other things—I didn't say what—before I got settled. So the woman walked over with me, and showed me which cabin it was, and asked was everything all right?

It looked all right to me. The room had a big bed in it, with sheets and a blanket and pillows and a bedspread, just like the ones I'd seen on television. And there was a chest of drawers, and a table with more small drawers in it, and two chairs and a mirror and door that went into a closet and one that led to the bathroom. The fixtures in there were a little different from the ones they'd made for me to practice in, but functionally they seemed about the same.

I didn't look for any difficulty with anything there except the bed, and that wasn't *her* fault, so I assured her everything was just fine, and let her show me how to operate the gas-burner that was set in the wall for heat. Then we went out, and she very carefully locked the door, and handed me the key.

"You better keep that door locked," she said, just a little sharply. "You never know . . ."

I wanted to ask her *what* you never know, but had the impression that it was something *every*body was supposed to know, so I just nodded and agreed instead.

"You want to get some lunch," she said then, "there's a place down the road isn't too bad. Clean, anyhow, and they don't cater too much to those . . . well, it's clean." She pointed the way; you could see the sign from where we were standing. I thanked her, and started the car, and decided I might as well go there as anyplace else, especially since I could see she was watching to find out whether I did or not.

These people are all too big. Or almost all of them. But the man behind the counter at the diner was enormous. He was tall and fat with a beefy red face and large open pores and a fleshy mound of a nose. I didn't like to look at him, and when he talked, he boomed so loud I could hardly understand him. On top of all that, the smell in that place was awful: not quite as bad as the drugstore, but some ways similar to it. I kept my eyes on the menu, which was full of unfamiliar words, and tried to remember that I was hungry.

The man was shouting at me—or it was more like growling, I guess—and I couldn't make out the words at first. He said it again, and I sorted out syllables and matched them with the words on the card, and then I got it:

"Goulash is nice today, miss . . ."

I didn't know what goulash was, and the state my stomach was in, with the smells, I decided I'd better play safe, and ordered a glass of milk, and some vegetable soup.

The milk had a strange taste to it. Not *bad*—just *different*. But of course, this came from cows. That was all right. But the vegetable soup . . . !

It was quite literally putrid, made as near as I could figure out from dead animal juices, in which vegetables had been soaked and cooked till any trace of flavor or nourishment was entirely removed. I took one taste of that, and then I realized what the really nauseating part of the odor was, in the diner and the drugstore both. It was rotten meat, dead for some time, and then heated in preparation for eating.

The crackers that came with the soup were good; they

had a nice salty tang. I ordered more of those, with another glass of milk, and sat back sipping slowly, trying to adjust to that smell, now that I realized I'd probably find it anywhere I could find food.

After a while, I got my insides enough in order so that I could look around a little and see the place, and the other people in it. That was when I turned around and saw Larry sitting next to me.

He was beautiful. He *is* beautiful. I know that's not what you're supposed to say about a man, and he wouldn't like it, but I can only say what I see, and of course that's partly a matter of my own training and my own feelings about myself.

At home on the ship, I always wanted to cut off my hair, because it was so black, and my skin was so white, and they didn't go together. But they wouldn't let me; they liked it that way, I guess, but *I* didn't. No child wants to feel like a freak, and nobody else had hair like that, or dead-white colorless skin, either.

Then, when I went down there, and saw all the humans, I was still a freak because I was so small.

Larry's small, too. Almost as small as I am. And he's all one color. He has hair, of course, but it's so light, and his skin is so dark (both from the sun, I found out), that he looks just about the same lovely golden color all over. Or at least as much of him as showed when I saw him that time, in the diner.

He was beautiful, and he was my size, and he didn't have ugly rough skin or big heavy hands. I stared at him, and I felt like grabbing on to him to make sure he didn't get away.

After a while I realized my mouth was half-open, and I was still holding a cracker, and I remembered that this was very bad manners. I put the cracker down and closed my mouth. He smiled. I didn't know if he was laughing at the odd way I was acting, or just being friendly, but I smiled back anyhow.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I mean, hello. How do you do, and

I'm sorry if I startled you. I shouldn't have been staring."

"*You,*" I said, and meant to finish. *You were staring?* But he went right on talking, so that I couldn't finish.

"I don't know what else you can expect, if you go around looking like that," he said.

"I'm sorry . . ." I started again.

"And you should be," he said sternly. "Anybody who walks into a place like this in the middle of a day like this looking the way you do has got to expect to get stared at a little."

The thing is, I wasn't used to the language; not used *enough*. I could communicate all right, and even understand some jokes, and I knew the spoken language, not some formal unusable version, because I learned it mostly watching those shows on the television screen. But I got confused this time, because "looking" means two different things, active and passive, and I was thinking about how I'd been *looking at* him, and . . .

That was my lucky day. I didn't want him to be angry at me, and the way I saw it, he was perfectly justified in scolding me, which is what I thought he was doing. But I *knew* he wasn't really angry; I'd have felt it if he was. So I said, "You're right. It was very rude of me, and I don't blame you for being annoyed. I won't do it any more."

He started laughing, and this time I knew it was friendly. Like I said, that was my lucky day; *he* thought I was being witty. And, from what he's told me since, I guess he realized then that *I* felt friendly too, because before that he'd just been bluffing it out, not knowing how to get to know me, and afraid *I'd* be sore at *him,* just for talking to me!

Which goes to show that sometimes you're better off not being *too* familiar with the local customs.

The trouble was there were too many things I didn't know, too many small ways to trip myself up. Things they couldn't have foreseen, or if they did, couldn't have done much about. All it took was a little caution and a lot of alertness, plus one

big important item: staying in the background—not getting to know any one person too well—not giving any single individual a chance to observe too much about me.

But Larry didn't mean to let me do that. And . . . I didn't want him to.

He asked questions; I tried to answer them. I did know enough at least of the conventions to realize that I didn't have to give detailed answers, or could, at any point, act offended at being questioned so much. I *didn't* know enough to realize that reluctance or irritation on my part wouldn't have made him go away. We sat on those stools at the diner for most of an hour, talking, and after a little while I found I could keep the conversation on safer ground by asking *him* about himself, and about the country thereabouts. He seemed to enjoy talking.

Eventually, he had to go back to work. As near as I could make out, he was a test-pilot, or something like it, for a small experimental aircraft plant near the city. He lived not too far from where I was staying, and he wanted to see me that evening.

I hadn't told him where the motel was, and I had at least enough caution left not to tell him, even then. I did agree to meet him at the diner, but for lunch the next day again, instead of that evening. For one thing, I had a lot to do; and for another, I'd seen enough on television shows to know that an evening date was likely to be pretty long-drawn-out, and I wasn't sure I could stand up under that much close scrutiny. I had some studying-up to do first. But the lunch-date was fine; the thought of not seeing him at all was terrifying—as if he were an old friend in a world full of strangers. That was how I felt, that first time, maybe just because he was almost as small as I. But I think it was more than that, really.

I drove downtown again, and found a store that seemed to sell all kinds of clothing for women. Then when I got inside, I didn't know where to start, or what to get. I thought of

just buying one of everything, so as to fill up a suitcase; the things I had on seemed to be perfectly satisfactory for actual *wearing* purposes. They were quite remarkably—when you stopped to think of it—similar to what most of the women I'd seen that day were wearing, and of course they weren't subject to the same problems of dirtying and wrinkling and such as the clothes in the store were.

I walked around for a while, trying to figure out what all the different items, shapes, sizes, and colors, were for. Some racks and counters had signs, but most of them were unfamiliar words like *brunchies,* or *Bermudas* or *scuffs;* or else they seemed to be mislabeled, like *dusters* for a sort of button-down dress, and *Postage Stamp Girdles* at one section of a long counter devoted to "Foundation Garments." For half an hour or so, I wandered around in there, shaking my head every time a saleswoman came up to me, because I didn't know, and couldn't figure out, what to ask for, or how to ask for it.

The thing was, I didn't dare draw too much attention to myself by doing or saying the wrong things. I'd have to find out more about clothes, somehow, before I could do much buying.

I went out, and on the same block I found a show-window full of suitcases. That was easy. I went in and pointed to one I liked, and paid for it, and walked out with it, feeling a little braver. After all, nobody had to know there was nothing in it. On the corner, I saw some books displayed in the window of a drug store. It took all the courage I had to go in there, after my first trip into one that looked very much like it, but I wanted a dictionary. This place didn't smell quite so strong; I suppose the pharmacy was enclosed in back, and I don't believe it had a lunch counter. Anyhow, I got in and out quickly, and walked back to the car, and sat down with the dictionary.

It turned out to be entirely useless, at least as far as *brunchies* and *Bermudas* were concerned. It had "scuff, v.," with

a definition; "v.," I found out, meant *verb*, so that wasn't the word I wanted, but when I remembered the slippers on the counter with the sign, it made sense in a way.

Not enough sense, though. I decided to forget about the clothes for a while. The next problem was a driver's license.

The policeman that morning had been helpful, if over-interested, and since policemen directed traffic, they ought to have the information I wanted. I found one of them standing on a streetcorner looking not too busy, and asked him, and if his hair hadn't been brown instead of reddish (and only half there) I'd have thought it was the same one I talked to before. He wanted to know how old I was, and where was I from, and what I was doing there, and did I have a car, and was I *sure* I was nineteen?

Well, of course, I wasn't sure, but they'd told me that by the local reckoning, that was my approximate age. And I almost slipped and said I *had* a car, until I realized that I didn't have a right to drive one till I had a license. After he asked that one question, I began to feel suspicious about everything else he asked, and the interest he expressed. He was helpful, but I had to remember too, that it was the police who were charged with watching for suspicous characters, and—well, it was the last time I asked a policeman for information.

He *did* tell me where I could rent a car to take my road test, though, and where to apply for the test. The Courthouse turned out to be the big building behind the square where I'd parked the car that morning, and arranging for the test turned out to be much simpler than, by then, I expected it to be. In a way, I suppose, all the questions I had to answer when I talked to the policeman had prepared me for the official session—though they didn't seem nearly so inquisitive there.

By this time, I'd come to expect that they wouldn't believe my age when I told them. The woman at the window behind the counter wanted to see a "birth certificate," and I pro-

duced the one piece of identification I had; an ancient and yellowed document they had kept for me all these years. From the information it contained, I suspected it might even *be* a birth certificate; whether or not, it apparently satisfied her, and after that all she wanted was things like my address and height and weight. Fortunately, they had taken the trouble, back on the ship, to determine these statistics for me, because things like that were always coming up on television shows, especially when people were being questioned by the police. For the address, of course, I used the motel. The rest I knew, and I guess we had the figures close enough to right so that at least the woman didn't question any of it.

I had my road test about half an hour later, in a rented car, and the examiner said I did very well. He seemed surprised, and I don't wonder, considering the way most of those people contrive to mismanage a simple mechanism like an automobile. I guess when they say Earth is still in the Mechanical Age, what they mean is that humans are just *learning* about machines.

The biggest single stroke of luck I had at any time came during that road test. We passed a public-looking building with a sign in front that I didn't understand.

"What's that place?" I asked the examiner, and he said, as if anyone would know what he meant, "That? Oh—the Library."

I looked it up in my dictionary as soon as I was done at the License Bureau, and when I found out what it was, everything became a great deal simpler.

There was a woman who worked there, who showed me, without any surprise at my ignorance, just how the card catalogue worked, and what the numbering system meant; she didn't ask me how old I was, or any other questions, or demand any proof of any kind to convince her I had a right to use the place. She didn't even bother me much with questions about what I was looking for. I told her there were a *lot*

of things I wanted to know, and she seemed to think that was a good answer, and said if she could help me any way, not to hesitate to ask, and then she left me alone with those drawers and drawers full of letter-and-number keys to all the mysteries of an alien world.

I found a book on how to outfit your daughter for college, that started with underwear and worked its way through to jewelry and cosmetics. I also found a whole shelf full of law books, and in one of them, specific information about the motor vehicle regulations in different States. There was a wonderful book about diamonds and other precious stones, particularly fascinating because it went into the chemistry of the different stones, and gave me the best measuring-stick I found at any time to judge the general level of technology of that so-called Mechanical Age.

That was all I had time for. I couldn't believe it was so late, when the librarian came and told me they were closing up, and I guess my disappointment must have showed all over me, because she asked if I wouldn't like to have a card, so I could take books home?

I found out all I needed to get a card was identification. I was supposed to have a reference, too, but the woman said she thought perhaps it would be all right without one, in my case. And then, when I wanted to take a volume of the Encyclopedia Americana, she said they didn't usually circulate that, but if I thought I could bring it back within a day or two . . .

I promised to, and I never did, and out of everything that happened, that's the one thing I feel badly about. I think she must have been a very unusual and *good* sort of woman, and I wish I had kept my promise to her.

Some of the stores downtown were still open. I bought the things I'd be expected to have, as near as I could make out from the book on college girls: panties and a garter belt and a brassiere, and stockings. A slip and another blouse, and a

coat, because even in the early evening it was beginning to get chilly. Then the salesgirl talked me into gloves and a scarf and some earrings. I was halfway back to the car when I remembered about night clothes, and went back for a gown and robe and slippers. That didn't begin to complete the college girls' list, but it seemed like a good start. I'd need a dress, too, I thought, if I ever did go out with Larry in the evening . . . but that could wait.

I put everything into the suitcase, and drove back to the motel. On the way, I stopped at a food store, and bought a large container of milk, and some crackers, and some fruit—oranges and bananas and apples. Back in my room, I put everything away in the drawers, and then sat down with my book and my food, and had a wonderful time. I was hungry, and everything tasted good, away from the dead meat smells, and what with clothes in the drawers and everything, I was beginning to feel like a real Earth-girl.

I even took a bath in the bathroom.

A good long one. Next to the library, that's the thing I miss most. It would be even better, if they made the tubs bigger, so you could swim around some. But just getting wet all over like that, and splashing in the water, is fun. Of course, we could never spare enough water for that on the ship.

Altogether, it was a good evening; everything was fine until I tried to sleep in that bed. I felt as if I was being suffocated all over. The floor was almost as bad, but in a different way. And once I got to sleep, I guess I slept well enough, because I felt fine in the morning. But then, I think I must have been on a mild oxygen jag all the time I was down there; nothing seemed to bother me too much. That morning, I felt so good I worked up my courage to go into a restaurant again—a different one. The smell was beginning to be familiar, and I could manage better. I experimented with a cereal called oatmeal, which was delicious, then I went back to the motel, packed up all my new belongings,

left the key on the desk—as instructed by the sign on the door—and started out for Denver.

Denver, according to the Encyclopedia Americana, is more of a true metropolitan area than Colorado Springs; that means—on Earth—that it is dirtier, more crowded, far less pleasant to look at or live in, and a great deal more convenient and efficient to do business in. In Denver, and with the aid of a Colorado driver's license for casual identification, I was able to sell two of my larger diamonds fairly quickly, at two different places, for something approximating half of their full value. Then I parked the car they had given me on a side street, took my suitcase, coat, and book with me, and walked to the nearest car sales lot. I left the keys in the old car, for the convenience of anyone who might want it.

Everything went extraordinarily smoothly, with just one exception. I had found out everything I needed to know in that library, except that when dealing with humans, one must always allow for waste time. If I had realized that at the time I left Colorado Springs that morning, everything might have turned out very differently indeed—although when I try to think just what other way it *could* have turned out, I don't quite know . . . and I wonder, too, how much they knew, or planned, before they sent me down there . . .

This much is sure: if I hadn't assumed that a 70-mile trip, with a 60-mile average speed limit, would take approximately an hour and a half, and if I had realized that buying an automobile was not the same simple process as buying a nightgown, I wouldn't have been late for my luncheon appointment. And if I'd been there on time, I'd never have made the date for that night. As it was, I started out at seven o'clock in the morning, and only by exceeding the speed limit on the last twenty miles of the return trip did I manage to pull into that diner parking space at five minutes before two.

His car was still there!

It is so easy to look back and spot the instant of recognition or of error. My relief when I saw his car . . . my delight when I walked in and saw and *felt* his mixture of surprise and joy that I had come, with disappointment and frustration because it was so late, and he had to leave almost immediately. And my complete failure, in the midst of the complexities of these inter-reactions, to think logically, or to recognize that his ordinary perceptions were certainly the equivalent of my own . . .

At that moment, I wasn't thinking *about* any of these things. I spent a delirious sort of five minute period absorbing his feelings about me, and releasing my own at him. I hadn't planned to do it, not so soon, not till I knew much more than I did—perhaps after another week's reading and going about—but when he said that since I'd got there so late for lunch, I'd *have* to meet him for dinner, I found I agreed with him perfectly.

That afternoon, I bought a dress. This, too, took a great deal of time, even more than the car, because in the one case I simply had to look at a number of component parts, and listen to the operation of the motor, and feel for the total response of the mechanism, to determine whether it was suitable or not—but in the other, I had nothing to guide me but my own untrained taste, and the dubious preferences of the salesgirl, plus what I *thought* Larry's reactions *might* be. Also, I had to determine, without seeming too ignorant, just what sort of dress might be suitable for a dinner date—and without knowing for sure just how elaborate Larry's plans for the evening might be.

I learned a lot, and was startled to find that I enjoyed myself tremendously. But I couldn't make up my mind, and bought three dresses instead of one. It was after that, emboldened by pleasure and success, that I went back to that first drugstore. The Encyclopedia volume I had taken from the library, besides containing the information I wanted on

Colorado, had an article on Cosmetics. I decided powder was unnecessary, although I could understand easily enough how important it must be to the native women, with their thick skin and large pores and patchy coloring; that accounted for the fact that the men were mostly so much uglier . . . and I wondered if Larry used it, and if that was why his skin looked so much better than the others'.

Most of the perfumes made me literally ill; a few were inoffensive or mildly pleasant, if you thought of them just as smells, and not as something to be mistaken for one's *own* smell. Apparently, though, from the amount of space given over to them on the counter, and the number of advertisements I had seen or heard for one brand or another, they were in an essential item. I picked out a faint lavender scent, and then bought some lipstick, mascara, and eyebrow pencil. On these last purchases, it was a relief to find that I had no opportunity to display my ignorance about nuances of coloring, or the merits of one brand over another. The woman behind the counter knew exactly what I should have, and was not interested in hearing any of my opinions. She even told me how to apply the mascara, which was helpful, since the other two were obvious, and anyhow I'd seen them used on television, and the lipstick especially I had seen women use since I'd been here.

It turned out to be a little more difficult than it looked, when I tried it. Cosmetics apparently take a good deal more experience than clothing, if you want to have it look *right*. Right by *their* standards, I mean, so that your face becomes a formal design, and will register only a minimum of actual emotion or response.

I was supposed to meet Larry in the cocktail lounge of a hotel in Manitou Springs, the smaller town I'd passed through the day before on my way down from the mountain. I drove back that way now, with all my possessions in my new car, including the purse that held not only my remaining diamonds and birth certificate, but also a car registration,

driver's license, wallet, money, and makeup. A little more than halfway there, I saw a motel with a "Vacancy" sign out, and an attractive clean look about it. I pulled in and got myself a room with no more concern than if I'd been doing that sort of thing all my life.

This time there was no question about my age, nor was there later on that evening, in the cocktail lounge or anywhere else. I suppose it was the lipstick that made the difference, plus a certain increase in self-confidence; apparently I wasn't too small to be an adult, provided I looked and acted like one.

The new room did not have a bathtub. There was a shower, which was fun, but not as much as the tub had been. Dressing was *not* fun, and when I was finished, the whole effect still didn't look right, in terms of my own mental image of an Earth-woman dressed for a date.

It was the shoes, of course. This kind of dress wanted high heels. I had tried a pair in the store, and promptly rejected the whole notion. Now I wondered if I'd been too hasty, but I realized I could not conceivably have added that discomfort to the already-pressing difficulties of stockings and garter belt.

This last problem got so acute when I sat down and tried to drive the car, that I did some thinking about it, and decided to take them off. It seemed to me that I'd seen a lot of bare legs with flat heels. It was only with high heels that stockings were a real necessity. Anyhow, I pulled the car over to the side on an empty stretch of road, and wriggled out of things with a great deal of difficulty. I don't believe it made much difference in my appearance. No one *seemed* to notice, and I do think the lack of heels was more important.

All of this has been easy to put down. The next part is harder: partly because it's so important; partly because it's personal; partly because I just don't remember it all as clearly.

Larry was waiting for me when I got to the hotel. He stood up and walked over to me, looking at me as if I were the only person in the room besides himself, or as if he'd been waiting all his life, and only just that moment saw what it was he'd been waiting for. I don't know how I looked at him, but I know how I felt all of a sudden, and I don't think I can express it very well.

It was odd, because of the barriers to communication. The way he felt and the way I did are not things to put into words, and although I couldn't help but feel the impact of *his* emotion, I had to remember that he was deaf-and-blind to mine. All I could get from him for that matter, was a sort of generalized *noise*, loud but confused, without any features of details.

He smiled, and I smiled, and he said, "I didn't know if you'd really come . . ." and I said, "Am I late?" and he said, "Not much. What do you want to drink?"

I knew he meant something with alcohol in it, and I didn't dare, not till I'd experimented all alone first.

"Could I get some orange juice?" I asked.

He smiled again. "You can get anything you want. You don't drink?" He took my arm, and walked me over to a booth in the back corner, and went on without giving me a chance to answer. "No, of course you don't. Just orange juice and milk. Listen, Tina, I've been scared to ask you, but we might as well get it over with. How old are you anyhow? . . ." We sat down, but he still didn't give me a chance to answer. "No, that's not the right question. Who are you? What are you? What makes a girl like you exist at all? How come they let you run around on your own like this? Does your mother . . . Never mind me, honey. I've go no business asking anything. Sufficient unto the moment, and all that. I'm just talking so much because I'm so nervous. I haven't felt like this since . . . since I first went up for a solo in a Piper Cub. I didn't think you'd come, and you did, and you're still here in spite of me and my dumb yap. "Orange

juice for the lady, please," he told the waiter, "and a beer for me. Draft."

I just sat there. As long as he kept talking, I didn't have to. He looked just as beautiful as he had in the diner, only maybe more so. His skin was smoother; I suppose he'd just shaved. And he was wearing a tan suit just a shade darker than his skin, which was just a shade darker than his hair, and there was absolutely nothing I could say out loud in his language that would mean anything at all, so I waited to see if he'd start talking again.

"You're not mad at me, Tina?"

I smiled and shook my head.

"Well, *say* something then."

"It's more fun listening to you."

"You say that just like you mean it . . . or do you mean *funny?*"

"No. I mean that it's hard for me to talk much. I don't know how to say a lot of the things I want to say. And most people don't say anything when they talk, and I don't like listening to their voices, but I do like yours, and . . . I can't help liking what you say . . . it's always so *nice*. About me, I mean. Complimentary. Flattering."

"You were right the first time. And you seem to be able to say what you mean very clearly."

Which was just the trouble. Not only able to, but unable not to. It didn't take any special planning or remembering to say or act the necessary lies to other humans. But Larry was the least alien person I'd ever known. Dishonesty to him was like lying to myself. Playing a role for him was pure schizophrenia.

Right then, I knew it was a mistake. I should never have made that date, or at least not nearly so soon. But even as I thought that, I had no more intention of cutting it short or backing out than I did of going back to the ship the next day. I just tried not to talk too much, and trusted to the certain knowledge that I was as important to him as he was to me—so

perhaps whatever mistakes I made, whatever I said that sounded *wrong*, he would either accept or ignore or forgive.

But of course you can't just sit all night and say nothing. And the simplest things could trip me up. Like when he asked if I'd like to dance, and all I had to say was "No, thanks," and instead, because I *wanted* to try it, I said, "I don't know how."

Or when he said something about going to a movie, and I agreed enthusiastically, and he gave me a choice of three different ones that he wanted to see . . . "Oh, anyone," I told him. "You're easy to please," he said, but he insisted on my making a choice. There was something he called "an old-Astaire-Rogers," and something else that was made in England, and one current American one with stars I'd seen on television. I wanted to see either of the others. I could have named one, any one. Instead I heard myself blurting out that I'd never been to a movie.

At that point, of course, he began to ask questions in earnest. And at that point, schizoid or not, I had to lie. It was easier, though, because I'd been thoroughly briefed in my story, for just such emergencies as this—and because I could talk more or less uninterruptedly, with only pertinent questions thrown in, and without having to react so much to the emotional tensions between us.

I told him how my parents had died in an automobile accident when I was a baby; how my two uncles had claimed me at the hospital; about the old house up on the mountainside, and the convent school, and the two old men who hated the evils of the world; about the death of the first uncle, and at long last the death of the second, and the lawyers and the will and everything—the whole story, as we'd worked it out back on the ship.

It answered everything, explained everything—even the unexpected item of not being able to eat meat. My uncles were vegetarians, which was certainly a harmless eccentricity compared to most of the others I credited them with.

As a story, it was pretty far-fetched, but it hung together —and in certain ways, it wasn't even *too* far removed from the truth. It was, anyhow, the closest thing to the truth that I could tell—and I therefore delivered it with a fair degree of conviction. Of course it wasn't designed to stand up to the close and personal inspection Larry gave it; but then he *wanted* to believe me.

He seemed to swallow it. What he did, of course, was something any man who relies, as he did, on his reflexes and responses to stay alive, learns to do very early—he filed all questions and apparent discrepancies for reference, or for thinking over when there was time, and proceeded to make the most of the current situation.

We both made the most of it. It was a wonderful evening, from that point on. We went to the Astaire-Rogers picture, and although I missed a lot of the humor, since it was contemporary stuff from a time before I had any chance to learn about Earth, the music and dancing were fun. Later on, I found that dancing was not nearly as difficult or intricate as it looked—at least not with Larry. All I had to do was give in to a natural impulse to let my body follow his. It felt wonderful, from the feet on up.

Finally, we went back to the hotel, where we'd left my car, and I started to get out of his, but he reached out an arm, and stopped me.

"There's something else I guess you never did," he said. His voice sounded different from before. He put both his hands on my shoulders, and pulled me toward him, and leaned over and kissed me.

I'd seen it, of course, on television.

I'd seen it, but I had no idea . . .

That first time, it was something I felt on my lips, and felt so sweetly and so strongly that the rest of me seemed to melt away entirely. I had no other sensations, except in that one place where his mouth touched mine. That was the first time.

When it stopped, the world stopped, and I began again,

but I had to sort out the parts and pieces and put them all together to find out who I was. While I did this, his hands were still on my shoulders, where they'd been all along, only he was holding me at arm's distance away from him, and looking at me curiously.

"It really was, wasn't it?" he said.

"What?" I tried to say, but the sound didn't come out. I took a breath and "Was what?" I croaked.

"The first time." He smiled suddenly, and it was like the sun coming up in the morning, and then his arms went all the way around me. I don't know whether he moved over on the seat, or I did, or both of us. "Oh, baby, baby," he whispered in my ear, and then there was the second time.

The second time was like the first, and also like dancing, and some ways like the bathtub. This time none of me melted away; it was all there, and all close to him, and all warm, and all tingling with sensations. I was more completely alive right then than I had ever been before in my life.

After we stopped kissing each other, we stayed very still, holding on to each other, for a while, and then he moved away just a little, enough to breathe better.

I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to get out of the car. I didn't even want to be separated from him by the two or three inches between us on the seat. But he was sitting next to me now, staring straight ahead, not saying anything, and I just didn't know what came next. On television, the kiss was always the end of the scene.

He started the car again.

I said, "I have to . . . my car . . . I . . ."

"We'll come back," he said. "Don't worry about it. We'll come back. Let's just drive a little . . . ?" he pulled out past my car, and turned and looked at me for a minute. "You don't want to go now, do you? Right away?"

I shook my head, but he wasn't looking at me any more, so I took a breath and said out loud, "No."

We came off a twisty street onto the highway. "So that's

how it hits you," he said. He wasn't exactly talking to me; more like thinking out loud. "Twenty-seven years a cool cat, and now it has to be a crazy little midget that gets to you." He had to stop then, for a red light—the same light I'd stopped at the first time on the way in. That seemed a long long time before.

Larry turned around and took my hand. He looked hard at my face. "I'm sorry, hon. I didn't mean that the way it sounded."

"What?" I said. "What do you mean?" I hadn't even tried to make sense out of what he was saying before; he wasn't talking to me anyhow.

"Kid," he said, "maybe that was the first time for you, but in a different way it was the first time for me too." His hand opened and closed around mine, and his mouth opened and closed too, but nothing came out. The light was green, he noticed, and started moving, but it turned red again. This time he kept watching it.

"I don't suppose anybody ever told you about the birds and the bees and the butterflies," he said.

"Told me *what* about them?" He didn't answer right away, so I thought about it. "All I can think of is they all have wings. They all fly."

"So do I. So does a fly. What I mean is . . . the hell with it!" He turned off the highway, and we went up a short hill and through a sort of gateway between two enormous rocks. "Have you ever been here?" he asked.

"I don't think so . . ."

"They call it The Garden of the Gods. I don't know why. I like it here . . . it's a good place to drive and think."

There was a lot of moonlight, and the Garden was all hills and drops and winding roads between low-growing brush, and everywhere, as if the creatures of some giant planet had dropped them, were those towering rocks, their shapes scooped out and chiseled and hollowed and twisted by wind,

water, and sand. Yes, it was lovely, and it was non-intrusive. Just what he said—a good place to drive and think.

Once he came to the top of a hill, and stopped the car, and we looked out over the Garden, spreading out in every direction, with the moonlight shadowed in the sagebrush, and gleaming off the great rocks. Then we turned and looked at each other, and he reached out for me and kissed me again; after which he pulled away as if the touch of me hurt him, and grabbed hold of the wheel with a savage look on his face, and raced the motor, and raised a cloud of dust on the road behind us.

I didn't understand, and I felt hurt. I wanted to stop again. I wanted to be kissed again. I didn't like sitting alone on my side of the seat, with that growl in his throat not quite coming out.

I asked him to stop again. He shook his head, and made believe to smile.

"I'll buy you a book," he said. "All about the birds and the bees and a little thing we have around here we call sex. I'll buy it tomorrow, and you can read it—you *do* know how to read, don't you?—and then we'll take another ride, and we can park if you want to. Not tonight, baby."

"But I *know* . . ." I started, and then had sense enough to stop. I knew about sex; but what I knew about it didn't connect with kissing or parking the car, or sitting close . . . and it occurred to me that maybe it did, and maybe there was a lot I *didn't* know that wasn't on Television, and wasn't on the Ship's reference tapes either. Morals and mores, and nuances of behavior. So I shut up, and let him take me back to the hotel again, to my own car.

He leaned past me to open the door on my side, but he couldn't quite make it, and I had my fourth kiss. Then he let go again, and almost pushed me out of the car; but when I started to close the door behind me, he called out, "Tomorrow night?"

"I . . . all right," I said. "Yes. Tomorrow night."

"Can I pick you up?"

There was no reason not to this time. The first time I wouldn't tell him where I lived, because I knew I'd have to change places, and I didn't know where yet. I told him the name of the motel, and where it was.

"Six o'clock," he said.

"All right."

"Good night."

"Good night."

I don't remember driving back to my room. I think I slept on the bed that night, without ever stopping to determine whether it was comfortable or not. And when I woke up in the morning, and looked out the window at a white-coated landscape, the miracle of snow (which I had never seen before; not many planets have as much water vapor in their atmospheres as Earth does) in summer weather seemed trivial in comparison to what had happened to me.

Trivial, but beautiful. I was afraid it would be very cold, but it wasn't.

I had gathered, from the weather-talk in the place where I ate breakfast, that in this mountain-country (it was considered to be very high altitude there), snow at night and hot sun in the afternoon was not infrequent in the month of April, though it was unusual for May.

It was beautiful to look at, and nice to walk on, but it began melting as soon as the sun was properly up, and then it looked awful. The red dirt there is pretty, and so is the snow, but when they began merging into each other in patches and muddy spots, it was downright ugly.

Not that I cared. I ate oatmeal and drank milk and nibbled at a piece of toast, and tried to plan my activities for the day. To the library first, and take back the book they'd lent me. Book . . . all right then, get a book on sex. But that was foolish; I *knew* all about sex. At least I knew . . . well,

what did I know? I knew their manner of reproduction, and . . .

Just why, at that time and place, I should have let it come through to me, I don't know. I'd managed to stay in a golden daze from the time in the Garden till that moment, refusing to think through the implications of what Larry said.

Sex. Sex is mating and reproduction. Dating and dancing and kissing are parts of the courtship procedure. And the television shows all stop with kissing, because the mating itself is taboo. Very simple. Also *very* taboo.

Of course, they didn't *say* I couldn't. They never said anything about it at all. It was just obvious. It wouldn't even work. We were *different,* after all.

Oh, technically, biologically, of course, we were probably cross-fertile, but . . .

The whole thing was so obviously *impossible!*

They should have warned me. I'd never have let it go this far, if I'd known.

Sex. Mating. Marriage. Tribal rites. Rituals and rigmaroles, and stay here forever. Never go back.

Never go back?

There was in instant's sheer terror, and then the comforting knowledge that they wouldn't *let* me do that. I had to go back.

Baby on a spaceship?

Well, *I* was a baby on a spaceship, but that was different. How different? I was older. I wasn't born there. Getting born is complicated. Oxygen, gravity, things like that. You can't raise a *human* baby on a spaceship . . . *Human?* What's human? What am I? Never mind the labels. It would be *my* baby . . .

I didn't want a baby. I just wanted Larry to hold me close to him and kiss me.

I drove downtown and on the way to the library I passed a bookstore, so I stopped and went in there instead. That was

better. I could buy what I wanted, and not have to ask permission to take it out, and if there was more than one, I could have all I wanted.

I asked the man for books about sex. He looked so startled, I realized the taboo must apply on the verbal level too.

I didn't care. He showed me where the books were, and that's all that mattered. "Non-fiction here," he said. "That what you wanted, Miss?"

Non-fiction. Definitely. I thanked him, and picked out half a dozen different books. One was a survey of sexual behavior and morals; another was a manual of techniques; one was on the psychology of sex, and there was another about abnormal sex, and one on physiology, and just to play safe, considering the state of my own ignorance, one that announced itself as giving a "clear simple explanation of the facts of life for adolescents."

I took them all to the counter, and paid for them, and the man still looked startled, but he took the money. He insisted on wrapping them up, though, before I could leave.

The next part of this is really Larry's story, but unable as I am, even now, to be *certain* about his unspoken thoughts, I can only tell it as I experienced it. I didn't do anything all that day, except wade through the books I'd bought, piecemeal, reading a few pages here and a chapter there. The more I read, the more confused I got. Each writer contradicted all the others, except in regard to the few basic biological facts that I already knew. The only real addition to my factual knowledge was the information in the manual of technique about contraception—and that was rather shocking, even while it was tempting.

The mechanical contrivances these people made use of were foolish, of course, and typical of the stage of culture they are going through. If I wanted to prevent conception, while engaging in an act of sexual intercourse, I could do so, of course, but . . .

The shock to the glandular system wouldn't be too severe; it was the psychological repercussions I was thinking about. The idea of pursuing a course of action whose sole motivation was the procreative urge, and simultaneously to decide by an act of will to refuse to procreate . . .

I *could* do it, theoretically, but in practice I knew I never would.

I put the book down and went outside in the afternoon sunshine. The motel was run by a young married couple, and I watched the woman come out and put her baby in the playpen. She was laughing and talking to it; she looked happy; so did the baby.

But *I* wouldn't be. Not even if they let me. I couldn't live here and bring up a child—children?—on this primitive, almost barbaric, world. Never ever be able fully to communicate with anyone. Never, ever, be entirely honest with anyone.

Then I remembered what it was like to be in Larry's arms, and wondered what kind of communication I could want that might surpass that. Then I went inside and took a shower and began to dress for the evening.

It was too early to get dressed. I was ready too soon. I went out and got in the car, and pulled out onto the highway and started driving. I was halfway up the mountain before I knew where I was going, and then I doubled my speed.

I was scared. I ran away.

There was still some snow on the mountain top. Down below, it would be warm yet, but up there it was cold. The big empty house was full of dust and chill and I brought fear in with me. I wished I had known where I was going when I left my room; I wanted my coat. I wanted something to read while I waited. I remembered the library book and almost went back. Instead, I went to the dark room in back that had once been somebody's kitchen, and opened the cupboard and found the projector and yelled for help.

I didn't know where they were, how far away, whether cruising or landed somewhere, or how long it would take. All I could be sure of was that they couldn't come till after dark, full dark, and that would be, on the mountain top, at least another four hours.

There was a big round black stove in a front room, that looked as if it could burn wood safely. I went out and gathered up everything I could find nearby that looked to be combustible, and started a fire, and began to feel better. I beat the dust off a big soft chair, and pulled it over close to the stove, and curled up in it, warm and drowsy and knowing that help was on the way.

I fell asleep, and I was in the car with Larry again, in front of that hotel, every cell of my body tinglingly awake, and I woke up, and moved the chair farther back away from the fire, and watched the sun set through the window—till I fell asleep again, and dreamed again, and when I woke, the sun was gone, but the mountain top was brightly lit. I had forgotten about the moon.

I tried to remember what time it rose and when it set, but all I knew was it had shone as bright last night in the Garden of the Gods.

I walked around, and went outside, and got more wood, and when it was hot in the room again, I fell asleep, and Larry's hands were on my shoulders, but he wasn't kissing me.

He was shouting at me. He sounded furious, but I couldn't feel any anger. "You God-damn little idiot!" he shouted. "What in the name of all that's holy . . . ? . . . put you over my knee and . . . For God's sake, baby," he stopped shouting, "what did you pull a dumb trick like this for?"

"I was scared. I didn't even plan to do it. I just did."

"Scared? My God, I should think you would be! Now listen, babe. I don't know yet what's going on, and I don't think I'm going to like it when I find out. I don't like it already that you told me a pack of lies last night. Just the

same, God help me, I don't think it's what it sounds like. But I'm the only one who doesn't. Now you better give it to me straight, because they've got half the security personnel of this entire area out hunting for you, and nobody else is going to care much what the truth is. My God, on top of everything else, you had to *run away!* Now, give out, kid, and make it good. This one has got to stick."

I didn't understand a lot of what he said. I started trying to explain, but he wouldn't listen. He wanted something else, and I didn't know what.

Finally, he made me understand.

He'd almost believed my story the night before. Almost, but there was a detail somewhere that bothered him. He couldn't remember it at first; it kept nudging around the edge of his mind, but he didn't know what it was. He forgot about it for a while. Then, in the Garden, I made my second big mistake. (He didn't explain all of this then; he just accused, and I didn't understand this part completely until later.) I wanted him to park the car.

Any girl on Earth, no matter how sheltered, how inexperienced, would have known better than that. As he saw it, he had to decide whether I was just so carried away by the night and the mood and the moment that I didn't *care*—or whether my apparent innocence was a pose all along.

When we separated in front of the hotel that night, we both had to take the same road for a while. Larry was driving right behind me for a good three miles, before I turned off at the motel. And that was when he realized what the detail was that had been bothering him: my car.

The first time he saw me, I was driving a different make and model, with Massachusetts plates on it. He was sure of that, because he had copied it down when he left the luncheonette, the first time we met.

Larry had never told me very clearly about the kind of work he did. I knew it was something more or less "classified," having to do with aircraft—jet planes or experimen-

tal rockets, or something like that. And I knew, without his telling me, that the work—not just the *job*, but the work he did at it—was more important to him than anything else ever had been. More important, certainly, than he had ever expected any woman to be.

So, naturally, when he met me that day, and knew he wanted to see me again, but couldn't get my address or any other identifying information out of me, he had copied down the license number of my car, and turned it in, with my name, to the Security Officer on the Project. A man who has spent almost every waking moment from the age of nine planning and preparing to fit himself for a role in humanity's first big fling into space doesn't endanger his security status by risking involuntary contamination from an attractive girl. The little aircraft plant on the fringes of town was actually a top-secret key division in the Satellite project, and if you worked there, you took precautions.

The second time I met him at the luncheonette, he had been waiting so long, and had so nearly given up any hope of my coming, that he was no longer watching the road or the door when I finally got there—and when he left, he was so pleased at having gotten a dinner date with me, that he didn't notice much of anything at all. Not except out of the corner of one eye, and with only the slightest edge of subconscious recognition: just enough so that some niggling detail that was out-of-place kept bothering him thereafter; and just enough so that he made a point of stopping in the Security Office again that afternoon to add my new motel address to the information he'd given them the day before.

The three-mile drive in back of my Colorado plates was just about long enough, finally, to make the discrepancy register consciously.

Larry went home and spent a bad night. His feelings toward me, as I could hardly understand at the time, were a great deal stronger, or at least more clearly defined, than

mine about him. But since he was more certain just what it was he wanted, and less certain what *I* did, every time he tried to fit my attitude in the car into the rest of what he knew, he'd come up with a different answer, and nine answers out of ten were angry and suspicious and agonizing.

"Now look, babe," he said, "you've got to see this. I trusted *you;* really, all the time, I did trust you. But I didn't trust *me.* By the time I went to work this morning, I was half-nuts. I didn't know *what* to think, that's all. And I finally sold myself on the idea that if you were what you said you were, nobody would get hurt, and—well, if you *weren't* on the level, I better find out, quick. You see that?"

"Yes," I said.

"Okay. So I told them about the license plates, and about —the other stuff."

"What other stuff?" What else was there? How stupid could I be?

"I mean, the—in the car. The way you— Listen, kid," he said, his face grim and demanding again. "It's still just as true as it was then. I *still* don't know. They called me this evening, and said when they got around to the motel to question you, you'd skipped out. They also said that Massachusetts car was stolen. And there were a couple of other things they'd picked up that they wouldn't tell me, but they've got half the National Guard and all the Boy Scouts out after you by now. They wanted me to tell them anything I could think of that might help them find this place. I couldn't think of anything while I was talking to them. Right afterwards, I remembered plenty of things—which roads you were familiar with, and what you'd seen before and what you hadn't, stuff like that, so—"

"So you—?"

"So I came out myself. I wanted to find you first. Listen, babe, I love you. Maybe I'm a sucker, and maybe I'm nuts, and maybe I-don't-know-what. But I figured maybe I could

find out more, and easier on you, than they could. And honey, it better be good, because I don't think I've got what it would take to turn you in, and now I've found you—"

He let it go there, but that was plenty. He was willing to listen. He wanted to believe in me, because he wanted me. And finding me in the house I'd described, where I'd said it was, had him half-convinced. But I still had to explain those Massachusetts plates. And I couldn't.

I was psychologically incapable of telling him another lie, now, when I knew I would never see him again, that this was the last time I could ever possibly be close to him in any way. I couldn't estrange myself by lying.

And I was *also* psychologically incapable—I found out—of telling the truth. They'd seen to that.

It was the first time I'd ever hated them. The first time, I suppose, that I fully realized my position with them.

I could not tell the truth, and I would not tell a lie; all I could do was explain this, and hope he would believe me. I could explain, too, that I was no spy, no enemy; that those who had prevented me from telling what I wanted to tell were no menace to his government or his people.

He believed me.

It was just that simple. He believed me, because I suppose he knew, without knowing how he knew it, that it was truth. Humans are not incapable of communication; they are simply unaware of it.

I told him, also, that they were coming for me, that I had called them, and—regretfully—that he had better leave before they came.

"You said they weren't enemies or criminals. You were telling the truth, weren't you?"

"Yes, I was. They won't *harm* you. But they might . . ." I couldn't say it. I didn't know the words when I tried to say it. *Might take you away with them . . . with us . . .*

"Might what?"

"Might . . . oh, I don't *know!*"

Now he was suspicious again. "All right," he said. "I'll leave. You come with me."

It was just that simple. Go back with him. Let them come and not find me. What could they do? Their own rules would keep them from hunting for me. They couldn't come down among the people of Earth. Go back. Stop running.

We got into his car, and he turned around and smiled at me again, like the other time.

I smiled back, seeing him through a shiny kind of mist which must have been tears. I reached for him, and he reached for me at the same time.

When we let go, he tried to start the car, and it wouldn't work. Of course. I'd forgotten till then. I started laughing and crying at the same time in a sort of a crazy way, and took him back inside and showed him the projector. They'd forgotten to give me any commands about not doing that, I guess. Or they thought it wouldn't matter.

It did matter. Larry looked it over, and puzzled over it a little, and fooled around, and asked me some questions. I didn't have much technical knowledge, but I knew what it did, and he figured out the way it did it. Nothing with an electro-magnetic motor was going to work while that thing was turned on, not within a mile or so in any direction. And there wasn't any way to turn it off. It was a homing beam, and it was on to stay—foolproof.

That was when he looked at me, and said slowly, "You got here three days ago, didn't you, babe?"

I nodded.

"There was— God-damn it, it's too foolish! There was a— a *flying saucer* story in the paper that day. Somebody saw it land on a hilltop somewhere. Some crackpot. Some . . . how about it, kid?"

I couldn't say yes and I couldn't say no, and I did the only thing that was left, which was to get hysterical. In a big way.

He had to calm me down, of course. And I found out why

the television shows stop with the kiss. The rest is very private and personal.

Author's note: This story was dictated to me by a five-year-old boy—word-for-word, except for a very few editorial changes of my own. He is a very charming and bright youngster who plays with my own five-year-old daughter. One day he wandered into my office, and watched me typing for a while, then asked what I was doing. I answered (somewhat irritably, because the children are supposed to stay out of the room when I'm working) that I was trying *to write a story.*

"What kind of a story?"

"A grown-up story."

"But what kind?"

"A science-fiction story." The next thing I was going to do was to call my daughter, and ask her to take her company back to the playroom. I had my mouth open, but I never got a syllable out. Teddy was talking.

"I don't know where they got the car," he said. "They made three or four stops before the last . . ." He had a funny look on his face, and his eyes were glazed-looking.

I had seen some experimental work with hypnosis and post-hypnotic performance. After the first couple of sentences, I led Teddy into the living room, and switched on the tape-recorder. I left it on as long as he kept talking. I had to change tapes once, and missed a few more sentences. When he was done, I asked him, with the tape still running, where he had heard that story.

"What story?" he asked. He looked perfectly normal again.

"The story you just told me."

He was obviously puzzled.

"The science-fiction *story," I said.*

"I don't know where they got the car," he began; his face was set and his eyes were blank.

I kept the tape running, and picked up the parts I'd missed

before. Then I sent Teddy off to the playroom, and played back the tape, and thought for a while.

There was a little more, besides what you've read. Parts of it were confused, with some strange words mixed in, and with sentences half-completed, and a feeling of ambivalence or censorship or inhibition of some kind preventing much clarity. Other parts were quite clear. Of these, the only section I have omitted so far that seems to me to belong in the story is this one:—

The baby will have to be born on Earth! They have decided that themselves. And for the first time, I am glad that they cannot communicate with me as perfectly as they do among themselves. I can think some things they do not know about.

We are not coming back. I do not think that I will like it on Earth for very long, and I do not know—neither does Larry—what will happen to us when the Security people find us, and we cannot answer their questions. But—

I am a woman now, and I love like a woman. Larry will not be their pet; so I cannot be. I am not sure that I am fit to be what Larry thinks of as a "human being." He says I must learn to be "my own master." I am not at all sure I could do this, if it were necessary, but fortunately, this is one of Larry's areas of semantic confusion. The feminine of *master* is *mistress*, which has various meanings.

Also, there is the distinct possibility, from what Larry says, that we will not, *either* of us, be allowed even as much liberty as we have here.

There is also the matter of gratitude. *They* brought me up, took care of me, taught me, loved me, gave me a way of life, and a knowledge of myself, infinitely richer than I could ever have had on Earth. Perhaps they even saved my life, healing me when I was quite possiby beyond the power of Earthly medical science to save. But against all this—

They caused the damage to start with. It was *their* force-field that wrecked the car and killed my parents. *They* have paid for it; *they* are paying for it yet. *They* will continue to pay, for more years than make sense in terms of a human lifetime. *They* will continue to wander from planet to planet and system to system, because *they* have broken *their* own law, and now may never go home.

But *I* can.

I am a woman, and Larry is a man. We will go home and have our baby. And perhaps the baby will be the means of our freedom, some day. If we cannot speak to save ourselves, he may some day be able to speak for us.

I do not think the blocks they set in us will penetrate my womb as my own thoughts, I hope, already have.

Author's note: Before writing this story—as *a story*—*I talked with Teddy's parents. I approached them cautiously. His mother is a big woman, and a brunette. His father is a friendly fat redhead. I already knew that neither of them reads science-fiction. The word is not likely to be mentioned in their household.*

They moved to town about three years ago. Nobody here knew them before that, but there are rumors that Teddy is adopted. They did not volunteer any confirmation of that information when I talked to them, and they did not pick up on any of the leads I offered about his recitation.

Teddy himself is small and fair-haired. He takes after his paternal grandmother, his mother says . . .

LARRY M. HARRIS

MEX

Talented Larry Harris, though he hails from Dodger territory (or what used to be called that) tells a story from down near the Mexican border where men are closer than we are to ancestral memories and to the ancient things which dwell in the shadows. . . .

WHAT THEY called me, that was what started it. I'm as good an American as the next fellow, and maybe a little bit better than men like that, big men drinking in a bar who can't find anything better to do than to spit on a man and call him Mex. As if a Mexican is something to hide or to be ashamed of. We have our own heroes and our own strength and we don't have to bend down to men like that, or any other men. But when they called me that I saw red and called them names back.

"Mex kid," one of the men said, a big red-haired bully with his sleeves rolled back and muscles like ropes on the big hairy arms. "Snot-nosed little Mex brat."

I called him a name. He only laughed back at me and turned his back, waving a hand for the bartender. Maybe in a big city in the North it would be different and probably it would not: this toleration we hear about is no more good than an open fight, and there must be understanding instead. But here near the border, just on the American side of the border, a Mexican is called fair game, and a seventeen-year-old like me is less than nothing to them, to the white ones who go to the big bars.

I thought carefully about what to do, and finally when I

had made my mind up I went for him and tried to hit him. But other men held me back, and I was kicking and shouting with my legs off the ground. When I stopped they put me down, so I started for the big red-haired man again and they had to stop me again. The red-haired man was laughing all this time. I wanted to run, back to my own family in their little house, and yet running would have been wrong; I was too angry to run, so I stayed.

"My sister," I said. "My sister is a witch and I will get her to put a curse on you." I was very angry, you must understand this.

And of course they had no idea that my sister is a real witch, and her curses are real, and only last year Manuel Valdez had died from the effects of her curse. Of all people, sometimes I wish I were my sister most of all, to curse people and see them shrivel and sicken and choke and die.

"Go ahead, half-pint," one of the other men yelled. "Get your sister to put a curse on me. I bet she knows who I am; I been with every Mex girl this side of the border."

This made me see red; my sister is pure and must be pure, since she is a witch. And she is not like some of the others even aside from that. I have heard her talk about them and I know.

I called him a name and ran up to him and hit him; my fist against his solid side felt good, but some other men pulled me off again. Yet it was impossible to leave. This was wrong for me, and I had to make it right. "I shall get my father to fight you, since he is a giant ten feet tall."

The men laughed at me, not knowing, of course, that my father is a giant ten feet tall in truth, and my mother a sweet siren like those in the books, the old books, with spells in her eyes and a strange power. They did not know I was not a daydreaming child but a man who told truth.

And they laughed; I grew angry again and told them many things, calling them names in Spanish, which they did not understand. That only made them laugh the more.

Finally I left; it was necessary for me to leave, since I was not wanted. But it was necessary, too, for me to make things right. Nights later they were dead for what they had said and done.

For I tell the truth always, and I had told them about my sister and my father and my mother. But one thing I had not told them.

I am sorry they could never know I was the winged thing that frightened and killed them, one by one . . .

●

DAVID C. KNIGHT

THE AMAZING MRS. MIMMS

We're inclined to agree with David Knight who wrote, when this story was first published—"Long may the good lady serve us poor folks in the dim past." Knight, then as now, feels that much of SF loses out because it lacks the human angle . . .

THERE WAS a muffled rushing noise and the faintly acrid smell of ion electrodes as the Time Translator deposited Mrs. Mimms back into the year 1958. Being used to such journeys, she looked calmly about with quick gray eyes, making little flicking gestures with her hands as if brushing the stray minutes and seconds from her plain brown coat.

The scene of Mrs. Mimms' arrival in the past was the rear of a large supermarket, more specifically between two packing cases which had once contained breakfast foods. The excursion through time had evidently been a smooth one for the smile had not once left Mrs. Mimms' rotund countenance during the intervening centuries.

Two heavy black suitcases appeared to be the lady's only

luggage accompanying her from the future. These she picked up with a sharp gasp and made her way to the front of the shopping center around which slick new apartment buildings formed a horseshoe.

Mrs. Mimms was, as usual, on another assignment for Destinyworkers, Inc.

It was early evening at the Greenlawn Apartments, a time supposedly of contentment, yet Mrs. Mimms was quick to sense the disturbing vibrations in the warm air. She pressed through the crowds entering and leaving the supermarket. A faint mustache of perspiration formed on her upper lip. No one offered to help her with the bags. With a professional eye Mrs. Mimms noted the drawn mouths, the tense expressions typical of the Time Zone and shook her head. Central as usual had not been wrong; the Briefing Officer himself had cautioned her on what poor shape the Zonal area was in.

Jostling Mrs. Mimms on all sides were mostly young men and women accompanied by energetic, wriggling children of varying ages. It saddened Mrs. Mimms to see the premature lines forming in the youthful mothers' foreheads, and the gray settling too quickly into the men's hair. Mrs. Mimms, who considered herself not quite in the twilight of middle age, was just 107 that month.

Outbursts of juvenile and adult temper grated harshly in the Destinyworker's ears. She witnessed a resounding slap and a child's cry of pain. A young mother was shouting angrily: "Couldn't *you* have kept an eye on her? Do I have to watch her every minute?"

Mrs. Mimms hurried swiftly on for there was much she had to do. Then she stopped abruptly before a small delicatessen. She entered and gave the clerk her order:

"One package of Orange Pekoe Tea, if you please. Tea *leaves,* not bags."

There were definite advantages, thought Mrs. Mimms, in being assigned to any century preceding the Twenty-Third. Due to the increasing use of synthetic products in Mrs.

Mimms' home-century the tea plant, among other vegetation, had been allowed to become extinct. Ever since Mrs. Mimms' solo assignment to Eighteenth Century England, she had grown exceedingly fond of the beverage.

Ten minutes later Mrs. Mimms, one of Destinyworkers' best Certified Priority Operators, reached the Renting Office of the Greenlawn Apartments. "I do hope the Superintendent is still on duty," panted Mrs. Mimms, setting her bags down very carefully. "If the Research Department is correct—and it usually is—his hours are from 9 to 6:30."

It was one minute past 6:30 when Mrs. Mimms knocked.

"Yeah?" boomed a disgruntled voice. "Come on in. It ain't locked."

"Good evening," said Mrs. Mimms to a young man in work clothes seated behind a paper-strewn desk. "I hope it's not too late for you to show me an apartment tonight. It needn't be large. Two or three rooms will do nicely. However, I have one stipulation."

"We aim to please at Greenlawn, Ma'm—within reason—you understand."

"I understand," replied the Destinyworker. "It is merely that the apartment should, as far as possible, be located in the central part of the building and on a middle floor—not too high or too low."

"No problem there," said the super, consulting a board from which hung a number of keys. "Most of 'em want just the opposite—corner apartments, views, top floor, Southern exposure. Here's one. Partly furnished. Young couple left for Europe. They want to sublet for the rest of the lease."

"I hope the rent is reasonable."

It was. Mrs. Mimms received the news with apparent relief. Due to the high cost of Time Translation and maintenance of workers in other Zones, Destinyworkers, Inc., a nonprofit organization, had to keep its overhead at a minimum.

"This will do very nicely," Mrs. Mimms announced after inspecting the apartment. "I should like to move in at once."

The superintendent then brought up his new tenant's suitcases, commented upon their weight, obtained Mrs. Mimms' signature on the preliminary lease and left.

Even for younger Destinyworkers, time travel at best was an exhausting business. The bags *had* been heavy, and Zonal Speech Compliance was always a strain at the outset of an assignment. Mrs. Mimms needed refreshment. Finding a battered pot and a broken cup abandoned by the former tenants, she heated water on the range and made herself some hot tea. Sipping it slowly Mrs. Mimms felt the strength returning to her tired system.

Having eaten an early dinner in the future Mrs. Mimms was not hungry. The tea would be sufficient until tomorrow. She washed the cup carefully, put away the pot and then unlocked one of her black suitcases. From it she extracted a small white card on which there was some printing and a phone number at the bottom. Mrs. Mimms checked the phone number with the telephone in her new apartment; they were the same. Research was almost *never* wrong. Mrs. Mimms then took the card down to the main floor and attached it to a bulletin board with four thumbtacks. The message read:

Mrs. Althea Mimms
Professional Companion & Babysitter
Rates Reasonable

Back in her apartment, the time traveler opened the other suitcase. It contained a batch of weird-looking apparatus which faintly resembled a television set, although there were twice the number of dials and knobs. To the uninitiated eye the legends under them would have been perplexing—"Month Selector," "Reverse Day Fast-Forward," "Weekometer," "Minute-Second Divider." To Mrs. Mimms however the instrument was simply standard equipment for all assignments. She placed it carefully on the desk in her living room

and, one by one, drew out the five sensitive antennae from their sockets. Mrs. Mimms did not need to use the electrical outlet under the desk for new d-c ion batteries had been installed whose combined guaranteed life was five years.

It had grown somewhat late at Greenlawn—the hands of Mrs. Mimms' watch were nearing eleven—yet this did not deter her from flicking the power on. She dialed to a position a few hours before on that same evening and waited for the equipment to warm up. A roar of angry static and strident voices suddenly filled the room until Mrs. Mimms quickly cut the volume. The outburst was definitely an indication that her work was cut out for her. Eyeing the red pilot indicator across which a ribbon of names was flashing she slowly twirled the Master Selector. Images flickered and disappeared on the screen; then suddenly Mrs. Mimms leaned forward anxiously. A living room much like her own came into view and in it a man and a woman faced each other manacingly. The pilot was flashing the name Randolph, Apt. 14-B.

Reducing the volume slightly, Mrs. Mimms listened:

"You don't care, Bill Randolph. If you cared we could be out somewhere right now. My God, it's Saturday night. I'll bet the Bairds and Simmons are at a show right now. But not us. Oh, no. Honestly, I don't think you'd stir out of that chair if it weren't for your meals and the office."

"You're a great one to talk," snapped the young man. "Every time we decide to line something up you get finicky about a sitter. How many times have we sat for Ruth Whatshername? And we're up at Ellen Fox's a couple of nights, too. Then our kid comes down with a cold or something and they're not good enough. No wonder we never get out."

"Can I help it if Kenny takes after *your* side of the family? You and your mother are always coming down with something. He's *sensitive*. I won't have some other woman taking care of my child when he needs my attention. And I *won't* have these teenage girls for Kenneth with their boyfriends

lolling all over the sofa. I wouldn't have an easy minute while we were away. Anyway, when we *do* get out I don't notice you bending over backwards to get tickets for anything decent. It's always something *you* want to see. Those silly Marilyn Monroe movies, for instance."

"What's wrong with Marilyn Monroe? I wouldn't *mind* being nagged by *her.*"

"I see," choked the young woman, biting her lip. "Thank you very much. Of course it's perfectly *OK* when something is wrong with every other meal I cook. It's *fine* when Your Majesty doesn't like the dress I've got on or the way I have my hair."

Mrs. Randolph's rising voice elicited a child's cry from the rear of the apartment. Both parents stiffened.

"Go ahead, say it, say it was *me* who woke him up this time," bleated Randolph. He quickly snapped a newspaper up between himself and his wife.

Mrs. Mimms cut the picture and erased the name from the pilot indicator. The case was a typical one, routine in fact; yet it was the first one of the assignment and Mrs. Mimms was moved to expedite it. She picked up the telephone and placed a call to nearby New York City. The party answered promptly.

"Althea! How nice. I didn't know you were in the Twentieth again. What can I do for you?"

"You can arrange some entertainment for me, George. Something good. For two."

Mrs. Mimms held the phone for a minute. Presently the conversation resumed as the voice of George Kahn, Resident Destinyworker, came over the wire.

"Sorry to be so long, Althea, it took some managing. I've got you two in the orchestra for 'My Fair Lady' on the 28th. That's the best of the current crop. Nice little thing, it'll be running for another four years of course. Ought to catch it yourself some night."

"I'd love to, George, but I shan't have time. Not the way

this assignment's developing. You know what to do with the tickets."

Mrs. Mimms replaced the telephone in its cradle and turned again to the Master Selector. Among the kaleidoscope of voices and figures not all were scenes of frustration and discontent. Yet enough of them were so that Mrs. Mimms was seriously disturbed. Then again, the apparatus had its indiscriminate faults: at one scene Mrs. Mimms blushed deeply and flicked the dial to another setting. Suddenly she was surprised to hear a familiar voice. The pilot monitor showed that it was the apartment of the building superintendent.

"It ain't right. You know it ain't right," the super was saying. He was sunk deep into an overstuffed chair and there was a can of beer at his elbow. "No wonder the kids're getting lousy report cards. The minute they get home from school they park in front of the TV. By the time they're ready for supper they're so excited watching Indians and cowboys and Foreign Legion stuff they can't eat. Afterwards they are too knocked out to do their homework."

"Don't I know it," said his wife. "But you can't forbid them because all the other kids are allowed to watch the same things. Adele Jones down the hall says she has the same trouble. They tried taking Brian's TV away and the kid put up such a fuss they gave it back just to get some peace."

The super took a swallow of beer and tapped one of the report cards in disgust.

"Look at that. Charlotte gets a 'D' in Reading. Goddam it, she's a smart enough kid. I can't remember when's the last time I saw *either* of them bring a book back from the library. Hell, they're too busy worrying about how Sergeant Preston's going to come out."

"You'd think they'd have more educational stuff on TV."

"I may be only a superintendent," growled the super, "but, by God, those kids are going to college. They're gonna have opportunities I never had. Sometimes I got a good mind to kick a hole right through that 21″ screen."

"Aw, Chuck, honey, take it easy. You're the best super this building ever had. I got me a real sweet guy, even if he isn't no college graduate."

"I ain't no Biff Baker or Captain Video, either. Maybe if I was the kids could watch me and we could dump the TV set."

Mrs. Mimms dimmed the screen and recorded the problem briefly in a notebook marked ACTIVE. This too was a common enough complaint of the Time Zone. Mrs. Mimms rummaged about in one of the suitcases until she produced a brightly colored box. Inside the box were a number of objects resembling radio condensers with small metal clamps at either end. Mrs. Mimms removed one and read the label: FILTER XC8794, Reading. *Caution: for best results attach to TV aerial. Lasts 2 weeks only. Destroy label before using.*

"I *do* hope the superintendent's set doesn't have rabbits' ears," said Mrs. Mimms, dialing the super's apartment again to check. "Hooking these up to a regular aerial is so much easier." The superintendent's set luckily had an outside antenna and by manipulating certain dials, the Destinyworker traced it out and up to the roof. Pressing a button marked TRACER LIGHT, she left the set in operation and made her way up to the top floor of the apartment house. Taking the fire exit to the roof, Mrs. Mimms found herself among a forest of TV aerials. However there was a small circle of light cast about one of them and she went to it and attached the filter.

Returning to her apartment, Mrs. Mimms went immediately to bed. She would have liked a last cup of tea before retiring, but she was too tired to fix it.

The telephone woke the time traveler at half past ten the next morning. She answered it sleepily. It was a young mother, Mrs. Mimms' first customer. Could Mrs. Mimms *possibly* come that night? The voice sounded desperate, then relieved when Mrs. Mimms answered Yes, she would be there.

Remembering that she had had nothing to eat since her own century, Mrs. Mimms hurried below to the delicatessen and purchased some Danish pastry. She looked forward to a cup of strong tea. As she waited for the water to boil, she switched on the apparatus and dialed once or twice across the band. At that hour most of the apartments were silent. Wives were attending to cleaning or washing and the children had been sent out to play. Leaving the apparatus for a minute, Mrs. Mimms made her tea. When she returned there was a burst of static on the loudspeaker, then a loud childish voice and images took shape on the screen.

"I'm captain of this spaceship, Ronnie Smith," insisted the taller of the two youngsters. "You gotta do like I say. We're the first guys on this planet, see? We got cut off from the ship by the monsters and we only got another half hour of oxygen left. We gotta shoot our way back. Let's go, Lieutenant Smith."

"Ah, you're always the captain," muttered Lt. Smith mutinously, though inaudibly under his F.A.O. Schwartz plastic helmet. The two Earthlings advanced cautiously across the parking lot in the rear of the apartment building, mowing down the aliens like flies with their atomic ray guns.

"Ah-ah-ah-ah-ah. See me get that one, Smith?" screamed the captain murderously. "Right in the belly, look at the guts. Ah-ah-ah-ah. Big spiders, about twenty feet tall. There's some more. Make every shot count, Smith. We gotta make the ship before they do."

"I just blasted five of 'em with one shot," bragged Lt. Smith, leveling his pistol at a particularly large alien and watching it dissolve.

Fighting their way desperately across the parking lot the spacemen finally made the Smith family car in safety. "Blast off immediately, Lt. Smith," ordered the captain. The rocket wavered for a minute and rose. "Wait a minute, Smith. I seen Rocky Morgan do this once in a comic book. No member of the Space Patrol lets an alien get away alive. We got to kill

'em all. Head back and we'll get the rest of 'em with the hydrogen artillery." Accordingly the ship swept low over the strange planet. "Ah-ah-ah-ah." Twin sheets of imaginary flame burst from the rocket and the remainder of the faltering spider-monsters perished horribly.

Shaking her head, Mrs. Mimms spun the Master Selector until the screen went blank. An avid space traveler herself (she was especially fond of a nice Lunar trip at vacation time), the negative implications of this childish violence had a depressing effect on Mrs. Mimms. She noted the incident down in her notebook and starred it for special attention.

Like any woman in any century, Mrs. Mimms had an infallible remedy for cheering herself up. She went shopping. By economizing on her expense account she found it possible to afford a tiny luxury now and then. Mrs. Mimms bought a badly needed blouse and some facial cream. She also bought some groceries and a newspaper. After a modest meal, she found that she had an hour before her babysitting assignment. Opening the newspaper to the sports page, she indulged in one of the amusements common among Certified Priority Operators. Glancing down the list of tomorrow's daily-double she checked the names of horses to win, place and show. Mrs. Mimms made her selections merely by the sound of the names. She then turned a knob marked Tomorrow and dialed about with the Master Selector until the image of a man reading a newspaper appeared on the screen. She waited until he turned to the sports page before seeing how she had done. She had done poorly. Only one winner out of seven races. Of course, using the Destiny apparatus itself for personal gain was a violation of the Direct Influencing of Personal Fate Clause and was sufficient reason for losing her CPO ticket.

When Mrs. Mimms returned from babysitting it was after midnight. A cup of tea at her elbow, she sat down before the screen. There was a party just breaking up in the far building. Some people above her were watching the late show on

TV. A couple on her own floor were arguing about money but the argument seemed to be nearly over and Mrs. Mimms did not intrude further. Suddenly the pilot marked URGENT started flashing and the blurs on the screen sharpened into a young man and woman seated across from each other in the apartment where the party had been. Half-finished drinks and ashtrays full of stubs lay about. Husband and wife were both slightly drunk and being very frank with each other.

"I don't know how we got off on *this*," remarked the man. "Whenever George gets a couple of drinks in him he starts popping off about politics and the fate of the world. He doesn't know a damn thing about either."

"Well, at least he's optimistic," the young woman said, kicking off her shoes.

"You can say that again! Fifty years from now, according to George, we'll all be living in plastic houses with three helicopters in each garage. There won't be any unemployment, we'll have a four-day week, atomic energy'll be doing all the heavy work, mankind'll have realized the futility of war, everything'll be just hunky-dory. Nuts! Guys like George make me sick."

"But good Lord, honey, if everyone felt like you there wouldn't *be* any world. Maybe things won't be perfect but life's got to go on."

"Go on to what?" muttered the husband, polishing off his watery highball. "—To a great big beautiful cloud of atomic fallout, that's what. Don't laugh either, because everything points that way and you know it. Sputniks and ICBMs zooming around, both sides stock-piling like crazy, half the world scrapping as it is. It's just a question of who tosses the first match and then blooie! Hell, Julie, it's not that I don't *want* another kid. It's just that I don't think it's fair to create human life and turn it loose in this—this holocaust."

The young woman got up and sat on the arm of his chair and stroked his hair. "Oh Bill, honey, it's *wrong* to think like that. Don't you see how wrong it is?" Suddenly she wrinkled

her nose at him and whispered some words in his ear. They were in the special baby-language which had sprung up around the first child.

Then she said tipsily: "A baby is such a tiny thing."

"Yeah," said her husband, "you feed them and take care of them and watch them grow and it's swell. Just like the fatted calf. Then you flip open the evening paper and wonder whether they'll have the good luck to die in their beds at a ripe old age. I tell you I'm honestly frightened of where we're going . . ."

There were tense little crow's feet about Mrs. Mimms' eyes as she cleared the screen. She reached immediately for the telephone and dialed a number. A couple of seconds later the Resident Destinyworker's voice said, "Hello?"

"George, this is Althea. I'm sorry to be calling so late but I have a Condition Twelve case."

George Kahn's voice was instantly alert. "Male?"

"Yes, and a good Third Intensity. Here are the coordinates if you want to rerun it yourself." Mrs. Mimms read some figures off the dials. "I'm authorized a week's night-teleportation but I only have the standard equipment of course. You have the Viele apparatus over there, haven't you?"

"Yes, but frankly, Althea, even with the Viele we're limited in what we can do. I don't have to tell you that's getting pretty close to Direct Influence. I tampered with it myself a couple of years ago and got a stiff reprimand from Central."

"But, George, this is a *Twelve*. A serious one. The files at Central are full of Anti-Population Projectographs. All that might-have-been talent that's lost in every Time Zone! Think what might have happened if we hadn't interfered in the Voltaire case! Why we might even have lost Darwin himself if Mr. Wentworth hadn't insisted on three nights of the Viele for Darwin's parents."

"Well, yes," admitted the Resident Destinyworker. "All right, Althea, I'll give him a week's dream kinesis if you in-

sist but just remember the Sophistication Curve in the Twentieth. You'll probably have to supplement it with some work of your own."

"Thank you George, I will."

"And Althea—"

"Yes?"

"You sound tired. Get a good night's rest. The Mid-Twentieth's a tough Zone and the Chief would not want one of his best CPO's taking on more than she can handle. Personally, I think you ought to ask him for a nice soft assignment in the Future Division next trip."

Mrs. Mimms smiled. "I'll leave the glamor to the youngsters, George, they're much better at it. Besides," she added, "there isn't any tea there."

Again, Mrs. Mimms would have liked a cup, but she was much too tired to prepare it.

Three weeks after Mrs. Mimms' arrival at the Greenlawn Apartments, the superintendent was repairing a leaky faucet on the top floor. The housewife watched him as he gave the nut a final twist with his wrench and stood up.

"Thanks for coming up and looking at it so soon, Mr. Seely," she said. "How are Mrs. Seely and the children?"

"Good, Mrs. Dorne, real good, thanks. Especially the kids after that new TV show came on."

"Oh?" said Mrs. Dorne. "Which one is that?"

"It ain't on no more," said the super, "but, boy, while it lasted the kids sure got a kick out of it. That little Charlotte of mine, she's going to be a real egghead."

"Well what kind of a show was it?"

"Reading," said the super. "Just reading. I ain't sure what they called it, but I know there wasn't no sponsor. Maybe that's why it lasted only two weeks or so. Some kind of test show I guess it was."

"I guess we missed it listening to something else. What channel was it on?"

"Now that you mention it I'm darned if I remember," Chuck Seely said. "The kids just come home from school one night and parked in front of the TV like always and instead of the westerns and like that here's this guy, just reading. It lasted about an hour every night; we couldn't drag the kids away. Me and the wife got in the habit of watching it too."

"Was it Charles Laughton? He has a reading program."

"It wasn't him. I never saw the guy before, but what a voice! No commercials, no scenery, no nothin' except this guy reading. Something different every night, too. Stuff like Dickens and famous writers like that. I never heard a voice like this guy had, you couldn't stop listening. Then you know what he'd do at the end of the show?"

"What?"

"He'd tell the kids to go get a pencil and write down the names of more books to get at the library. And you know what? The kids *do* it. That Charlotte, the other night she brings home some Shakespeare stories for kids by a guy named Lamb. She makes me read 'em to her, too. Get a load o' me reading Shakespeare. I got to admit they're pretty good stories. That Charlotte's going to be a real egghead."

"We usually have our TV on around suppertime. It's funny we missed it."

"I checked TV Guide but it was not listed," said the super. "It was some kind of test show. I guess this guy couldn't find a sponsor."

A week after this incident Betty Randolph picked up the telephone and said, "Hello?" It was Dot on the ground floor. Ed had phoned earlier and said he'd be a little late. Betty felt relaxed and just in the mood for some woman talk.

"Dot, you'll never guess where we were last night," she said. "We saw My Fair Lady, imagine! Don't you envy me?"

There was a gasp at the other end of the line. "Betty Randolph, you didn't! We've been on the waiting list for six months. Where in the world did you get tickets?"

"That's the weird part of it. A messenger just delivered them to Ed in the office one morning. They were in a plain envelope marked 'Mr. Randolph' and a card inside said 'Hope you enjoy them—George.' Ed thinks the messenger made a mistake and got the wrong building or something because Ed's the only Randolph there. Anyway, by the time Ed opened the envelope the messenger was gone. There wasn't anything to do but use the tickets of course."

"Of all the luck! Maybe you and Ed've got a fairy Godmother or something. What'd you do for a sitter?"

"Oh, we were nearly insane finding one. Jane and Tina were busy and we knew you were away for the weekend. Fortunately we phoned this Mrs. Mimms and she was available. Kenneth *loved* her."

"Isn't she *nice?* That woman's a wonder with children. Dicky and Sue are as good as gold when she's around and she always seems to be free when you want her. She's so cheap, too, I don't see how the woman lives."

"Glory we had a good time!" sighed Betty. "We had drinks and filet mignon at a nice little place near the theater and forgot all about kids for a while. It was like going on a date again. I had on my red-and-gold dress I haven't worn for months and Ed kept telling me how cute I looked . . ."

"Zoom, zoom," the captain kept saying. The spaceship swooped in for a landing on the crimson Martian sands. Captain Bobby Taylor took up a position before the airlock and briefed his second-in-command, Ronnie Smith. "We're surrounded by enemy aliens, Smith," announced Captain Taylor. "Better break out the death-ray pistols. Our mission is to destroy every metal monster on this planet. Look at 'em come! They got eight legs and sixteen wire arms . . ."

"Ah, cut it out, Bobby. I ain't playing science-fiction with you any more. It ain't like you say at all."

"What's it like then, wise guy? I suppose *you* been to Mars."

"Maybe I ain't," said Lt. Smith. "Anyways I know somebody that *has*."

"Yeah? Who?"

"Mrs. Mimms. She babysits with me when Mom and Dad go out. She's been all over in space. Venus and all them other planets. She says there ain't any monsters on any of 'em. There ain't *nuthin* on Mars except a little bitty grass and a lot of scientists from Earth."

"Mad scientists?" asked Captain Taylor hopefully.

"Nah, just scientists. She says we oughta forget about monsters and play the right way. You know, like with atomic reactors and radar communication and growing new kinds of food for Earth colonies."

"Ah I don't believe it. She'd hafta be from someplace in the future. She'd hafta come here by time machine or something, wouldn't she?"

"That's what she did," Lt. Smith informed the captain. "She showed me pictures to prove it. Pictures of her last vacation on the moon. You oughta see what they done to the place. She's from the future, all right."

"Then she ain't supposed to tell anybody about it, is she?"

Lt. Smith waved his hand airily. "She says it's OK to tell kids because grownups wouldn't believe it anyway. Get your mother to let her sit for you next time. She'll show you the pictures if you ask her. Heck, it's no fun playing monsters now."

"Well, look," said Captain Taylor magnanimously, "supposing I let you be Captain today. You can pretend any kind of stuff you want."

"OK," said the new Captain, and immediately postulated a gigantic atomic reactor on the planet Pluto.

The doctor had said Julie should not, but she had another cup of coffee anyway. She drank it and then lit a cigarette. Immediately she felt a twinge of the morning sickness and wisely snubbed it out in the ashtray. She was so happy it

almost didn't hurt at all. I'm pregnant again, she thought, that's the important thing. Julie hugged herself and thought again of Mrs. Mimms and her tea leaves. It was the silliest thing, she told herself, you didn't base important decisions on tea leaves. Not *tea* leaves. It was right after the week Bill had been having those queer dreams that they'd decided, well, to go ahead. Julie remembered Bill's face as he sat on the edge of her bed describing one of the dreams to her as she lay there.

"It was vivid as hell, honey," Bill had said. "Maybe I ought to give up eating cheese sandwiches at night or something. It's like dreaming on the installment plan. Every time I'm someplace different and some guy in a weird suit is showing me around. Last night I could swear it was somewhere in New York, only the buildings were a lot taller and there were kind of triple-decker ramp things with nutty-looking cars on them and the people all wore tight-fitting clothes. Then all of a sudden we were down on what looked like the Battery and the guy showed me a big cookie-shaped thing out in the harbor with planes that looked like flying saucers landing and taking off from it. Hell, maybe it's going to be George Humphry's kind of world after all a couple of hundred years from now."

Then a night or two later they'd gone out to a movie. She'd been lucky to get Mrs. Mimms to sit with Georgie. After they got back Mrs. Mimms had made some tea—*real* tea she'd brought from her own apartment. When she offered to tell their fortunes in the leaves, Julie began to giggle . . . until she saw Bill was taking it perfectly seriously. Maybe it was the quiet way Mrs. Mimms had discussed their futures over the brown leaves, as if she'd been there herself. Funny old duck. Wonderful with Georgie, though; and the other girls swore by her. Bill hadn't batted an eye when she predicted it would be a girl this time, and perfectly healthy and all right.

Julie peeked into the bedroom where Georgie was sleeping and pulled the blanket up under his chin. "According to

Mrs. Mimms, my lad, you'll be getting a baby sister soon," she whispered. Bill *had* changed lately. Not so gloomy somehow, nicer. But *tea* leaves, for Heaven's sake, they couldn't have anything to do with . . .

She stopped trying to figure it out because the nausea returned. This time it was bad and she had to run for the bathroom.

The crisp directive—Zonally disguised as a contemporary telegram—was forwarded to Mrs. Mimms on a Monday night. Although it bore the Resident Destinyworker's address, it had come of course directly from the Chief's office for the code word DESTWORK headed the message. Decoded, it read:

URGENT YOU CLOSE OUT PRESENT ASSIGNMENT IN DAY OR TWO. CONDITION 16 IN 22ND CENTURY APPROACHING CRISIS. IMPORTANT ALL AVAILABLE PERSONNEL BE CONCENTRATED. PICK-UP AT POINT OF ENTRY ACCORDING TO PROCEDURE. BRIEFING TO COME FROM KEY RESIDENTS. ALL VACATIONS AND LEAVES-OF-ABSENCE HEREWITH CANCELED.

Mrs. Mimms sighed. It was always this way she reflected. Central was perpetually short of experienced help. The younger Destinyworkers, fresh from the colleges, always wanted to traipse off into the future where nothing practical ever got done. Oh, they argued, you could always read about the past if you wanted to and, anyway, since Direct Influence on Historic Continuum was strictly forbidden, what was the good of wandering around in musty yesterdays? Mrs. Mimms however knew better and so did every other member of the small cadre of qualified CPO's. A good CPO, a dedicated one, could always find loopholes in the Destiny Code. The past *could* be shaped in little ways even if the organization *was* powerless to stop major catastrophes.

At any rate orders were orders and Mrs. Mimms began to consider the practical side of leaving Greenlawn. Packing

was no problem. All CPO's were required to be Translation Alert in half an hour if necessary, inclusive of destroying all telltale evidence such as notes, papers, etc. Her apparatus was in perfect working order and the rent for that month was paid. Mrs. Mimms passed over these details quickly. She was thinking: it was invariably the *priorees* who suffered in emergency conversions.

The case book labeled ACTIVE was open on the table. There were two full pages alone of babysitting appointments she would have to cancel not to speak of the more serious cases, some of which were Second and Third Intensity. A heavy discouragement settled over Mrs. Mimms as she sat down at the apparatus to check certain images as they came and went on the screen. The Nortons, who hadn't been out for weeks, were fighting again; that date would have to be canceled. The delinquent attitude developing in the Bradley youngster was going to rob the world of a great scientist unless Mr. Bradley's business got back on its feet and he could spend more time with his son; Mrs. Mimms had a simple campaign mapped out for this, but it would take time—more time than she had left. Then there was the cocktail party the Haskells had been planning for weeks and Frank Haskell's boss was going to be there; Mrs. Mimms had left that date open especially because Frank's mother who had promised to take the kids overnight was going to be sick and they'd have to get someone to help her. And that teen-age picnic—there would be trouble unless she, and not someone else, were chaperoning it.

She dared not think of the growing list of Third Intensities. Another Condition Twelve in the far building and one developing on the floor directly above. Crippled old Mrs. Schaefer on the ground floor who had tried to commit suicide before with an overdose of sleeping tablets—and might certainly try it again if Mrs. Mimms didn't spend a few hours with her every week. And, as usual, on every assignment after a few months had gone by, the exhausting sleep-beaming by Des-

tiny apparatus of the cases where she had no direct contact. There was the young doctor on the third floor who was becoming addicted to his own morphine supply. The campaign against Mrs. Jamison's frigidity which would be getting results in a few weeks. And the theft of company funds which the middle-aged clerk in B-18 was contemplating.

Yes, it was always the priorees who suffered on an incomplete assignment. Not to speak of the Destinyworker involved. All the months of careful work building up an event here, a circumstance there, only to let the delicate fabric slip back again into the impersonal Historic Continuum. It wasn't fair, thought Mrs. Mimms. You were suddenly transferred to another Time Zone and there was no one to carry on. The answer from Central was always the same: NO AVAILABLE PERSONNEL. Not even a trainee. Not even—

Then Mrs. Mimms remembered the young salesman. It had been a particularly hectic day at Central. Mrs. Mimms and the Briefing Officer were conferring in the Chief's Office when the Chief finally pressed a buzzer in irritation and said, "He's still there? All right, I'll see him if he can state his case in five minutes." There were firm, tired lines around the Chief's full-lipped mouth. All day long the Translation Rooms had smelled of overionized electrodes as Destinyworkers arrived by the dozens from various Time Zones. Two thirds of the entire Past Division was being recalled and reassigned to a Condition 14 in the Twenty-Third—elimination of a teenage fad which was getting out of hand in North America. The Chief had smiled wanly as the young salesman shook hands and plunged into his sales talk.

"I know how busy you are, sir; thank you for seeing me. My firm, Duplicanicals Unlimited, believes it has the answer to your employment problem. Frankly, it's so simple that I'm amazed you haven't called on us to serve you before. Briefly, our plan is this. Your Operators go into the various Time Zones as usual and lay the preliminary groundwork (of course Duplicanicals *realizes* there's no *real* substitute for

humanoid tactics at the outset of any case). Then," said the young man, bringing home his point triumphantly, "when the human Operator is needed elsewhere, a new model, low-cost Duplicanical takes over and carries on the work. Yes, every Duplicanical purchased from our firm can release a Destinyworker for an assignment in another Time Zone. A few basic specifications is all that our plant needs to duplicate any Destinyworker down to—if I may say so—the slightest detail. In emergencies, a simple photograph will do. Our skilled craftsmen can deliver a finished model to your offices in a matter of hours. Android construction guaranteed throughout at rock bottom prices. Why, a child could follow the simple instructions enclosed with every . . ."

But already the Chief had turned back to the map of North America; he had smiled politely and told the salesman to leave any literature he had with his secretary.

Mrs. Mimms made a decision.

She picked up the telephone and dialed a number. Even before the Resident Destinyworker had time for a greeting, Mrs. Mimms said:

"George, I want to send a message to Central. Make it a flat Priority-to-Present; there's no time to waste with a Zonal Relay Letter. ATTENTION: CHIEF, DESTINYWORKERS, INC. . . .

It was early evening when Eighty-One (Female, Duplicanical Pat. Pending U17809) entered the apartment and carefully set down the two black suitcases. For an hour she had been seated on the bus which had carried her from the address in New York out to Greenlawn. All the while she had been smiling faintly as per Similarity Instruction 3.

Eighty-One's cybertechnic brain hummed smoothly as she unpacked the bags and set up the Destiny apparatus (Work Instruction 17). Although she was neither cold nor hot, she removed the plain brown coat (Human Function 55). From Eighty-One's chest there came the nearly imperceptible tick-

ing of her rotary stabilizer; it lessened slightly when she sat down at the desk as the take-up tension relaxed on key bearings.

From one of the black suitcases she took a copy of *The Destinyworker's Manual & Guide* and also a photocopy of a notebook marked ACTIVE. She opened both books simultaneously and began to read. Without a glance at the bed behind her, she turned the pages slowly and uniformly until next morning when the books were finished. Word-for-word copies of them were now lightly etched on the tape reels behind her deftly molded Pigma-Foam forehead, and even now were being fed into the Action-and-Motion Editor at the base of her Myoplastic skull.

Satisfied, Eighty-One raised her hand in Female Instinctive Function 14 and smoothed her graying Spun-Tex hair, feeling the hard stitching on the scalp beneath.

Then the telephone rang and Eighty-One picked it up.

"This is Clair Howard in C-12, Mrs. Mimms. I'm so ashamed to ask on such short notice but I'm *desperate* for a sitter tomorrow afternoon. Can you possibly come over?"

"Why of course," answered the Duplicanical.

HENRY SLESAR

MY FATHER, THE CAT

Henry Slesar is a young advertising executive who has become one of the better-known writers in the field. Here is an off-trail story that is guaranteed to make some of you take a searching second look at some of the young men you know. . . .

MY MOTHER was a lovely, delicate woman from the coast of Brittany, who was miserable sleeping on less than three mattresses, and who, it is said, was once injured by a falling leaf in her garden. My grandfather, a descendant of the French nobility whose family had ridden the tumbrils of the Revolution, tended her fragile body and spirit with the same loving care given rare, brief-blooming flowers. You may imagine from this his attitude concerning marriage. He lived in terror of the vulgar, heavy-handed man who would one day win my mother's heart, and at last, this persistent dread killed him. His concern was unnecessary, however, for my mother chose a suitor who was as free of mundane brutality as a husband could be. Her choice was Dauphin, a remarkable white cat which strayed onto the estate shortly after his death.

Dauphin was an unusually large Angora, and his ability to speak in cultured French, English, and Italian was sufficient to cause my mother to adopt him as a household pet. It did not take long for her to realize that Dauphin deserved a higher status, and he became her friend, protector, and confidante. He never spoke of his origin, nor where he had

acquired the classical education which made him such an entertaining companion. After two years, it was easy for my mother, an unworldly woman at best, to forget the dissimilarity in their species. In fact, she was convinced that Dauphin was an enchanted prince, and Dauphin, in consideration of her illusions, never dissuaded her. At last, they were married by an understanding clergyman of the locale, who solemnly filled in the marriage application with the name of M. Edwarde Dauphin.

I, Etienne Dauphin, am their son.

To be candid, I am a handsome youth, not unlike my mother in the delicacy of my features. My father's heritage is evident in my large, feline eyes, and in my slight body and quick movements. My mother's death, when I was four, left me in the charge of my father and his coterie of loyal servants, and I could not have wished for a finer upbringing. It is to my father's patient tutoring that I owe whatever graces I now possess. It was my father, the cat, whose gentle paws guided me to the treasure houses of literature, art, and music, whose whiskers bristled with pleasure at a goose well cooked, at a meal well served, at a wine well chosen. How many happy hours we shared! He knew more of life and the humanities, my father, the cat, than any human I have met in all my twenty-three years.

Until the age of eighteen, my education was his personal challenge. Then, it was his desire to send me into the world outside the gates. He chose for me a university in America, for he was deeply fond of what he called "that great raw country," where he believed my feline qualities might be tempered by the aggressiveness of the rough-coated barking dogs I would be sure to meet.

I must confess to a certain amount of unhappiness in my early American years, torn as I was from the comforts of the estate and the wisdom of my father, the cat. But I became adapted, and even upon my graduation from the university, sought and held employment in a metropolitan art mu-

seum. It was there I met Joanna, the young woman I intended to make my bride.

Joanna was a product of the great American southwest, the daughter of a cattle-raiser. There was a blooming vitality in her face and her body, a lustiness born of open skies and desert. Her hair was not the gold of antiquity; it was new gold, freshly mined from the black rock. Her eyes were not like old-world diamonds; their sparkle was that of sunlight on a cascading river. Her figure was bold, an open declaration of her sex.

She was, perhaps, an unusual choice for the son of a fairy-like mother and an Angora cat. But from the first meeting of our eyes, I knew that I would someday bring Joanna to my father's estate to present her as my fiancee.

I approached that occasion with understandable trepidation. My father had been explicit in his advice before I departed for America, but on no point had he been more emphatic than secrecy concerning himself. He assured me that revelation of my paternity would bring ridicule and unhappiness upon me. The advice was sound, of course, and not even Joanna knew that our journey's end would bring us to the estate of a large, cultured, and conversing cat. I had deliberately fostered the impression that I was orphaned, believing that the proper place for revealing the truth was the atmosphere of my father's home in France. I was certain that Joanna would accept her father-in-law without distress. Indeed, hadn't nearly a score of human servants remained devoted to their feline master for almost a generation?

We had agreed to be wed on the first of June, and on May the fourth, emplaned in New York for Paris. We were met at Orly Field by Francois, my father's solemn manservant, who had been delegated not so much as escort as he was chaperone, my father having retained much of the old world proprieties. It was a long trip by automobile to our estate in Brittany, and I must admit to a brooding silence throughout the drive which frankly puzzled Joanna.

However, when the great stone fortress that was our home came within view, my fears and doubts were quickly dispelled. Joanna, like so many Americans, was thrilled at the aura of venerability and royal custom surrounding the estate. Francois placed her in charge of Madame Jolinet, who clapped her plump old hands with delight at the sight of her fresh blonde beauty, and chattered and clucked like a mother hen as she led Joanna to her room on the second floor. As for myself, I had one immediate wish: to see my father, the cat.

He greeted me in the library, where he had been anxiously awaiting our arrival, curled up in his favorite chair by the fireside, a wide-mouthed goblet of cognac by his side. As I entered the room, he lifted a paw formally, but then his reserve was dissolved by the emotion of our reunion, and he licked my face in unashamed joy.

Francois refreshed his glass, and poured another for me, and we toasted each other's well-being.

"To you, *mon purr,*" I said, using the affectionate name of my childhood memory.

"To Joanna," my father said. He smacked his lips over the cognac, and wiped his whiskers gravely. "And where is this paragon?"

"With Madame Jolinet. She will be down shortly."

"And you have told her everything?"

I blushed. "No, *mon purr,* I have not. I thought it best to wait until we were home. She is a wonderful woman," I added impulsively. "She will not be—"

"Horrified?" my father said. "What makes you so certain, my son?"

"Because she is a woman of great heart," I said stoutly. "She was educated at a fine college for women in Eastern America. Her ancestors were rugged people, given to legend and folklore. She is a warm, human person—"

"Human," my father sighed, and his tail swished. "You are expecting too much of your beloved, Etienne. Even a

woman of the finest character may be dismayed in this situation."

"But my mother—"

"Your mother was an exception, a changeling of the Fairies. You must not look for your mother's soul in Joanna's eyes." He jumped from his chair, and came towards me, resting his paw upon my knee. "I am glad you have not spoken of me, Etienne. Now you must keep your silence forever."

I was shocked. I reached down and touched my father's silky fur, saddened by the look of his age in his gray, gold-flecked eyes, and by the tinge of yellow in his white coat.

"No, *mon purr*," I said. "Joanna must know the truth. Joanna must know how proud I am to be the son of Edwarde Dauphin."

"Then you will lose her."

"Never! That cannot happen!"

My father walked stiffly to the fireplace, staring into the gray ashes. "Ring for Francois," he said. "Let him build the fire. I am cold, Etienne."

I walked to the cord and pulled it. My father turned to me and said: "You must wait, my son. At dinner this evening, perhaps. Do not speak of me until then."

"Very well, father."

When I left the library, I encountered Joanna at the head of the stairway, and she spoke to me excitedly.

"Oh, Etienne! What a *beautiful* old house. I know I will love it! May we see the rest?"

"Of course," I said.

"You look troubled. Is something wrong?"

"No, no. I was thinking how lovely you are."

We embraced, and her warm full body against mine confirmed my conviction that we should never be parted. She put her arm in mine, and we strolled through the great rooms of the house. She was ecstatic at their size and elegance, exclaiming over the carpeting, the gnarled furniture, the an-

cient silver and pewter, the gallery of family paintings. When she came upon an early portrait of my mother, her eyes misted.

"She was lovely," Joanna said. "Like a princess! And what of your father? Is there no portrait of him?"

"No," I said hurriedly. "No portrait." I had spoken my first lie to Joanna, for there was a painting, half-completed, which my mother had begun in the last year of her life. It was a whispering little watercolor, and Joanna discovered it to my consternation.

"What a magnificent cat!" she said. "Was it a pet?"

"It is Dauphin," I said nervously.

She laughed. "He has your eyes, Etienne."

"Joanna, I must tell you something—"

"And this ferocious gentleman with the moustaches? Who is he?"

"My grandfather. Joanna, you must listen—"

Francois, who had been following our inspection tour at shadow's-length, interrupted. I suspected that his timing was no mere coincidence.

"We will be serving dinner at seven-thirty," he said. "If the lady would care to dress—"

"Of course," Joanna said. "Will you excuse me, Etienne?"

I bowed to her, and she was gone.

At fifteen minutes to the appointed dining time, I was ready, and hastened below to talk once more with my father. He was in the dining room, instructing the servants as to the placement of the silver and accessories. My father was proud of the excellence of his table, and took all his meals in the splendid manner. His appreciation of food and wine was unsurpassed in my experience, and it had always been the greatest of pleasures for me to watch him at table, stalking across the damask and dipping delicately into the silver dishes prepared for him. He pretended to be too busy with his dinner preparations to engage me in conversation, but I insisted.

"I must talk to you," I said. "We must decide together how to do this."

"It will not be easy," he answered with a twinkle. "Consider Joanna's view. A cat as large and as old as myself is cause enough for comment. A cat that speaks is alarming. A cat that dines at table with the household is shocking. And a cat whom you must introduce as your—"

"Stop it!" I cried. "Joanna must know the truth. You must help me reveal it to her."

"Then you will not heed my advice?"

"In all things but this. Our marriage can never be happy unless she accepts you for what you are."

"And if there is no marriage?"

I would not admit to this possibility. Joanna was mine; nothing could alter that. The look of pain and bewilderment in my eyes must have been evident to my father, for he touched my arm gently with his paw and said:

"I will help you, Etienne. You must give me your trust."

"Always!"

"Then come to dinner with Joanna and explain nothing. Wait for me to appear."

I grasped his paw and raised it to my lips. "Thank you, father!"

He turned to Francois, and snapped: "You have my instructions?"

"Yes, sir," the servant replied.

"Then all is ready. I shall return to my room now, Etienne. You may bring your fiancee to dine."

I hastened up the stairway, and found Joanna ready, strikingly beautiful in shimmering white satin. Together, we decended the grand staircase and entered the room.

Her eyes shone at the magnificence of the service set upon the table, at the soldiery array of fine wines, some of them already poured into their proper glasses for my father's enjoyment: *Haut Medoc*, from *St. Estephe*, authentic *Chablis*,

Epernay Champagne, and an American import from the Napa Valley of which he was fond. I waited expectantly for his appearance as we sipped our aperitif, while Joanna chatted about innocuous matters, with no idea of the tormented state I was in.

At eight o'clock, my father had not yet made his appearance, and I grew ever more distraught as Francois signalled for the serving of the *bouillon au madere*. Had he changed his mind? Would I be left to explain my status without his help? I hadn't realized until this moment how difficult a task I had allotted for myself, and the fear of losing Joanna was terrible within me. The soup was flat and tasteless on my tongue, and the misery in my manner was too apparent for Joanna to miss.

"What is it, Etienne?" she said. "You've been so morose all day. Can't you tell me what's wrong?"

"No, it's nothing. It's just—" I let the impulse take possession of my speech. "Joanna, there's something I should tell you. About my mother, and my father—"

"Ahem," Francois said.

He turned to the doorway, and our glances followed his.

"Oh, Etienne!" Joanna cried, in a voice ringing with delight.

It was my father, the cat, watching us with his gray, gold-flecked eyes. He approached the dining table, regarding Joanna with timidity and caution.

"It's the cat in the painting!" Joanna said. "You didn't tell me he was here, Etienne. He's beautiful!"

"Joanna, this is—"

"Dauphin! I would have known him anywhere. Here, Dauphin! Here, kitty, kitty, kitty!"

Slowly, my father approached her outstretched hand, and allowed her to scratch the thick fur on the back of his neck.

"Aren't you the pretty little pussy! Aren't you the sweetest little thing!"

"Joanna!"

She lifted my father by the haunches, and held him in her lap, stroking his fur and cooing the silly little words that women address to their pets. The sight pained and confused me, and I sought to find an opening word that would allow me to explain, yet hoping all the time that my father would himself provide the answer.

Then my father spoke.

"Meow," he said.

"Are you hungry?" Joanna asked solicitously. "Is the little pussy hungry?"

"Meow," my father said, and I believed my heart broke then and there. He leaped from her lap and padded across the room. I watched him through blurred eyes as he followed Francois to the corner, where the servant had placed a shallow bowl of milk. He lapped at it eagerly, until the last white drop was gone. Then he yawned and stretched, and trotted back to the doorway, with one fleeting glance in my direction that spoke articulately of what I must do next.

"What a wonderful animal," Joanna said.

"Yes," I answered. "He was my mother's favorite."

WILLIAM C. GAULT

TITLE FIGHT

William Campbell Gault, better known in the detective field, tells the compelling story of the robots who "passed" and the robots who fought and *who planned for the Day—and what happened . . .*

THE SOUNDS from above were dim in the dressing room. Over his head, between him and the thousands of fans, were the tons of concrete, robot-made concrete. Man conceived but robot made.

He looked down at his hands, his strong, short-fingered hands. Complete with fingerprints—but of protonol. Who'd know it, to look at them? In man's image, he was made. In God's image, man was made, if one believed in that, any more. In man's image, he was made, but not with man's status.

His name was Alix 1340, which meant only that he was the thirteen hundred and fortieth of the Alix type. The short, broad Nordic type. In about twenty minutes, he was due in the ring. He was fighting for the middleweight championship of the world.

Joe Nettleton had dreamed that one up. It had been born in the verbiage of his daily syndicated sports column, nurtured by the fans' clamor, and fanned into reality—by what? Animosity? These robots were coming up in the world, getting too big for their britches. Nick Nolan would show this Alix his place.

Nick was the champ, a man, made in His image. He

butted and thumbed and gouged and heeled. His favorite target was the groin. But *he* was a man. Oh, yes, he was a man. A champion among men.

Manny came in. His real title was Manuel 4307, but robots like to forget the numbers. He was Manny, Alix's manager and number one second. A deft and sharp and able robot, Manny.

He said, "I thought it would be better if we were alone. No fans, especially. And I've had a bellyful of sports writers."

"Even Joe Nettleton?" Alix asked. "Joe's on our side, isn't he?"

"It's hard to say. Do you ever wonder about him, Alix?"

Alix didn't answer, right away. He knew there were robots who 'passed', went over to the status line and lived as humans. He didn't know how many there were, and he often wondered about them. In every robot brain, there was a remote-controlled circuit breaker. They could be stopped with the throwing of a switch at the personnel center. There was a well-guarded office and a man on duty at that center twenty-four hours of every day.

Now Alix said, "I never thought much about Joe, either way."

"What have you been thinking?" Manny asked.

"I've been thinking," Alix said slowly, "that we fight man's wars and pulverate his garbage and dehydrate his sewerage, but we're not citizens. Why, Manny?"

"We're not human. We're not—orthodox." Manny was watching him closely as he spoke.

"Not human? They feed us Bach and Brahms and Beethoven and Shakespeare and Voltaire in our incubation period, don't they? And all the others I've forced myself to forget. Does this—this *soul* come from somewhere outside the system?"

"I guess it does. They don't feed us much religion, but I guess it comes from God."

"And what's He like?"

"It would depend upon who you ask, I guess," Manny said. "Sort of a superman. From Him they get their charity and tolerance and justice and all the rest of their noble attributes." Manny's laugh was bitter. "How they love themselves."

"They're so sure about everything else," Alix said, "but not very sure of their God. Is that it?"

"That's about it. I heard one man say He watched when a sparrow falls. I guess we're less than the sparrows, Alix."

There was a silence, and then Manny put a hand on Alix's shoulder. "We've got about fifteen minutes, and I've got a million things to say. Maybe I should have said them earlier."

Alix turned at the gravity of Manny's voice. His lumagel eyes went over Manny's dark face, absorbing his rigid intensity. Whatever it was that was coming, it was more important than the fight.

Manny said quietly, "Win this one, and blood will run in the streets, Alix."

"Human blood?"

"White man's blood. We've got the Negro, and the Jap and the Chinamen and all the rest of them who got their rights so recently. And what kind of rights have they got? Civil, not in the people's hearts. You think those races don't know it? We were talking of their God, Alix. Well, the robots have one, too. His name is Alix 1340."

"Manny, you've gone crazy."

"Have I? Joe Nettleton's one of us, Alix. This was his scheme, and the four men who run the switch at the personnel center; they're ours, too. Top robots. Their I.Q.'s all crowding two hundred. We've got the brains, Alix, and the man power. We've got the combined venom of a billion nonwhites. And now we've got you."

"A pug. What kind of god would I make? You're off the beam, Manny."

"Am I? Did I ever give you anything but the straight dope? They adore you, Alix. You've been a model to them. You could be their king, if you say the word."

"You've been setting this up, you and Joe Nettleton? This fight tonight's the crisis? You've been building toward tonight."

"But it takes a front man, a symbol. You're the only one who can be that. You're the only one they'd all back."

Alix looked again at his hands, the hands that had taken him to the first mixed fight in history, to a title fight. 'Man Versus The Machine' most of the sports scribes had labeled it, though not Joe Nettleton. Machine? A machine that had assimilated Voltaire? A machine that had listened to Brahms?

What differentiates man from his machines? Supremacy? Supremacy would be established tonight. No, it wasn't physical supremacy. And there were robots far beyond man's mental powers.

The spark, then, the spark from their God? How did they know they had it? In all the wrangling mysticism that had gone through so many directed misinterpretations, where could they find their God?

"Thinking it over?" Manny asked. "Why so quiet, Alix?"

Alix's grin was saturnine. "Believe it or not, I was thinking of God."

"*Their* God?"

Alix frowned. "I suppose. Their's and the sparrows'."

There were three spaced knocks at the door. Manny said, "Joe Nettleton. He wants to talk to you. We've got about eight minutes, Alix." He went to the door.

Joe Nettleton was tall, and pale and brown-eyed. The eyes should be lumagel, and Alix studied them, but could note no difference from those of a man.

Joe said to Manny, "He knows?"

Manny nodded.

Joe turned back. "Well—Alix—?"

"I don't know. It's—it's—monstrous, it's—" He shrugged his shoulders and pounded one hand into the palm of the other.

"You're *it*, Alix. King, god, what you will. For six years, I've built you up—in *their* papers, in *their* minds. Clean, quiet, hard working Alix. And humble. Oh, the humility I gave you has made me cry, at times."

Manny said in mild protest, "You didn't have to build that angle much. Alix is humble. Alix is—he's—he's—" And the articulate Manny had no words.

Joe Nettleton's pale face was cynical. He said, "The way you feel is the way they all feel—the black ones out there and the brown ones and the yellow ones."

"They've got their rights," Alix said.

"Have they? Take a look at the first twenty rows, ringside. You'll see what rights they have, word rights, paper rights. But not in the hearts of men. Oh, the grapes of wrath are out there, Alix, beyond the twentieth row. Haven't you any sense of history, of destiny?"

Alix didn't answer.

Manny said, "He's been thinking of God, he tells me."

Joe Nettleton's face was blank. "God? Their God?" He looked at Alix wonderingly. "This Superman they scare us with? You don't eat that malarkey, do you, Alix?"

Alix shrugged, saying nothing.

"They don't believe it themselves," Joe protested. "It's one of those symbols they set up, to make them superior. They ever tell you what He looks like? Oh, they give Him a prophet sure, and the prophet gives them words to live by. Don't kill, don't steal, don't lie, don't lust, don't envy— Words, Alix, words, words, words— Judge them by their actions."

Alix looked up. "I'm not—cut out to be a leader."

"Yes, you are. And I cut you out, in their minds, with words. The brown ones read me and the black ones and the yellow ones, and I built you up, in their minds—*and tonight they'll wait for a signal from you.*"

"A signal from me? Are you—what—?"

"A signal from you. To those in the crowd, to those watching on the video screens, the ones who are briefed and *know* about rioting, about how to steer a revolution. Think of the irony of it—man's prejudice building the army of resentment and man's genius building the machines that army can use to destroy man—white man. White man—first."

"First—?" Manny said. "You've dreams beyond tonight, Joe?"

Joe smiled disarmingly. "I use too many words. That one got away. We can't think beyond tonight, now." He turned to Alix. "It's not an involved signal, Alix. It's just one word. The word is 'kill'. From *you* it's more than a word, it's an order."

There was a knock at the door, and the sono-bray above the door said, "Time to go up. Time for the big one."

All three were silent, and then Joe put a hand on Alix's shoulder. "You can't give the signal from your back, Alix. You'd better be standing up, when this one is over with."

Alix looked at Joe, trying to read behind those brown eyes. Alix said, "I'll be standing up. There's never been a second I doubted that."

They went out, and there was a clamor, a ring of scribes in the corridor beyond the showers. One of them voiced it for all of them, "What the hell is this, Manny? Joe a cousin, or something. How about a statement?"

Manny looked at them bleakly. "We hope to win, but we're up against a superior being. It's in God's lap."

Cynical men, but they resented the blasphemy—coming from a robot.

Joe said, "And Alix is his prophet. Who's betting what?"

No answer. They stared at Joe, and some wrote down a few words. One of them looked at Alix.

"How about you, Alix? How do you feel?"

Alix the humble, the new day Uncle Tom, the subservient. Alix lifted his chin and didn't smile. "Confident. I'll win."

"How?" another asked.

"Hitting him harder, and oftener. What's he got but a hook and an iron jaw?"

"Guts," one of them said. "You've got to hand him that, Alix."

"I concede nothing," Alix answered. "We'll see, tonight."

There were no further questions. They went down the long aisle that led to the bright ring, Manny and Alix and the other handler, who'd been waiting in the prelim boys' shower room.

Eighty thousand people in the Bowl, a clear, warm night, and millions watching on the video screens around the globe. Video hadn't hurt this one—this was history, a robot crossing the status line. They wanted to be a part of this.

The referee was black, Willie Newton. It would look like less favoritism, if the referee was black reasoned the white man in their left-handed reasoning.

Bugs around the arcs, and big, ebony Willie in his striped shirt, waiting in the ring, smiling, just *happening* to be in Alix's corner as he climbed through.

Willie bent, pretending to help part the ropes. Willie whispered, "You'll get all the breaks you need, Alix."

Alix came through and stood erect. "I don't want a single break, Willie, just a fair shake. *You* can understand it has to be like that."

"I can Alix. I'm sorry. About the name—just Alix? Or I could blur the rest."

"Alix one-three-four-oh, not blurred. It's my name."

He turned from Willie then, acknowledging the thunder behind him, both hands high in salute. He could see the rows stretching out from ringside—the first twenty all white. Most of the thunder came from high in the stands.

And now the champ came down his aisle, his faded purple dressing robe across his bulky shoulders, his handlers a respectful few paces behind him.

Nick Nolan, the middleweight champion of the world. His ears were lumpy, his brows ridged with scar tissue. His round head centered on those bulky shoulders, apparently with no neck to connect them. A fringe of red hair and a brutal, thick featured face.

Made in His image?

Some words ran through Alix's mind— "Is this the Thing Lord God made and gave— To have dominion over sea and land . . . ?"

This was a hell of a time to be recalling Markham.

Nick came over to his corner, the false geniality on his face as phoney as the gesture of a champ coming to the challenger's corner. Nick said, "Best—between us, huh?"

"The better," Alix corrected him. "Keep them above the belt, Nick."

Nick grinned. "Don't I always? I came up the hard way, Alix."

Alix said nothing, staring . . . *when this dumb Terror shall rise to judge the world* . . .

A man with a hook and an urge to combat. The hard way? Maybe. He'd taken enough punches to give him a lifetime lease on Queer Street. But he'd handed out more than he'd received. A spoiler and a mixer. A weight-draper and infighter and an easy bleeder.

Blood will run in the streets, Alix . . .

In the ring, Nick's blood would flow, and further stain the spotted canvas. In the streets, the blood of Nick's brothers would flow, in the streets around the world.

Title fight? Oh, yes.

The Irishman first, he'd come up through the ring to his grudging equality, and the Jew, then and the Filipino and the Negro and the Cuban and all the others who wouldn't stay down. Who had their fists and their guts. Mickey Walker, Benny Leonard, Joe Louis—immortals all. Great men, great champs, great memories.

And he? Alix 1340? Different, a machine, no spark. He'd almost forgotten about no spark.

Nick's manager came over to inspect the bandages on Alix's hands, and then went back to his corner with Manny to inspect those on the battered hands of the champ.

Alix's hands were clean lined, no breaks, no lumps. Alix was a scientific hitter, and his protonol was better than the natural product.

He watches the sparrows, Manny had said. *A signal,* Joe had said. I wish somebody would give me a signal, Alix thought. It's too big for me.

The introductions, the numbers not blurred. The instructions, and Willie saying, "Clean tonight, Nick. I know you well, Nick. But this one is touchy, remember."

"Ah, save it," Nick told him. Champ, big man, Nick Nolan.

The buzzer and Manny's brief pat on the shoulder. Rising, and flexing on the ropes, looking down into that sea of faces, white faces. The ones who held dominion over sea and land.

Bugs in the arcs, a hush on the crowd and the bell.

Alix turned and here came Nick, shuffling across, wasting no time, bringing the fight to the upstart.

Nick had a right hand, too, but it was clumsy. The hook was better trained. Alix circled to his left, away from Nick's left, and put his jab easily to Nick's nose.

There are sportswriters, Alix knew, who talked of a *right* hook, but a man would need to be a contortionist to throw it. Unless he was *completely* unorthodox. Or a southpaw.

Nick was neither. Nick had a right hand like a mallet, but it came from below or above, and was telegraphed by the pulling up of his right foot. Nick saved that for the time his opponent couldn't see or react.

Nick came in with the hook, trying to slide under Alix's extended left hand, trying to time the pattern of his feet to Alix's circling, looking for the hole.

Alix peppered him with the left, and then saw the low left

hand of Nick's. Alix stopped circling—and tossed a singing right.

It traveled over Nick's left and found the button. Nick took two stumbling backward steps, and went down.

Resin dust swirled and the scream of the stands was like a single anguished cry.

Alix went to a neutral corner, shrugging his shoulder muscles loose trying to still the sudden pounding of his heart. Nick had been knocked down before, often.

He took a full count, under the rules, but was on one knee at three. The big black semaphore of Willie's right hand and then those hands wiping the gloves and Willie stepping clear.

Nick stormed in. He got through Alix's left, this time, and sent a looping right hand high. It missed, but it was meant to miss. Nick's elbow smashed Alix's mouth.

Rage, a red rage, and they stood in the corner, trading leather.

The hook came in low, and pain knifed into Alix's groin. In his aching blindness he could feel Nick's feet groping for his, trying to find his instep.

Champion, model.

Alix grabbed, and hung on. This one he had to win. This one could be lost, right now.

Nick said, "Break it up, phoney man. I can't hit you when you're hanging on."

The big slap of Willie's hand. Willie, playing it straight. Alix broke at the touch.

Alix broke—and Nick threw the right hand, on the break.

Foul? Of course, but Alix went down, his senses numb, his mind turning black. He lay on his face, not moving, the blackness moving through his body.

What's this God like? It would depend upon who you ask. They ever tell you what He looks like? The blackness turned red, the red of blood, running in the streets. And there was suddenly a cross, and a dim figure and he heard Willie's sonorous, "Five, six—"

He turned over at seven, was on one knee at eight and up at nine. And Nick came bulling in, both hands ready.

The bell.

He got to his corner without Manny's help. The magic of Manny's hands dug at his neck, bringing clarity. The ice, the other handler probing at his flaccid legs.

"I saw a cross, Manny."

"Nobody's crossing us, Alix. Don't think, Alix. Here." He gave him the water bottle.

Alix rinsed his mouth, and spit it out. "He's rough, Manny. He knows all the tricks."

"Don't you?"

"I don't want to. I saw a cross when I was unconscious, Manny. A cross like you see on a church."

"Don't tell me about it. Get him, boy. Don't try to mix with him, but get him, with that left, with your speed, with your brain. Get him."

"I'll try. But he's not typical, Manny. They're not all like Nick."

"The hell they aren't. He's one of the better ones. Get him."

The buzzer, the bell, and Nick.

Nick with the iron jaw, Nick with the hook and the bulging shoulders, Nick the champion.

Alix put the left into Nick's face, but it wasn't a jab. It was a straight left, with shoulder in it. It twisted Nick's nose, and brought blood.

Nick was nettled, and he charged. He charged into a straight, sweet right hand that was delivered from a flat-footed stance. Nick wavered, and tried to grab.

Alix felt his strength pour back and the pattern of his feet was sure and planned. A left, a feint, a jolting right, moving around this hulk, this blundering knot of flesh and muscle, beating a tattoo on him, spreading the blood. *Get him.*

It looked like a slaughterhouse. Blood all over Nick's face, and blood matting the curled, sweaty hair on his chest. Starting to look dazed, starting to wonder, the champ. The un-

typical man? He must be, he had to be, to have dominion over sea and land.

Why didn't he go down? Couldn't he see the pattern of it, the pattern Alix was tracing for him with his blood-soaked gloves? Why didn't he go down? Why didn't he quit?

He hadn't quit by the end of the fifth round. Out there, those eighty thousand were silent. This was no fight, this was now murder. Why didn't he quit?

Alix asked Manny, on the stool, before the sixth, "Why doesn't he quit? He can't win. Manny, I hate to hit him."

"Don't be a sucker. Don't be a damned fool." Manny's voice was hoarse. "As long as there's a spark of life in those bastards, they won't quit. He's dangerous yet, Alix."

A spark, a spark— Life? Cognizance? No, life, a spark of life.

In the sixth, Nick almost went to his knees, in the middle of the ring. But he got control, and stumbled toward Alix.

Alix came in fast and carelessly—and the earth erupted.

He's dangerous, yet, Alix. There was no blackness this time, just the blood red. There was no cross. But a voice? "In the sky, in the sky—" Silence.

Get up, Alix. For the black and brown and red and yellow who are watching you, around the world, get up. You're their hope, you're their WORD. Up, to one knee, and up just under the wire.

Nick didn't charge, this time. Wary and careful, he was, after the pasting he'd been taking. Let Alix make the mistakes, like the one he just had. Nick only needed one more.

Manny said, "Can you hit him, now? Still mourning for him, are you?"

Alix said, "I'm a machine, Manny. He can't hurt me. I can hurt him, but he can't hurt me."

"That's my boy," Manny said. "I'm glad you know what side of the fence you're on, finally."

"I know my place," Alix said. "I know my job."

"That you do. Get him."

He got him. They don't quit, these men. Not while they're conscious. Not while they're alive. Alix hit him everywhere there was room to hit, with both hands, knocking him down four times in the seventh round.

Each time, Nick got up. And in the eighth, he came out to meet Alix, walking into his doom, not flinching, not hiding, putting his crown on the line.

Supremacy? Nick had it, bastard though he was. But for how long? How long could he stay that dumb and still live?

Nick came out, his low hands a farce of a defense.

How long could he hold the animosity down with his arrogance and his brutality and his shoddiness? How much time did he have? Alix knew.

Nick came out for the eighth, and Alix hit him with a solid right hand. He didn't set it up, or feint Nick into the spot, or hesitate. There wasn't any need to.

He put all his weight and most of his bitterness into the button-shot that made him middleweight champion of the world.

Silence, a shocked silence at the history before them, and then, from the far seats, from the cheap seats, acclamation. The video cameras covered the ring, the crowd; the lights went on all over the huge bowl.

Manny hugged him, Joe Nettleton hugged him, and others.

In the far seats, no one moved. In the near seats, no one moved. Joe said, "The word, Alix."

They were bringing the banked microphones over, the microphones that would carry the word all over the world. The cameras trained on him. The word.

He looked at Joe, and Manny. He brought the mikes to mouth level, and moved back a bit. He said, "I won, tonight. I've no message for you. But someone has. It's in the sky."

Craning necks, a murmur, the cameras leaving Alix as the operators swung the huge machines toward the red letters in the sky.

Beside him, Manny gasped. Joe Nettleton stared, unbelieving, his mouth slack.

Red letters? Something like red, but luminous and miles high, and definite. The cameras were trained directly on it, now.

FIND YOUR GOD.

Manny said, "Alix—how— Are you, did you? Alix, what in hell are you?"

"There's more to it they don't know," Alix said. "It's 'find your God or your machines will kill you'. I don't think there's any need to tell them the rest if they obey the first."

Manny said hoarsely, "But this message came through you? You're a—"

"A prophet? Me, a machine, Alix 1340?"

Joe said, "You're not sending out the other word?"

"Not yet. It's not time."

"How do *you* know," Manny cut in. "How do you know if it's time or not? And if their God wanted to send a message, why should he use a machine? Why should he use you?"

"Because," Alix said, "no man would listen. And if they don't listen, now, Manny, our time *will* come. . . ."

SAM MOSKOWITZ

THE GOLDEN PYRAMID

Author of THE IMMORTAL STORM and former editor of Science Fiction Plus, *Sam Moskowitz is justly called "the Historian of Science Fiction." SF fans are, as is well known, completists. Moskowitz has one of the most incredible collections of SF material existent today.*

IT WAS an unusually calm day for Mars. Scarcely a particle of sand floated in the thin air, and nowhere was the horizon tinged with the red that generally heralded a desert sandstorm.

Two space-suited figures, both holding clicking geiger counters, were painstakingly slipping and sliding through the treacherous sands, making ever widening circles around a small space ship.

"I think we're almost on top of it, Jim," the tallest and oldest of the men barked into his radio transmitter. He cursed through a week's growth of beard as he slid and almost fell in the slippery red dust.

"The thing that bothers me," the younger man said, "is that the radiation seems rather weak for an important deposit of uranium."

The older man didn't answer. The stepped-up tempo of his instrument told its own story.

There was a whirring sound. Suddenly, a section of sand, almost under their feet, began to cave in.

"What the hell!" the older man shouted as he made an impressive backward leap of almost fifteen feet, made possible

by the fact that a man weighs less than 40% as much on Mars as he does on Earth.

There was a swirl of red dust and a V-shaped snout emerged from the sand followed by a body that was about two feet long and a foot thick. The spade-like snout cut a path ahead while two roughly circular, bumpy appendages, one on either side of the cigar-shaped body, whirled around, propelling it forward much as a caterpillar tread moves a bulldozer.

The geiger counters almost went crazy as the creatures came into full view.

"The blasted thing's radioactive, Bill," the younger man said in astonishment.

The head, except for the snout, had been virtually featureless. Now, a section of the surface near the V-shaped projection slid back for all the world like an opening steel shutter. Through the aperture, an eye, like a many-faceted gleaming crystal, focused on the two men. The shutter-like lid slid back covering the eye except for the tiniest slit. The appendages began to revolve again and the creature headed for the space ship, moving like an old side-wheel steam boat. It circled the ship once, leaving a permanent wake behind it. Finally it stopped, opened its slit wide and just stared at the ship as though hypnotized.

"A Martian sand swimmer," the older man finally explained. "A few of them were spotted when the first expeditions landed, practically nothing is known about them, since they're difficult to capture. Always located the same way; set the counters a clickin'. There's one theory they're not flesh and blood but some kind of silicon-metallic life."

"Are they dangerous?" the younger man asked.

The older man started to shrug, stopped and pointed at the horizon. The sky was turning red and a gathering dark mass, propelled by winds of hurricane force, seemed to gallop across the desert towards them.

"Quick!" the older man ordered. "Into that outcropping of rocks. We'll never make the ship before it hits us."

Utilizing grotesque hops the two men floundered towards a nearby rock formation. They dived into a natural cave only seconds ahead of a shrieking maelstrom of sand which reduced outside visibility to zero.

The younger man wiped the red dust from his eye plate. Then gave a little shout and pounced upon an object on the floor of the cave.

Making whooping noises he straightened up, a gleaming, golden pyramid, about four inches high, resting in the palm of his gloved hand.

"A Martian artifact," the older man gasped. "It's priceless. Proof that a civilization once existed on this planet—looks like cast gold."

"Remember, I found it," the younger man emphasized. There was a tinge of violet on his face but it was hard to say whether it was the result of enthusiasm or the reflection on his viewing plate from the red sands. "I don't have to share the proceeds of what the museums will give me for this with you. It isn't the same as a uranium strike."

"The devil you say," the older man spat, advancing menacingly. "Share and share alike, that was our agreement and you're going to stick by it if I . . ."

"The agreement was for uranium. Nothing was said about something like this," the younger man replied, moving towards the mouth of the cave.

As quickly as it had arrived, the sandstorm retreated until it became a thin, red haze on the horizon. The air cleared and abruptly the ship was visible outside.

"Now look here," the older man reasoned. "That relic must be worth a fortune. There's plenty in it for both of us."

The younger man, instead of replying, began plowing through the sand towards the space ship, the golden pyramid clutched in his electrically heated mittens.

"What're you up to?" the older man demanded sharply.

"Oh, gonna try to leave me here, are you? Well, we'll see about that."

The two men began a bizarre race for the ship. Making fantastic leaps against the lighter gravity and landing to slide face forward in the slippery sands. Then picking themselves up and starting for the ship again.

The younger man reached the air lock first. He reached inside and pressed the button to close it. The fine sand that the storm had blown into the grooves of the lock slowed down its rate of closing and gave the older man time to slip past before it shut. Even as the air pressure began to rise in the cabin of the ship, he threw himself upon the younger man and the two of them battled furiously but ineffectually. Their reduced weight coupled with the thickly insulated suits, deprived the blows of any authority.

A tinny crash interrupted the argument. They simultaneously swung in the direction of the sound. Two mouths gaped as one in amazement.

The strange sand swimmer that had appeared out of the desert sands had evidently entered the lock of the ship while they were in the cave. It now had rammed its ploughlike head through the thin metal skin of the inner wall of the ship exposing a layer of lead insulation.

At the same time the older man noted that his companion's face was flushed with violet. His anger melted with understanding. "Kid," he said almost kindly, "you've got radiation fever."

The younger man wasn't listening. He was shouting and gesturing. The strange creature was apparently eating the lead insulation in the walls of the ship. It was grinding away with steel-hard rotary teeth, consuming quantities of lead at an alarming rate.

The young man snatched a sampling of ore out of a leather bag and fired it at the creature. It bounced off, ricocheting about the room from the force of the throw. The creature scarcely noticed.

Enraged, the young man dashed over and directed a powerful kick at the hard surface of the Martian life form. Despite its almost metallic texture, the creature was small and the force of the kick sent it rolling towards the lock.

Before it could recover, the young man raced over and gave it another kick that rolled it almost to the lock. The older man pushed the button that opened the lock and a third kick propelled the creature out on to the desert sand.

The young man grabbed a rocket gun from the wall and pumped a shell at the creature. He missed and the explosion blew up a geyser of sand. Jim tried to grab the gun, but the younger man, his face almost purple with fever, evaded him and brought the butt down alongside his head.

When he came to, the rockets of the ship were a cherry flicker in the sky. He didn't feel angry at the kid. Radiation sickness was something that could hit anyone at anytime. He clicked on his S. O. S. radio signal set. The powerful receivers on Phobos, one of the two moons of Mars, would pick it up and a rescue ship would follow, probably in only a matter of hours.

Suddenly he realized that the sand swimmer was resting quietly in the sand scarcely twelve yards away. Its midsection had turned a reddish hue and was beginning to glow.

"It can't be possible," he thought to himself. "That crazy thing eats lead and digests it with the use of a radioactive pile in its stomach." It upset all concepts of life and intelligence. The life force that motivated the thing could be compared to a natural atomic engine.

Though consumed by curiosity he stayed his distance. There was no question in his mind that the kid's radiation sickness was the result of close contact with this creature. He didn't intend to get a dose of the same, even though his own radiation tolerance was evidently higher than the kid's.

The glow in the midsection of the creature gradually diminished and then finally died away altogether. The shutter-like lid slid open and the crystal clear eye regarded him. The

sand swimmer's limbs began whirring around like tank treads. The head plowed into the sand. In seconds it had disappeared.

Cautiously Jim approached the hole. The soft, sifting sand was already filling it in. Then something caught his eye. He stared a moment, caught his stomach and rolled over and over on the sand convulsed by paroxysms of laughter.

There on the sand. On the sometimes treacherous but occasionally puckish red sands of Mars, the sand swimmer had laid a beautiful glowing, golden pyramid!

●

FELIX BOYD

THE ROBOT WHO WANTED TO KNOW

The possibility that robots, in common with certain humanoids, may in time come to share certain emotions with their creators, has frequently been considered. Felix Boyd, author of the present story, is a well known Science Fiction writer and editor.

THAT WAS the trouble with Filer 13B-445-K, he wanted to know things that he had just no business knowing. Things that *no* robot should be interested in—much less investigate. But Filer was a very different type of robot.

The trouble with the blonde in tier 22 should have been warning enough for him. He had hummed out of the stack room with a load of books, and was cutting through tier 22 when he saw her bending over for a volume on the bottom shelf.

As he passed behind her he slowed down, then stopped a

few yards farther on. He watched her intently, a strange glint in his metallic eyes.

As the girl bent over her short skirt rode up to display an astonishing length of nylon-clad leg. That it was a singularly attractive leg should have been of no interest to a robot—yet it was. He stood there, looking, until the blonde turned suddenly and noticed his fixed attention.

"If you were human, Buster," she said, "I would slap your face for being rude. But since you are a robot, I would like to know what your little photon-filled eyes find so interesting?"

Without a microsecond's hesitation, Filer answered, "Your seam is crooked." Then he turned and buzzed away.

The blonde shook her head in wonder, straightened the offending seam, and chalked up another credit to the honor of electronics.

She would have been very surprised to find out what Filer had been looking at. He *had* been staring at her leg. Of course he hadn't lied when he answered her—since he was incapable of lying—but he had been looking at a lot more than the crooked seam. Filer was facing a problem that no other robot had ever faced before.

Love, romance, and sex were fast becoming a passionate interest for him.

That this interest was purely academic goes without saying, yet it was still an interest. It was the nature of his work that first aroused his curiosity about the realm of Venus.

A Filer is an amazingly intelligent robot and there aren't very many being manufactured. You will find them only in the greatest libraries, dealing with only the largest and most complex collections. To call them simply librarians is to demean all librarians and to call their work simple. Of course very little intelligence is required to shelf books or stamp cards, but this sort of work has long been handled by robots that are little more than wheeled IBM machines. The cataloging of human information has always been an incredibly complex task. The Filer robots were the ones who finally in-

herited this job. It rested easier on their metallic shoulders than it ever had on the rounded ones of human librarians.

Besides a complete memory, Filer had other attributes that are usually connected with the human brain. Abstract connections for one thing. If he was asked for books on one subject, he could think of related books in other subjects that might be referred to. He could take a suggestion, pyramid it into a category, then produce tactile results in the form of a mountain of books.

These traits are usually confined to homo sapiens, they are the things that pulled him that last, long step above his animal relatives. If Filer was more human than other robots, he had only his builders to blame.

He blamed no one—he was just interested. All Filers are interested, they are designed that way. Filer 9B-367-O, librarian at the university in Tashkent, had turned his interest to language due to the immense amount of material at his disposal. He spoke thousands of languages and dialects, all he could find, and enjoyed a fine reputation in linguistic circles. That was because of his library. Filer 13B, he of the interest in girls' legs, labored in the dust filled corridors of New Washington. In addition to all the gleaming new microfiles, he had access to tons of ancient printed-on-paper books that dated back for centuries.

Filer had found *his* interest in the novels of that by-gone time.

At first he was confused by all the references to *love* and *romance,* as well as the mental and physical suffering that seemed to accompany them. He could find no satisfactory or complete definition of the terms and was intrigued. Intrigue led to interest and finally absorption. Unknown to the world at large, he became an authority on love.

Very early in his interest, Filer realized that this was the most delicate of all human institutions. He therefore kept his researches a secret and the only records he kept were in the capacious circuits of his brain. Just about the same time

he discovered that he could do research, *in vivo,* to supplement the facts in his books. This happened when he found a couple locked in embrace in the zoology section.

Quickly stepping back into the shadows, Filer had turned up the gain on his audio pickup. The resulting dialogue he heard was dull to say the least. A sort of wasted shadow of the love lyrics he knew from his books. This comparison was interesting and enlightening.

After that he listened to male-female conversations whenever he had the opportunity. He also tried to observe women from the viewpoint of men, and vice versa. This is what had led him to the lower-limb observation in tier 22.

It also led him to his ultimate folly.

A researcher sought his aid a few weeks later and fumbled out a thick pile of reference notes. A card slid from the notes and fell unnoticed to the floor. Filer picked it up and handed it back to the man who put it away with mumbled thanks. After the researcher had been supplied with the needed books and gone, Filer sat back and reread the card. He had only seen it for a split second, and upside down at that, but that was all he needed. The image of the card was imprinted forever in his brain. Filer mused over the card and the first glimmerings of an idea assailed him.

The card had been an invitation to a masquerade ball. He was well acquainted with this type of entertainment—it was stock-in-trade for his dusty novels. People went to them disguised as various romantic figures.

Why couldn't a robot go, disguised as people?

Once the idea was fixed in his head there was no driving it out. It was an un-robot thought and a completely un-robot action. Filer had a glimmering of the first time that he was breaking down the barrier between himself and the mysteries of romance. This only made him more eager to go. And of course he did.

Of course he didn't dare purchase a costume, but there was no problem in obtaining some ancient curtains from one

of the storerooms. A book on sewing taught him the technique and a plate from a book gave him the design for his costume. It was predestined that he go as a cavalier.

With a finely ground pen point he printed an extra duplicate of the invitation on heavy card stock. His mask was part face and part mask, it offered no barrier to his talent or technology. Long before the appointed date he was ready. The last days were filled with browsing through stories about other masquerade balls and learning the latest dance steps.

So enthused was he by the idea, that he never stopped to ponder the strangeness of what he was doing. He was just a scientist studying a species of animal. Man. Or rather woman.

The night finally arrived and he left the library late with what looked like a package of books and of course wasn't. No one noticed him enter the patch of trees on the library grounds. If they had, they would certainly never have connected him with the elegant gentleman who swept out of the far side a few moments later. Only the empty wrapping paper bore mute evidence of the disguise.

Filer's manner in his new personality was all that might be expected of a superior robot who has studied a role to perfection. He swept up the stairs to the hall, three at a time, and tendered his invitation with a flourish. Once inside he headed straight for the bar and threw down three glasses of champagne, right through a plastic tube to a tank in his thorax. Only then did he let his eye roam over the assembled beauties. It was a night for love.

And of all the women in the room, there was only one he had eyes for. Filer could see instantly that she was the belle of the ball and the only one to approach. Could he do anything else in memory of 50,000 heroes of those long-forgotten books?

Carol Ann van Damm was bored as usual. Her face was disguised, but no mask could hide the generous contours of her bosom and flanks. All her usual suitors were there, danc-

ing attendance behind their dominoes, lusting after her youth and her father's money. It was all too familiar and she had trouble holding back her yawns.

Until the pack was courteously but irrevocably pushed aside by the wide shoulders of the stranger. He was like a lion among wolves as he swept through them and faced her.

"This *is* our dance," he said in a deep voice rich with meaning. Almost automatically she took the proferred hand, unable to resist this man with the strange gleam in his eyes. In a moment they were waltzing and it was heaven. His muscles were like steel yet he was light and graceful as a god.

"Who are you?" she whispered.

"Your prince, come to take you away from all this," he murmured in her ear.

"You talk like a fairy tale," she laughed.

"This is a fairy tale, and you are the heroine."

His words struck fire from her brain and she felt the thrill of an electric current sweep through her. It had, just a temporary short circuit. While his lips murmured the words she had wanted to hear all her life into her ear, his magic feet led her through the great doors onto the balcony. Once there words blended with action and hot lips burned against hers. 102 degrees to be exact, that was what the thermostat was set at.

"Please," she breathed, weak with this new passion, "I must sit down." He sat next to her, her hands in his soft yet vise-like grip. They talked the words that only lovers know until a burst of music drew her attention.

"Midnight," she breathed. "Time to unmask, my love." Her mask dropped off, but he of course did nothing. "Come, come," she said. "You must take your mask off too."

It was a command and of course as a robot he had to obey. With a flourish he pulled off his face.

Carol Ann screamed first, then burned with anger.

"What sort of scheme is this, you animated tin can? Answer."

"It was love, dear one. Love that brought me here tonight and sent me to your arms." The answer was true enough, though Filer couched it in the terms of his disguise.

When the soft words of her darling came out of the harsh mouth of the electronic speaker, Carol Ann screamed again. She knew she had been made a fool of.

"Who sent you here like this, answer. What is the meaning of this disguise, answer. ANSWER! ANSWER! you articulated pile of cams and rods!"

Filer tried to sort out the questions and answer them one at a time, but she gave him no time to speak.

"It's the filthiest trick of all time, sending you here disguised as a man. You a robot. A nothing. A two-legged IBM machine with a victrola attached. Making believe you're a man when you're nothing but a robot."

Suddenly Filer was on his feet, the words crackling and mechanical from his speaker.

"I'm a robot."

The soft voice of love was gone and replaced by that of mechanical despair. Thought chased thought through the whirling electronic circuits of his brain and they were all the same thought.

I'm a robot—a robot—I must have forgotten I was a robot—what can a robot be doing here with a woman—a robot can't kiss a woman—a woman can't love a robot—yet she said she loved me—yet I'm a robot—a robot. . . .

With a mechanical shudder he turned from the girl and clanked away. With each step his steel fingers plucked at his clothes and plastic flesh until they came away in shards and pieces. Fragments of cloth marked his trail away from the woman and within a hundred paces he was as steel-naked as the day he was built. Through the garden and down to the street he went, the thoughts in his head going in ever tighter circles.

It was uncontrolled feedback and soon his body followed his brain. His legs went faster, his motors whirled more rap-

idly, and the central lubrication pump in his thorax churned like a mad thing.

Then, with a single metallic screech, he raised both arms and plunged forward. His head hit a corner of a stair and the granite point thrust into the thin casing. Metal grounded to metal and all the complex circuits that made up his brain were instantly discharged.

Robot Filer 13B-445-K was quite dead.

That was what the report read that the mechanic sent in the following day. Not dead, but permanently impaired, to be disposed of. Yet, strangely enough, that wasn't what the mechanic said when he examined the metallic corpse.

A second mechanic had helped in the examination. It was he who had spun off the bolts and pulled out the damaged lubrication pump.

"Here's the trouble," he had announced. "Malfunction in the pump. Piston broke, jammed the pump, the knees locked from lack of oil—then the robot fell and shorted out his brain."

The first mechanic wiped grease off his hands and examined the faulty pump. Then he looked from it to the gaping hole in the chest.

"You could almost say he died of a broken heart."

They both laughed and he threw the pump into the corner with all the other cracked, dirty, broken and discarded machinery.

ROBERT SILVERBERG

ROAD TO NIGHTFALL

Robert Silverberg is the author of THE 13th IMMORTAL, MASTER OF LIFE, AND DEATH, INVADERS FROM EARTH, STEPSONS OF TERRA, etc. etc. (all Ace) and currently Chairman of the Hydra Club, a group of men and women active professionally in the SF field, who live, mostly, in the New York area.

THE DOG snarled, and ran on. Katterson watched the two lean, fiery-eyed men speeding in pursuit, while a mounting horror grew in him and rooted him to the spot. The dog suddenly bounded over a heap of rubble and was gone; its pursuers sank limply down, leaning on their clubs, and tried to catch their breath.

"It's going to get much worse than this," said a small, grubby-looking man who appeared from nowhere next to Katterson. "I've heard the official announcement's coming today, but the rumor's been around for a long time."

"So they say," answered Katterson slowly. The chase he had just witnessed still held him paralyzed. "We're all pretty hungry."

The two men who had chased the dog got up, still winded, and wandered off. Katterson and the little man watched their slow retreat.

"That's the first time I've ever seen people doing that," said Katterson. "Out in the open like that—"

"It won't be the last time," said the grubby man. "Better get used to it, now that the food's gone."

Katterson's stomach twinged. It was empty, and would stay that way till the evening's food dole. Without the doles,

he would have no idea of where his next bite of food would come from. He and the small man walked on through the quiet street, stepping over the rubble, walking aimlessly with no particular goal in mind.

"My name's Paul Katterson," he said finally. "I live on 47th Street. I was discharged from the Army last year."

"Oh, one of those," said the little man. They turned down 15th Street. It was a street of complete desolation; not one pre-war house was standing, and a few shabby tents were pitched at the far end of the street. "Have you had any work since your discharge?"

Katterson laughed. "Good joke. Try another."

"I know. Things are tough. My name is Malory; I'm a merchandiser."

"What do you merchandise?"

"Oh . . . useful products."

Katterson nodded. Obviously Malory didn't want him to pursue the topic, and he dropped it. They walked on silently, the big man and the little one, and Katterson could think of nothing but the emptiness in his stomach. Then his thoughts drifted to the scene of a few minutes before, the two hungry men chasing a dog. Had it come to that so soon, Katterson asked himself? What was going to happen, he wondered, as food became scarcer and scarcer and finally there was none at all.

But the little man was pointing ahead. "Look," he said. "Meeting at Union Square."

Katterson squinted and saw a crowd starting to form around the platform reserved for public announcements. He quickened his pace, forcing Malory to struggle to keep up with him.

A young man in military uniform had mounted the platform and was impassively facing the crowd. Katterson looked at the jeep nearby, automatically noting it was the 2036 model, the most recent one, eighteen years old. After a min-

ute or so the soldier raised his hand for silence, and spoke in a quiet, restrained voice.

"Fellow New Yorkers, I have an official announcement from the Government. Word has just been received from Trenton Oasis—"

The crowd began to murmur. They seemed to know what was coming.

"Word has just been received from Trenton Oasis that, due to recent emergency conditions there, all food supplies for New York City and environs will be temporarily cut off. Repeat: due to recent emergency in the Trenton Oasis, all food supplies for New York and environs will temporarily be cut off."

The murmuring in the crowd grew to an angry, biting whisper as each man discussed this latest turn of events with the man next to him. This was hardly unexpected news; Trenton had long protested the burden of feeding helpless, bombed-out New York, and the recent flood there had given them ample opportunity to squirm out of their responsibility. Katterson stood silent, towering over the people around him, finding himself unable to believe what he was hearing. He seemed aloof, almost detached, objectively criticizing the posture of the soldier on the platform, counting his insignia, thinking of everything but the implications of the announcement, and trying to fight back the growing hunger.

The uniformed man was speaking again. "I also have this message from the Governor of New York, General Holloway: he says that attempts at restoring New York's food supply are being made, and that messengers have been despatched to the Baltimore Oasis to request food supplies. In the meantime the Government food doles are to be discontinued effective tonight, until further notice. That is all."

The soldier gingerly dismounted from the platform and made his way through the crowd to his jeep. He climbed quickly in and drove off. Obviously he was an important

man, Katterson decided, because jeeps and fuel were scarce items, not used lightly by anyone and everyone.

Katterson remained where he was and turned his head slowly, looking at the people around him—thin, half-starved little skeletons, most of them, who secretly begrudged him his giant frame. An emaciated man with burning eyes and a beak of a nose had gathered a small group around himself and was shouting some sort of harangue. Katterson knew of him—his name was Emerich, and he was the leader of the colony living in the abandoned subway at 14th Street. Katterson instinctively moved closer to hear him, and Malory followed.

"It's all a plot!" the emaciated man was shouting. "They talk of an emergency in Trenton. What emergency? I ask you, what emergency? That flood didn't hurt them. They just want to get us off their necks by starving us out, that's all! And what can we do about it? Nothing. Trenton knows we'll never be able to rebuild New York, and they want to get rid of us, so they cut off our food."

By now the crowd had gathered round him. Emerich was popular; people were shouting their agreement, punctuating his speech with applause.

"But will we starve to death? We will not!"

"That's right, Emerich!" yelled a burly man with a beard.

"No," Emerich continued, "we'll show them what we can do. We'll scrape up every bit of food we can find, every blade of grass, every wild animal, every bit of shoe-leather. And we'll survive, just the way we survived the blockade and the famine of '47 and everything else. And one of these days we'll go out to Trenton and—and—roast them alive!"

Roars of approval filled the air. Katterson turned and shouldered his way through the crowd, thinking of the two men and the dog, and walked away without looking back. He headed down Fourth Avenue, until he could no longer hear the sounds of the meeting at Union Square, and sat

down wearily on a pile of crushed girders that had once been the Carden Monument.

He put his head in his big hands and sat there. The afternoon's events had numbed him. Food had been scarce as far back as he could remember—the twenty-four years of war with the Spherists had just about used up every resource of the country. The war had dragged on and on. After the first rash of preliminary bombings, it had become a war of attrition, slowly grinding the opposing spheres to rubble.

Somehow Katterson had grown big and powerful on hardly any food, and he stood out wherever he went. The generation of Americans to which he belonged was not one of size or strength—the children were born undernourished old men, weak and wrinkled. But he had been big, and he had been one of the lucky ones chosen for the Army. At least there he had been fed regularly.

Katterson kicked away a twisted bit of slag, and saw little Malory coming down Fourth Avenue in his direction. Katterson laughed to himself, remembering his Army days. His whole adult life had been spent in a uniform, with soldier's privileges. But it had been too good to last; two years before, in 2052, the war had finally dragged to a complete standstill, with the competing hemispheres both worn to shreds, and almost the entire Army had suddenly been mustered out into the cold civilian world. He had been dumped into New York, lost and alone.

"Let's go for a dog-hunt," Malory said, smiling, as he drew near.

"Watch your tongue, little man. I might just eat you if I get hungry enough."

"Eh? I thought you were so shocked by two men trying to catch a dog."

Katterson looked up. "I was," he said. "Sit down, or get moving, but don't play games," he growled. Malory flung himself down on the wreckage near Katterson.

"Looks pretty bad," Malory said.

"Check," said Katterson. "I haven't eaten anything all day."

"Why not? There was a regular dole last night, and there'll be one tonight."

"You hope," said Katterson. The day was drawing to a close, he saw, and evening shadows were falling fast. Ruined New York looked weird in twilight; the gnarled girders and fallen buildings seemed ghosts of long-dead giants.

"You'll be even hungrier tomorrow," Malory said. "There isn't going to be any dole, any more."

"Don't remind me, little man."

"I'm in the food-supplying business, myself," said Malory, as a weak smile rippled over his lips.

Katterson picked up his head in a hurry.

"Playing games again?"

"No," Malory said hastily. He scribbled his address on a piece of paper and handed it to Katterson. "Here. Drop in on me any time you get really hungry. And—say, you're a pretty strong fellow, aren't you? I might even have some work for you since you say you're unattached."

The shadow of an idea began to strike Katterson. He turned so he faced the little man, and stared at him.

"What kind of work?"

Malory paled. "Oh, I need some strong men to obtain food for me. *You* know," he whispered.

Katterson reached over and grasped the small man's thin shoulders. Malory winced. "Yes, I know," Katterson repeated slowly. "Tell me, Malory," he said carefully. "What sort of food do you sell?"

Malory squirmed. "Why—why—now look, I just wanted to help you, and—"

"Don't give me any of that." Slowly Katterson stood up, not releasing his grip on the small man. Malory found himself being dragged willy-nilly to his feet. "You're in the meat business, aren't you, Malory? *What kind of meat do you sell?*"

Malory tried to break away. Katterson shoved him with a contemptuous half-open fist and sent him sprawling back into the rubble-heap. Malory twisted away, his eyes wild with fear, and dashed off down 13th Street into the gloom. Katterson stood for a long time watching him retreat, breathing hard and not daring to think. Then he folded the paper with Malory's address on it and put it in his pocket, and walked numbly away.

Barbara was waiting for him when he pressed his thumb against the doorplate of his apartment on 47th Street, an hour later.

"I suppose you've heard the news," she said as he entered. "Some spic-and-span lieutenant came by and announced it down below. I've already picked up our dole for tonight, and that's the last one. Hey—anything the matter?" She looked at him anxiously as he sank wordlessly into a chair.

"Nothing, kid. I'm just hungry—and a little sick to my stomach."

"Where'd you go today? The Square again?"

"Yeah. My usual Thursday afternoon stroll, and a pleasant picnic that turned out to be. First I saw two men hunting a dog—they couldn't have been much hungrier than I am, but they were chasing this poor scrawny thing. Then your lieutenant made his announcement about the food. And then a filthy meat peddler tried to sell me some 'merchandise' and give me a job."

The girl caught her breath. "A job? Meat? What happened? Oh, Paul—"

"Stow it," Katterson told her. "I knocked him sprawling and he ran away with his tail between his legs. You know what he was selling? You know what kind of meat he wanted me to eat?"

She lowered her eyes. "Yes, Paul."

"And the job he had for me—he saw I'm strong, so he would have made me his supplier. I would have gone out hunting in

the evenings. Looking for stragglers to be knocked off and turned into tomorrow's steaks."

"But we're so hungry, Paul—when you're hungry that's the most important thing."

"What?" His voice was the bellow of an outraged bull. "What? You don't know what you're saying, woman. Eat before you go out of your mind completely. I'll find some other way of getting food, but I'm not going to turn into a bloody cannibal. No longpork for Paul Katterson."

She said nothing. The single light-glow in the ceiling flickered twice.

"Getting near shut-off time. Get the candles out, unless you're sleepy," he said. He had no chronometer, but the flickering was the signal that eight-thirty was approaching. At eight-thirty every night electricity was cut off in all residence apartments except those with permission to exceed normal quota.

Barbara lit a candle.

"Paul, Father Kennen was back here again today."

"I've told him not to show up here again," Katterson said from the darkness of his corner of the room.

"He thinks we ought to get married, Paul."

"I know. I don't."

"Paul, why are you—"

"Let's not go over that again. I've told you often enough that I don't want the responsibility of two mouths to feed, when I can't even manage keeping my own belly full. This way is the best—each of us our own."

"But children, Paul—"

"Are you crazy tonight?" he retorted. "Would you dare to bring a child into this world? Especially now that we've even lost the food from Trenton Oasis. Would you enjoy watching him slowly starve to death in all this filth and rubble, or maybe growing up into a hollow-cheeked little skeleton? Maybe you would. I don't think I'd care to."

He was silent. She sat watching him, sobbing quietly.

"We're dead, you and I," she finally said. "We won't admit it, but we're dead. This whole world is dead—we've spent the last thirty years committing suicide. I don't remember as far back as you do, but I've read some of the old books, about how clean and new and shiny this city was before the war. The war! All my life, we've been at war, never knowing who we were fighting or why. Just eating the world apart for no reason at all."

"Cut it, Barbara," Katterson said. But she went on in a dead monotone. "They tell me America once went from coast to coast, instead of being cut up into little strips bordered by radioactive no-man's-land. And there were farms, and food, and lakes and rivers, and men flew from place to place. Why did this have to happen? Why are we all dead? Where do we go now, Paul?"

"I don't know, Barbara. I don't think anyone does." Wearily, he snuffed out the candle, and the darkness flooded in and filled the room.

Somehow he had wandered back down to Union Square again, and he stood on 14th Street, rocking gently back and forth on his feet and feeling the light-headedness which is the first sign of starvation. There were just a few people in the streets, morosely heading for whatever destinations claimed them. The sun was high overhead, and bright.

His reverie was interrupted by the sound of yells and an unaccustomed noise of running feet. His Army training stood him in good fashion, as he dove into a gaping trench and hid there, wondering what was happening.

After a moment he peeked out. Four men, each as big as Katterson himself, were roaming up and down the now deserted streets. One was carrying a sack.

"There's one," Katterson heard the man with the sack yell harshly. He watched without believing as the four men located a girl cowering near a fallen building.

She was a pale, thin, ragged-looking girl, perhaps twenty

at the most, who might have been pretty in some other world. But her cheeks were sunken and coarse, her eyes dull and glassy, her arms bony and angular.

As they drew near she huddled back, cursing defiantly, and prepared to defend herself. *She doesn't understand,* Katterson thought. *She thinks she's going to be attacked.*

Perspiration streamed down his body, and he forced himself to watch, kept himself from leaping out of hiding. The four marauders closed in on the girl. She spat, struck out with her clawlike hand.

They chuckled and grabbed her clutching arm. Her scream was suddenly ear-piercing as they dragged her out into the open. A knife flashed; Katterson ground his teeth together, wincing, as the blade struck home.

"In the sack with her, Charlie," a rough voice said.

Katterson's eyes steamed with rage. It was his first view of Malory's butchers—at least, he suspected it was Malory's gang. Feeling the knife at his side, in its familiar sheath, he half-rose to attack the four meat-raiders, and then, regaining his senses, he sank back into the trench.

So soon? Katterson knew that cannibalism had been spreading slowly through starving New York for many years, and that few bodies of the dead ever reached their graves intact—but this was the first time, so far as he knew, that raiders had dragged a man living from the streets and killed him for food. He shuddered. The race for life was on, then.

The four raiders disappeared in the direction of Third Avenue, and Katterson cautiously eased himself from the trench, cast a wary eye in all directions, and edged into the open. He knew he would have to be careful; a man his size carried meat for many mouths.

Other people were coming out of the buildings now, all with much the same expression of horror on their faces. Katterson watched the marching skeletons walking dazedly, a few sobbing, most of them past the stage of tears. He clenched and unclenched his fists, angry, burning to stamp out this

spreading sickness and knowing hopelessly that it could not be done.

A tall, thin man with chiseled features was on the speaker's platform now. His voice was choked with anger.

"Brothers, it's out in the open now. Men have turned from the ways of God, and Satan has led them to destruction. Just now you witnessed four of His creatures destroy a fellow mortal for food—the most terrible sin of all.

"Brothers, our time on Earth is almost done. I'm an old man—I remember the days before the war, and, while some of you won't believe it, I remember the days when there was food for all, when everyone had a job, when these crumpled buildings were tall and shiny and streamlined, and the skies teemed with jets. In my youth I traveled all across this country, clear to the Pacific. But the War has ended all that, and it's God's hand upon us. Our day is done, and soon we'll all meet our reckoning.

"Go to God without blood on your hands, brothers. Those four men you saw today will burn forever for their crime. Whoever eats the unholy meat they butchered today will join them in Hell. But listen a moment, brothers, listen! Those of you who aren't lost yet, I beg of you: save yourselves! Better to go without food at all, as most of you are doing, than to soil yourselves with this kind of new food, the most precious meat of all."

Katterson stared at the people around him. He wanted to end all this; he had a vision of a crusade for food, a campaign against cannibalism, banners waving, drums beating, himself leading the fight. Some of the people had stopped listening to the old preacher, and some had wandered off. A few were smiling and hurtling derisive remarks at the old man, but he ignored them.

"Hear me! Hear me, before you go. We're all doomed anyway; the Lord has made that clear. But think, people—this world will shortly pass away, and there is the greater world to come. Don't sign away your chance for eternal life,

brothers! Don't trade your immortal soul for a bite of tainted meat!"

The crowd was melting away, Katterson noted. It was dispersing hastily, people quickly edging away and disappearing. The preacher continued talking. Katterson stood on tip-toes and craned his neck past the crowd and stared down towards the east. His eyes searched for a moment, and then he paled. Four ominous figures were coming with deliberate tread down the deserted street.

Almost everyone had seen them now. They were walking four abreast down the center of the street, the tallest holding an empty sack. People were heading hastily in all directions, and as the four figures came to the corner of 14th Street and Fourth Avenue only Katterson and the preacher still stood at the platform.

"I see you're the only one left, young man. Have you defiled yourself, or are you still of the Kingdom of Heaven?"

Katterson ignored the question. "Old man, get down from there!" he snapped. "The raiders are coming back. Come on, let's get out of here before they come."

"No. I intend to talk to them when they come. But save yourself, young man, save yourself while you can."

"They'll kill you, you old fool," Katterson whispered harshly.

"We're all doomed anyway, son. If my day has come, I'm ready."

"You're crazy," Katterson said. The four men were within speaking distance now. Katterson looked at the old man for one last time and then dashed across the street and into a building. He glanced back and saw he was not being followed.

The four raiders were standing under the platform, listening to the old man. Katterson couldn't hear what the preacher was saying, but he was waving his arms as he spoke. They seemed to be listening intently. Katterson stared. He saw one of the raiders say something to the old man, and then the tall

one with the sack climbed up on the platform. One of the others tossed him an unsheathed knife.

The shriek was loud and piercing. When Katterson dared to look out again, the tall man was stuffing the preacher's body into the sack. Katterson bowed his head. The trumpets began to fade; he realized that resistance was impossible. Unstoppable currents were flowing.

Katterson plodded uptown to his apartment. The blocks flew past, as he methodically pulled one foot after another, walking the two miles through the rubble and deserted, ruined buildings. He kept one hand on his knife and darted glances from right to left, noting the furtive scurryings in the side streets, the shadowy people who were not quite visible behind the ashes and the rubble. Those four figures, one with the sack, seemed to lurk behind every lamppost, waiting hungrily.

He cut into Broadway, taking a shortcut through the stump of the Parker Building. Fifty years before, the Parker Building had been the tallest in the Western world; its truncated stump was all that remained. Katterson passed what had once been the most majestic lobby in the world, and stared in. A small boy sat on the step outside, gnawing a piece of meat. He was eight, or ten; his stomach was drawn tight over his ribs, which showed through like a basket. Choking down his revulsion, Katterson wondered what sort of meat the boy was eating.

He continued on. As he passed 44th Street, a bony cat skittered past him and disappeared behind a pile of ashes. Katterson thought of the stories he had heard of the Great Plains, where giant cats were said to roam unmolested, and his mouth watered.

The sun was sinking low again, and New York was turning dull gray and black. The sun never really shone in late afternoon any more; it sneaked its way through the piles of rubble and cast a ghostly glow on the ruins of New York.

Katterson crossed 47th Street and turned down towards his building.

He made the long climb to his room—the elevator's shaft was still there, and the frozen elevator, but such luxuries were beyond dream—and stood outside for just a moment, searching in the darkness for the doorplate. There was the sound of laughter from within, a strange sound for ears not accustomed to it, and a food-smell crept out through the door and hit him squarely. His throat began to work convulsively, and he remembered the dull ball of pain that was his stomach.

Katterson opened the door. The food-odor filled the little room completely. He saw Barbara look up suddenly, white-faced, as he entered. In his chair was a man he had met once or twice, a scraggly-haired, heavily-bearded man named Heydahl.

"What's going on?" Katterson demanded.

Barbara's voice was strangely hushed. "Paul, you know Olaf Heydahl, don't you? Olaf, Paul?"

"What's going on?" Katterson repeated.

"Barbara and I have just been having a little meal, Mr. Katterson," Heydahl said, in a rich voice. "We thought you'd be hungry, so we saved a little for you."

The smell was overpowering, and Katterson felt it was all he could do to keep from foaming at the lips. Barbara was wiping her face over and over again with the napkin; Heydahl sat contentedly in Katterson's chair.

In three quick steps Katterson crossed to the other side of the room and threw open the doors to the little enclosed kitchenette. On the stove a small piece of meat sizzled softly. Katterson looked at the meat, then at Barbara.

"Where did you get this?" he asked. "We have no money."

"I—I—"

"I bought it," Heydahl said quietly. "Barbara told me how little food you had, and since I had more than I wanted I brought over a little gift."

"I see. A gift. No strings attached?"

"Why, Mr. Katterson! Remember I'm Barbara's guest."

"Yes, but please remember this is my apartment, not hers. Tell me, Heydahl—what kind of payment do you expect for this—this gift? And how much payment have you had already?"

Heydahl half-rose in his chair. "Please, Paul," Barbara said hurriedly. "No trouble, Paul. Olaf was just trying to be friendly."

"Barbara's right, Mr. Katterson," Heydahl said, subsiding. "Go ahead, help yourself. You'll do yourself some good, and you'll make me happy too."

Katterson stared at him for a moment. The half-light from below trickled in over Heydahl's shoulder, illuminating his nearly-bald head and his flowing beard. Katterson wondered just how Heydahl's cheeks managed to be quite so plump.

"Go ahead," Heydahl repeated. "We've had our fill."

Katterson turned back to the meat. He pulled a plate from the shelf and plopped the piece of meat on it, and unsheathed his knife. He was about to start carving when he turned to look at the two others.

Barbara was leaning forward in her chair. Her eyes were staring wide, and fear was shining deep in them. Heydahl, on the other hand, sat back comfortably in Katterson's chair, with a complacent look on his face that Katterson had not seen on anyone's features since leaving the Army.

A thought hit him suddenly and turned him icy-cold. "Barbara," he said, controlling his voice, "what kind of meat is this? Roast beef or lamb?"

"I don't know, Paul," she said uncertainly. "Olaf didn't say what—"

"Maybe roast dog, perhaps? Filet of alleycat? Why didn't you ask Olaf what was on the menu. *Why don't you ask him now?*"

Barbara looked at Heydahl, then back at Katterson.

"Eat it Paul. It's good, believe me—and I know how hungry you are."

"I don't eat unlabeled goods, Barbara. Ask Mr. Heydahl what kind of meat it is, first."

She turned to Heydahl. "Olaf—"

"I don't think you should be so fussy these days, Mr. Katterson," Heydahl said. "After all, there are no more food doles, and you don't know when meat will be available again."

"I like to be fussy, Heydahl. What kind of meat is this?"

"Why are you so curious? You know what they say about looking gift-horses in the mouth, heh heh."

"I can't even be sure this is horse, Heydahl. What kind of meat is it?" Katterson's voice, usually carefully modulated, became a snarl. "A choice slice of fat little boy? Maybe a steak from some poor devil who was in the wrong neighborhood one evening?"

Heydahl turned white.

Katterson took the meat from the plate and hefted it for a moment in his hand. "You can't even spit the words out, either of you. They choke in your mouths. Here—cannibals!"

He hurled the meat hard at Barbara; it glanced off the side of her cheek and fell to the floor. His face was flaming with rage. He flung open the door, turned, and slammed it again, rushing blindly away. The last thing he saw before slamming the door was Barbara on her knees, scurrying to pick up the piece of meat.

Night was dropping fast, and Katterson knew the streets were unsafe. His apartment, he felt, was polluted; he could not go back to it. The problem was to get food. He hadn't eaten in almost two days. He thrust his hands in his pocket and felt the folded slip of paper with Malory's address on it, and, with a wry grimace, realized that this was his only source of food and money. But not yet—not so long as he could hold up his head.

Without thinking he wandered toward the river, toward the huge crater where, Katterson had been told, there once

had been the United Nations buildings. The crater was almost a thousand feet deep; the United Nations had been obliterated in the first bombing, back in 2028. Katterson had been just one year old then, the year the war began. The actual fighting and bombing had continued for the next five or six years, until both hemispheres were scarred and burned from combat, and then the long war of attrition had begun. Katterson had turned eighteen in 2045—nine long years, he reflected—and his giant frame made him a natural choice for a soft Army post. In the course of his Army career he had been all over the section of the world he considered his country—the patch of land bounded by the Appalachian radioactive belt on one side, by the Atlantic on the other. The enemy had carefully constructed walls of fire partitioning America into a dozen strips, each completely isolated from the next. An airplane could cross from one to another, if there were any left. But science, industry, technology, were dead, Katterson thought wearily, as he stared without seeing at the river. He sat down on the edge of the crater and dangled his feet.

What had happened to the brave new world that had entered the Twenty-First century with such proud hopes? Here he was, Paul Katterson, probably one of the strongest and tallest men in the country, swinging his legs over a great devastated area, with a gnawing pain in the pit of his stomach. The world was dead, the shiny streamlined world of chrome plating and jet planes. Someday, perhaps, there would be new life. Someday.

Katterson stared at the waters beyond the crater. Somewhere across the seas there were other countries, broken like the rest. And somewhere in the other direction were rolling plains, grass, wheat, wild animals, fenced off by hundreds of miles of radioactive mountains. The War had eaten up the fields and pastures and livestock, had ground all mankind under.

He got up and started to walk back through the lonely

street. It was dark now, and the few gaslights cast a ghostly light, like little eclipsed moons. The fields were dead, and what was left of mankind huddled in the blasted cities, except for the lucky ones in the few Oases scattered by chance through the country. New York was a city of skeletons, each one scrabbling for food, cutting corners and hoping for tomorrow's bread.

A small man bumped into Katterson as he wandered unseeing. Katterson looked down at him and caught him by the arm. A family man, he guessed, hurrying home to his hungry children.

"Excuse me, sir," the little man said, nervously, straining to break Katterson's grip. The fear was obvious on his face; Katterson wondered if the worried little man thought this giant was going to roast him on the spot.

"I won't hurt you," Katterson said. "I'm just looking for food, citizen."

"I have none."

"But I'm starving," Katterson said. "You look like you have a job, some money. Give me some food and I'll be your bodyguard, your slave, anything you want."

"Look, fellow, I have no food to spare. Ouch! Let go of my arm!"

Katterson let go, and watched the little man go dashing away down the street. People always ran away from other people these days, he thought. Malory had made a similar escape.

The streets were dark and empty. Katterson wondered if he would be someone's steak by morning, and he didn't really care. His chest itched suddenly, and he thrust a grimy hand inside his shirt to scratch. The flesh over his pectoral muscles had almost completely been absorbed, and his chest was bony to the touch. He felt his stubbly cheeks, noting how tight they were over his jaws.

He turned and headed uptown, skirting around the

craters, climbing over the piles of the rubble. At 50th Street a Government jeep came coasting by and drew to a stop. Two soldiers with guns got out.

"Pretty late for you to be strolling, Citizen," one soldier said.

"Looking for some fresh air."

"That all?"

"What's it to you?" Katterson said.

"Not hunting some game too, maybe?"

Katterson lunged at the soldier. "Why, you little punk—"

"Easy, big boy," the other soldier said, pulling him back. "We were just joking."

"Fine joke," Katterson said. "You can afford to joke—all you have to do to get food is wear a monkey suit. I know how it is with you Army guys."

"Not any more," the second soldier said.

"Who are you kidding?" Katterson said. "I was a Regular Army man for seven years, until they broke up our outfit in '52. I know what's happening."

"Hey—what regiment?"

"306th Exploratory, soldier."

"You're not Katterson, Paul Katterson?"

"Maybe I am," Katterson said slowly. He moved closer to the two soldiers. "What of it?"

"You know Mark Leswick?"

"Damned well I do," Katterson said. "But how do you know him?"

"My brother. Used to talk of you all the time—Katterson's the biggest man alive, he'd say. Appetite like an ox."

Katterson smiled. "What's he doing now?"

The other coughed. "Nothing. He and some friends built a raft and tried to float to South America. They were sunk by the Shore Patrol just outside the New York Harbor."

"Oh. Too bad. Fine man, Mark. But he was right about that appetite. I'm hungry."

"So are we, fellow," the soldier said. "They cut off the soldier's dole yesterday."

Katterson laughed, and the echoes rang in the silent street. "Damn them anyway! Good thing they didn't pull that when I was in service; I'd have told them off."

"You can come with us, if you'd like. We'll be off-duty when this patrol is over, and we'll be heading downtown."

"Pretty late, isn't it? What time is it? Where are you going?"

"It's quarter to three," the soldier said, looking at his chronometer. "We're looking for a fellow named Malory; there's a story he has some food for sale, and we just got paid yesterday." He patted his pocket smugly.

Katterson blinked. "You know what kind of stuff Malory's selling?"

"Yeah," the other said. "So what? When you're hungry, you're hungry, and it's better eat than starve. I've seen some guys like you—too stubborn to go that low for a meal. But you'll give in, sooner or later, I suppose. I don't know—you look stubborn."

"Yeah," Katterson said, breathing a little harder than usual. "I guess I am stubborn. Or maybe I'm not hungry enough yet. Thanks for the lift, but I'm afraid I am going uptown."

And he turned and trudged off into the darkness.

There was only one friendly place to go.

Hal North was a quiet, bookish man who had come in contact with Katterson fairly often, even though North lived almost four miles uptown, on 114th Street.

Katterson had a standing invitation to come to North at any time of day or night, and, having no place else to go, he headed there. North was one of the few scholars who still tried to pursue knowledge at Columbia, once a citadel of learning. They huddled together in the crumbling wreck of

one of the halls, treasuring moldering books and exchanging ideas. North had a tiny apartment in an undamaged building on 114th Street, and he lived surrounded by books and a tiny circle of acquaintances.

Quarter to three, the soldier said. Katterson walked swiftly and easily, hardly noticing the blocks as they flew past. He reached North's apartment just as the sun was beginning to come up, and he knocked cautiously on the door. One knock, two, then another a little harder.

Footsteps within. "Who's there?" in a tired, high-pitched voice.

"Paul Katterson," Katterson whispered. "You awake?"

North slid the door open. "Katterson! Come on in! What brings you up here?"

"You said I could come whenever I needed to. I need to." Katterson sat down on the edge of North's bed. "I haven't eaten in two days, pretty near."

North chuckled. "You come to the right place, then. Wait —I'll fix you some bread and oleo. We still have some left."

"You sure you can spare it, Hal?"

North opened a cupboard and took out a loaf of bread, and Katterson's mouth began to water. "Of course, Paul. I don't eat much anyway, and I've been storing most of my food doles. You're welcome to whatever's here."

A sudden feeling of love swept through Katterson, a strange, consuming emotion which seemed to enfold all mankind for a moment, then withered and died away. "Thanks, Hal. Thanks."

He turned and looked at the tattered, thumb-stained book lying open on North's bed. Katterson let his eye wander down the tiny print and read softly aloud.

> *"The emperor of the sorrowful realm was there,*
> *Out of the girding ice he stood breast-high*
> *And to his arm alone the giants were*
> *Less comparable than to a giant I."*

North brought a little plate of food over to where Katterson was sitting. "I was reading that all night," he said. "Somehow I had thought of browsing through it again, and I started it last night and read till you came."

"Dante's *Inferno*," Katterson said. "Very appropriate. Someday I'd like to look through it again too. I've read so little, you know; soldiers don't get much education."

"Whenever you want to read, Paul, the books are still here." North smiled, a pale smile on his wan face. He pointed to the bookcase, where grubby, frayed books leaned at all angles. "Look, Paul: Rabelais, Joyce, Dante, Enright, Voltaire, Aeschylus, Homer, Shakespeare. They're all here, Paul, the most precious things of all. They're my old friends; those books have been my breakfast and my lunches and my suppers many times when no food was to be had for any price."

"We may be depending on them alone, Hal. Have you been out much these days?"

"No," North said. "I haven't been outdoors in over a week. Henriks has been picking up my food doles and bringing them here, and borrowing books. He came by yesterday—no, two days ago—to get my volume of Greek tragedies. He's writing a new opera, based on a play of Aeschylus."

"Poor crazy Henriks," Katterson said. "Why does he keep on writing music when there are no orchestras, no records, no concerts? He can't even hear the stuff he writes."

North opened the window and the morning air edged in. "Oh, but he does, Paul. He hears his music in his mind, and that satisfies him. It doesn't really matter; he'll never live to hear it played."

"The doles have been cut off," Katterson said.

"I know."

"The people out there are eating each other. I saw a man killed for food yesterday—butchered just like a cow."

North shook his head and straightened a tangled, whitened

lock. "So soon? I thought it would take longer than that, once the food ran out."

"They're hungry, Hal."

"Yes, they're hungry. So are you. In a day or so my supply up here will be gone, and I'll be hungry too. But it takes more than hunger to break down the taboo against eating flesh. Those people out there have given up their last shred of humanity now; they've suffered every degradation there is, and they can't sink any lower. Sooner or later we'll come to realize that, you and I, and then we'll be out there hunting for meat too."

"Hal!"

"Don't look so shocked, Paul." North smiled patiently. "Wait a couple of days, till we've eaten the bindings of my books, till we're finished chewing our shoes. The thought turns my stomach, too, but it's inevitable. Society's doomed; the last restraints are breaking now. We're more stubborn than the rest, or maybe we're just fussier about our meals. But our day will come too."

"I don't believe it," Katterson said, rising.

"Sit down. You're tired, and you're just a skeleton yourself now. What happened to my big, muscular friend Katterson? Where are his muscles now?" North reached up and squeezed the big man's biceps. "Skin, bones, what else? You're burning down, Paul, and when the spark is finally out you'll give in too."

"Maybe you're right, Hal. As soon as I stop thinking of myself as human, as soon as I get hungry enough and dead enough, I'll be out there hunting like the rest. But I'll hold out as long as I can."

He sank back on the bed and slowly turned the yellowing pages of Dante.

Henriks came back the next day, wild-eyed and haggard, to return the book of Greek plays, saying the times were not

ripe for Aeschylus. He borrowed a slim volume of poems by Ezra Pound. North forced some food on Henriks, who took it gratefully and without any show of diffidence. Then he left, staring oddly at Katterson.

Others came during the day—Komar, Goldman, de Metz —all men who, like Henriks and North, remembered the old days, before the long war. They were pitiful skeletons, but the flame of knowledge burned brightly in each of them. North introduced Katterson to them, and they looked wonderingly at his still-powerful frame before pouncing avidly on the books.

But soon they stopped coming. Katterson would stand at the window and watch below for hours, and the empty streets remained empty. It was now four days since the last food had arrived from Trenton Oasis. Time was running out.

A light snowfall began the next day, and continued throughout the long afternoon. At the evening meal North pulled his chair over to the cupboard, balanced precariously on its arm, and searched around in the cupboard for a few moments. Then he turned to Katterson.

"I'm even worse off than Mother Hubbard," he said. "At least she had a dog."

"Huh?"

"I was referring to an incident in a children's book," North said. "What I meant was we have no more food."

"None?" Katterson asked dully.

"Nothing at all." North smiled faintly. Katterson felt the emptiness stirring in his stomach, and leaned back, closing his eyes.

Neither of them ate at all the next day. The snow continued to filter lightly down. Katterson spent most of the time staring out the little window, and he saw a light, clean blanket of snow covering everything in sight. The snow was unbroken.

The next morning Katterson arose and found North busily

tearing the binding from his copy of the Greek plays. With a sort of amazement Katterson watched North put the soiled red binding into a pot of boiling water.

"Oh, you're up? I'm just preparing breakfast."

The binding was hardly palatable, but they chewed it to a soft pulp anyway, and swallowed the pulp just to give their tortured stomachs something to work on. Katterson retched as he swallowed his final mouthful.

One day of eating bookbindings.

"The city is dead," Katterson said from the window without turning around. "I haven't seen anyone come down this street yet. The snow is everywhere."

North said nothing.

"This is crazy, Hal," Katterson said suddenly. "I'm going out to get some food."

"Where?"

"I'll walk down Broadway and see what I can find. Maybe there'll be a stray dog. I'll look. We can't hold out forever up here."

"Don't go, Paul."

Katterson turned savagely. "Why? Is it better to starve up here without trying than to go down and hunt? You're a little man; you don't need food as much as I do. I'll go down to Broadway; maybe there'll be something. At least we can't be any worse off than now."

North smiled. "Go ahead, then."

"I'm going."

He buckled on his knife, put on all the warm clothes he could find, and made his way down the stairs. He seemed to float down, so lightheaded was he from hunger. His stomach was a tight hard knot.

The streets were deserted. A light blanket of snow lay everywhere, mantling the twisted ruins of the city. Katterson headed for Broadway, leaving tracks in the unbroken snow, and began to walk downtown.

At 96th Street and Broadway he saw his first sign of life, some people at the following corner. With mounting excitement he headed for 95th Street, but pulled up short.

There was a body sprawled over the snow, newly dead. And two boys of about twelve were having a duel to the death for its possession, while a third circled warily around them. Katterson watched them for a moment, and then crossed the street and walked on.

He no longer minded the snow and the solitude of the empty city. He maintained a steady, even pace, almost the tread of a machine. The world was crumbling fast around him, and his recourse lay in his solitary trek.

He turned back for a moment and looked behind him. There were his footsteps, the long trail stretching back and out of sight, the only marks breaking the even whiteness. He ticked off the empty blocks.

90th. 87th. 85th. At 84th he saw a blotch of color on the next block, and quickened his pace. When he got to close range, he saw it was a man lying on the snow. Katterson trotted lightly to him and stood over him.

He was lying face-down. Katterson bent and carefully rolled him over. His cheeks were still red; evidently he had rounded the corner and died just a few minutes before. Katterson stood up and looked around. In the window of the house nearest him, two pale faces were pressed against the pane, watching greedily.

He whirled suddenly to face a small, swarthy man standing on the other side of the corpse. They stared for a moment, the little man and the giant. Katterson noted dimly the other's burning eyes and set expression. Two more people appeared, a ragged woman and a boy of eight or nine. Katterson moved closer to the corpse and made a show of examining it for identification, keeping a wary eye on the little tableau facing him.

Another man joined the group, and another. Now there were five, all standing silently in a semi-circle. The first man

beckoned, and from the nearest house came two women and still another man. Katterson frowned; something unpleasant was going to happen.

A trickle of snow fluttered down. The hunger bit into Katterson like a red-hot knife, as he stood there uneasily waiting for something to happen. The body lay fence-like between them.

The tableau dissolved into action in an instant. The small swarthy man made a gesture and reached for the corpse; Katterson quickly bent and scooped the dead man up. Then they were all around him, screaming and pulling at the body.

The swarthy man grabbed the corpse's arm and started to tug, and a woman reached up for Katterson's hair. Katterson drew up his arm and swung as hard as he could, and the small man left the ground and flew a few feet, collapsing into a huddled heap in the snow.

All of them were around him now, snatching at the corpse and at Katterson. He fought them off with his one free hand, with his feet, with his shoulders. Weak as he was and outnumbered, his size remained a powerful factor. His fist connected with someone's jaw and there was a rewarding crack; at the same time he lashed back with his foot and felt contact with breaking ribs.

"Get away!" he shouted. "Get away! This is mine! Away!" The first woman leaped at him, and he kicked at her and sent her reeling into the snowdrifts. "Mine! This is mine!"

They were even more weakened by hunger than he was. In a few moments all of them were scattered in the snow except the little boy, who came at Katterson determinedly, made a sudden dash, and leaped on Katterson's back.

He hung there, unable to do anything more than cling. Katterson ignored him, and took a few steps, carrying both the corpse and the boy, while the heat of battle slowly cooled inside him. He would take the corpse back uptown to North; they could cut it in pieces without much trouble. They would live on it for days, he thought. They would—

He realized what had happened. He dropped the corpse and staggered a few steps away, and sank down into the snow, bowing his head. The boy slipped off his back, and the little knot of people timidly converged on the corpse and bore it off triumphantly, leaving Katterson alone.

"Forgive me," he muttered hoarsely. He licked his lips nervously, shaking his head. He remained there kneeling for a long time, unable to get up.

"No. No forgiveness. I can't fool myself; I'm one of them now," he said. He arose and stared at his hands, and then began to walk. Slowly, methodically, he trudged along, fumbling with the folded piece of paper in his pocket, knowing now that he had lost everything.

The snow had frozen in his hair, and he knew his head was white from snow—the head of an old man. His face was white too. He followed along Broadway for a while, then cut to Central Park West. The snow was unbroken before him. It lay covering everything, a sign of the long winter setting in.

"North was right," he said quietly to the ocean of white that was Central Park. He looked at the heaps of rubble seeking cover beneath the snow. "I can't hold out any longer." He looked at the address—Malory, 218 West 42nd Street—and continued onward, almost numb with the cold.

His eyes were narrowed to slits, and lashes and head were frosted and white. Katterson's throat throbbed in his mouth, and his lips were clamped together by hunger. 70th Street, 65th. He zigzagged and wandered, following Columbus Avenue, Amsterdam Avenue for a while. Columbus, Amsterdam—the names were echoes from a past that had never been.

What must have been an hour passed, and another. The streets were empty. Those who were left stayed safe and starving inside, and watched from their windows the strange giant stalking alone through the snow. The sun had almost dropped from the sky as he reached 50th Street. His hunger had all but abated now; he felt nothing, knew just that his goal

lay ahead. He faced forward, unable to go anywhere but ahead.

Finally 42nd Street, and he turned down toward where he knew Malory was to be found. He came to the building. Up the stairs, now, as the darkness of night came to flood the streets. Up the stairs, up another flight, another. Each step was a mountain, but he pulled himself higher and higher.

At the fifth floor Katterson reeled and sat down on the edge of the steps, gasping. A liveried footman passed, his nose in the air, his green coat shimmering in the half-light. He was carrying a roasted pig with an apple in its mouth, on a silver tray. Katterson lurched forward to seize the pig. His groping hands passed through it, and pig and footman exploded like bubbles and drifted off through the silent halls.

Just one more flight. Sizzling meat on a stove, hot, juicy, tender meat filling the hole where his stomach had once been. He picked up his legs carefully and set them down, and came to the top at last. He balanced for a moment at the top of the stairs, nearly toppled backwards but seized the banister at the last second, and then pressed forward.

There was the door. He saw it, heard loud noise coming from behind it. A feast was going on, a banquet, and he ached to join it. Down the hall, turn left, pound on the door.

Noise growing closer.

"Malory! Malory! It's me, Katterson, big Katterson! I've come to you! Open up, Malory!"

The handle began to turn.

"Malory! Malory!"

Katterson sank to his knees in the hall and fell forward on his face when the door opened at last.

HARRY HARRISON

THE VELVET GLOVE

We begin—and we end—with that world anticipated in the writings of so many in this field, a perhaps not too distant future where robots—particularly specialist robots who don't know their place—find life decidedly rough, despite *the so-called Robot Equality Act . . .*

JON VENEX fitted the key into the hotel room door. He had asked for a large room, the largest in the hotel, and paid the desk clerk extra for it. All he could do now was pray that he hadn't been cheated. He didn't dare complain or try to get his money back. He heaved a sigh of relief as the door swung open, it was bigger than he had expected—fully three feet wide by five feet long. There was more than enough room to work in. He would have his leg off in a jiffy and by morning his limp would be gone.

There was the usual adjustable hook on the back wall. He slipped it through the recessed ring in the back of his neck and kicked himself up until his feet hung free of the floor. His legs relaxed with a rattle as he cut off all power from his waist down.

The overworked leg motor would have to cool down before he could work on it, plenty of time to skim through the newspaper. With the chronic worry of the unemployed he snapped it open at the want ads and ran his eye down the *Help Wanted—Robot* column. There was nothing for him under the Specialist heading, even the Unskilled Labor listings were bare and unpromising. New York was a bad town for robots this year.

The want ads were just as depressing as usual but he could always get a lift from the comic section. He even had a favorite strip, a fact that he scarcely dared mention to himself. "Rattly Robot," a dull-witted mechanical clod who was continually falling over himself and getting into trouble. It was a repellent caricature, but could still be very funny. Jon was just starting to read it when the ceiling light went out.

It was ten P.M., curfew hour for robots. Lights out and lock yourself in until six in the morning, eight hours of boredom and darkness for all except the few night workers. But there were ways of getting around the letter of a law that didn't concern itself with a definition of visible light. Sliding aside some of the shielding around his atomic generator, Jon turned up the gain. As it began to run a little hot the heat waves streamed out—visible to him as infra-red rays. He finished reading the paper in the warm, clear light of his abdomen.

The thermocouple in the tip of his second finger left hand, he tested the temperature of his leg. It was soon cool enough to work on. The waterproof gasket stripped off easily, exposing the power leads, nerve wires and the weakened knee joint. The wires disconnected, Jon unscrewed the knee above the joint and carefully placed it on the shelf in front of him. With loving care he took the replacement part from his hip pouch. It was the product of toil, purchased with his savings from three months employment on the Jersey pig farm.

Jon was standing on one leg testing the new knee joint when the ceiling fluorescent flickered and came back on. Five-thirty already, he had just finished in time. A shot of oil on the new bearing completed the job; he stowed away the tools in the pouch and unlocked the door.

The unused elevator shaft acted as waste chute, he slipped his newspaper through a slot in the door as he went by. Keeping close to the wall, he picked his way carefully down the grease stained stairs. He slowed his pace at the 17th floor as two other mechs turned in ahead of him. They were ob-

viously butchers or meatcutters; where the right hand should have been on each of them there stuck out a wicked, foot long knife. As they approached the foot of the stairs they stopped to slip the knives into the plastic sheaths that were bolted to their chestplates. Jon followed them down the ramp into the lobby.

The room was filled to capacity with robots of all sizes, forms and colors. Jon Venex's greater height enabled him to see over their heads to the glass doors that opened onto the street. It had rained the night before and the rising sun drove red glints from the puddles on the sidewalk. Three robots, painted snow white to show they were night workers, pushed the doors open and came in. No one went out as the curfew hadn't ended yet. They milled around slowly talking in low voices.

The only human being in the entire lobby was the night clerk dozing behind the counter. The clock over his head said five minutes to six. Shifting his glance from the clock Jon became aware of a squat black robot waving to attract his attention. The powerful arms and compact build identified him as a member of the Diger family, one of the most numerous groups. He pushed through the crowd and clapped Jon on the back with a resounding clang.

"Jon Venex! I knew it was you as soon as I saw you sticking up out of this crowd like a green tree trunk. I haven't seen you since the old days on Venus!"

Jon didn't need to check the number stamped on the short one's scratched chestplate. Alec Diger had been his only close friend during those thirteen boring years at Orange Sea Camp. A good chess player and a whiz at Two-handed Handball, they had spent all their off time together. They shook hands, with the extra squeeze that means friendliness.

"Alec, you beat-up little grease pot, what brings you to New York?"

"The burning desire to see something besides rain and jungle, if you must know. After you bought-out, things got

just too damn dull. I began working two shifts a day in that foul diamond mine, and then three a day for the last month to get enough credits to buy my contract and passage back to earth. I was underground so long that the photocell on my right eye burned out when the sunlight hit it."

He leaned forward with a hoarse confidential whisper, "If you want to know the truth, I had a sixty carat diamond stuck behind the eye lens. I sold it here on earth for two-hundred credits, gave me six months of easy living. It's all gone now, so I'm on my way to the employment exchange." His voice boomed loud again, "And how about *you?*"

Jon Venex chuckled at his friend's frank approach to life. "It's just been the old routine with me, a run of odd jobs until I got sideswiped by a bus—it fractured my knee bearing. The only job I could get with a bad leg was feeding slops to pigs. Earned enough to fix the knee—and here *I* am."

Alec jerked his thumb at a rust colored, three-foot tall robot that had come up quietly beside him. "If you think you've got trouble take a look at Dik here, that's no coat of paint on him. Dik Dryer, meet Jon Venex, an old buddy of mine."

Jon bent over to shake the little Mech's hand. His eye shutters dilated as he realized what he had thought was a coat of paint was a thin layer of rust that coated Dik's metal body. Alec scratched a shiny path in the rust with his finger tip. His voice was suddenly serious.

"Dik was designed for operation in the Martian desert. It's as dry as a fossil bone there so his skinflint company cut corners on the stainless steel.

"When they went bankrupt he was sold to a firm here in the city. After a while the rust started to eat in and slow him down, they gave Dik his contract and threw him out."

The small robot spoke for the first time, his voice grated and scratched. "Nobody will hire me like this, but I can't get repaired until I get a job." His arms squeaked and grated

as he moved them. "I'm going by the Robot Free Clinic again today, they said they might be able to do something."

Alec Diger rumbled in his deep chest. "Don't put too much faith in those people. They're great at giving out tenth-credit oil capsules or a little free wire—but don't depend on them for anything important."

It was six now, the robots were pushing through the doors into the silent streets. They joined the crowd moving out, Jon slowing his stride so his shorter friends could keep pace. Dik Dryer moved with a jerking, irregular motion, his voice as uneven as the motion of his body.

"Jon—Venex, I don't recognize your family name. Something to do—with Venus—perhaps."

"Venus is right, Venus Experimental—there are only twenty-two of us in the family. We have waterproof, pressure resistant bodies for working down on the ocean bottom. The basic idea was all right, we did our part, only there wasn't enough money in the channel dredging contract to keep us all working. I bought out my original contract at half price and became a free robot."

Dik vibrated his rusted diaphragm. "Being free isn't all it should be. I some—times wish the Robot Equality Act hadn't been passed. I would just l-love to be owned by a nice rich company with a machine shop and a—mountain of replacement parts."

"You don't really mean that, Dik." Alec Diger clamped a heavy black arm across his shoulders. "Things aren't perfect now, we know that, but it's certainly a lot better than the old days, we were just hunks of machinery then. Used twenty-four hours a day until we were worn out and then thrown in the junk pile. No thanks, I'll take my chances with things as they are."

Jon and Alec turned into the employment exchange, saying good-by to Dik who went on slowly down the street. They pushed up the crowded ramp and joined the line in

front of the registration desk. The bulletin board next to the desk held a scattering of white slips announcing job openings. A clerk was pinning up new additions.

Venex scanned them with his eyes, stopping at one circled in red.

ROBOTS NEEDED IN THESE CATEGORIES. APPLY AT ONCE TO CHAINJET, LTD., 1219 BROADWAY
Fasten
Flyer
Atommel
Filmer
Venex

Jon rapped excitedly on Alec Diger's neck. "Look there, a job in my own specialty—I can get my old pay rate! See you back at the hotel tonight—and good luck in your job hunting."

Alec waved good-by. "Let's hope the job's as good as you think, I never trust those things until I have my credits in my hand."

Jon walked quickly from the employment exchange, his long legs eating up the blocks. *Good old Alec, he didn't believe in anything he couldn't touch. Perhaps he was right, but why try to be unhappy. The world wasn't too bad this morning—his leg worked fine, prospects of a good job—he hadn't felt this cheerful since the day he was activated.*

Turning the corner at a brisk pace he collided with a man coming from the opposite direction. Jon had stopped on the instant, but there wasn't time to jump aside. The obese individual jarred against him and fell to the ground. From the height of elation to the depths of despair in an instant—he had injured a *human being!*

He bent to help the man to his feet, but the other would have none of that. He evaded the friendly hand and screeched in a high pitched voice.

"Officer, officer-police . . . HELP! I've been attacked—a mad robot . . . HELP!"

A crowd was gathering—staying at a respectful distance

—but making an angry muttering noise. Jon stood motionless, his head reeling at the enormity of what he had done. A policeman pushed his way through the crowd.

"Seize him, officer, shoot him down . . . he struck me . . . almost killed me . . ." The man shook with rage, his words thickening to a senseless babble.

The policeman had his .75 recoilless revolver out and pressed against Jon's side.

"This *man* has charged you with a serious crime, *grease-can*. I'm taking you into the stationhouse—to talk about it." He looked around nervously, waving his gun to open a path through the tightly packed crowd. They moved back grudgingly, with murmurs of disapproval.

Jon's thoughts swirled in tight circles. How did a catastrophe like this happen, where was it going to end? He didn't dare tell the truth, that would mean he was calling the man a liar. There had been six robots power-lined in the city since the first of the year. If he dared speak in his own defense there would be a jumper to the street lighting circuit and a seventh burnt out hulk in the police morgue.

A feeling of resignation swept through him, there was no way out. If the man pressed charges it would mean a term of penal servitude, though it looked now as if he would never live to reach the court. The papers had been whipping up a lot of anti-robe feeling, you could feel it behind the angry voices, see it in the narrowed eyes and clenched fists. The crowd was slowly changing into a mob, a mindless mob as yet, but capable of turning on him at any moment.

"What's goin' on here . . . ?" It was a booming voice, with a quality that dragged at the attention of the crowd.

A giant cross-continent freighter was parked at the curb. The driver swung down from the cab and pushed his way through the people. The policeman shifted his gun as the man strode up to him.

"That's my robot you got there, Jack, don't put any holes in him!" He turned on the man who had been shouting accu-

sations. "Fatty, here, is the world's biggest liar. The robot was standing here waiting for me to park the truck. Fatty must be as blind as he is stupid, I saw the whole thing. He knocks himself down walking into the robe, then starts hollering for the cops."

The other man could take no more. His face crimson with anger he rushed toward the trucker, his fists swinging in ungainly circles. They never landed, the truck driver put a meaty hand on the other's face and seated him on the sidewalk for the second time.

The onlookers roared with laughter, the power-lining and the robot were forgotten. The fight was between two men now, the original cause had slipped from their minds. Even the policeman allowed himself a small smile as he holstered his gun and stepped forward to separate the men.

The trucker turned toward Jon with a scowl.

"Come on you aboard the truck—you've caused me enough trouble for one day. What a junkcan!"

The crowd chuckled as he pushed Jon ahead of him into the truck and slammed the door behind them. Jamming the starter with his thumb he gunned the thunderous diesels into life and pulled out into the traffic.

Jon moved his jaw, but there were no words to come out. Why had this total stranger helped him, what could he say to show his appreciation? He knew that all humans weren't robe-haters, why it was even rumored that some humans treated robots as *equals* instead of machines. The driver must be one of these mythical individuals, there was no other way to explain his actions.

Driving carefully with one hand the man reached up behind the dash and drew out a thin, plastikoid booklet. He handed it to Jon who quickly scanned the title, *Robot Slaves in a World Economy* by Philpott Asimov II.

"If you're caught reading that thing they'll execute you on the spot. Better stick it between the insulation on your generator, you can always burn it if you're picked up.

"Read it when you're alone, it's got a lot of things in it that you know nothing about. Robots aren't really inferior to humans, in fact they're superior in most things. There is even a little history in there to show that robots aren't the first ones to be treated as second class citizens. You may find it a little hard to believe, but human beings once treated each other just the way they treat robots now. That's one of the reasons I'm active in this movement—sort of like the fellow who was burned helping others stay away from the fire."

He smiled a warm, friendly smile in Jon's direction, the whiteness of his teeth standing out against the rich ebony brown of his features.

"I'm heading towards US-1, can I drop you anywheres on the way?"

"The Chainjet Building please—I'm applying for a job."

They rode the rest of the way in silence. Before he opened the door the driver shook hands with Jon.

"Sorry about calling you *Junkcan*, but the crowd expected it." He didn't look back as he drove away.

Jon had to wait a half hour for his turn, but the receptionist finally signalled him towards the door of the interviewer's room. He stepped in quickly and turned to face the man seated at the transplastic desk, an upset little man with permanent worry wrinkles stamped in his forehead. The little man shoved the papers on the desk around angrily, occasionally making crabbed little notes on the margins. He flashed a birdlike glance up at Jon.

"Yes, yes, be quick. What is it you want?"

"You posted a help wanted notice, I—"

The man cut him off with a wave of his hand. "All right, let me see your ID tag . . . quickly, there are others waiting."

Jon thumbed the tag out of his waist slot and handed it across the desk. The interviewer read the code number, then began running his finger down a long list of similar figures.

He stopped suddenly and looked sideways at Jon from under his lowered lids.

"You have made a mistake, we have no opening for you."

Jon began to explain to the man that the notice had requested his specialty, but he was waved to silence. As the interviewer handed back the tag he slipped a card out from under the desk blotter and held it in front of Jon's eyes. He held it there for only an instant, knowing that the written message was recorded instantly by the robot's photographic vision and eidetic memory. The card dropped into the ash tray and flared into embers at the touch of the man's pencil-heater.

Jon stuffed the ID tag back into the slot and read over the message on the card as he walked down the stairs to the street. There were six lines of typewritten copy with no signature.

To Venex Robot: You are urgently needed on a top secret company project. There are suspected informers in the main office, so you are being hired in this unusual manner. Go at once to 787 Washington Street and ask for Mr. Coleman.

Jon felt an immense sensation of relief. For a moment there, he was sure the job had been a false lead. He saw nothing unusual in the method of hiring. The big corporations were immensely jealous of their research discoveries and went to great lengths to keep them secret—at the same time resorting to any means to ferret out their business rivals' secrets. There might still be a chance to get this job.

The burly bulk of a lifter was moving back and forth in the gloom of the ancient warehouse stacking crates in ceiling high rows. Jon called to him, the robot swung up his forklift and rolled over on noiseless tires. When Jon questioned him he indicated a stairwell against the rear wall.

"Mr. Coleman's office is down in back, the door is marked." The lifter put his fingertips against Jon's ear pick-

ups and lowered his voice to the merest shadow of a whisper. It would have been inaudible to human ears, but Jon could hear him easily, the sounds being carried through the metal of the other's body.

"He's the meanest man you ever met—he hates robots so be *ever* so polite. If you can use 'sir' five times in one sentence you're perfectly safe."

Jon swept the shutter over one eye-tube in a conspiratorial wink, the large mech did the same as he rolled away. Jon turned and went down the dusty stairwell and knocked gently on Mr. Coleman's door.

Coleman was a plump little individual in a conservative purple and yellow business suit. He kept glancing from Jon to the Robot General Catalog checking the Venex specifications listed there. Seemingly satisfied he slammed the book shut.

"Gimme your tag and back against that wall."

Jon laid his ID tag on the desk and stepped towards the wall. "Yes sir, here it is sir." Two "sir" on that one, not bad for the first sentence. He wondered idly if he could put five of them in one sentence without the man knowing he was being made a fool of.

He became aware of the danger an instant too late. The current surged through the powerful electromagnet behind the plaster flattening his metal body helplessly against the wall. Coleman was almost dancing with glee.

"We got him, Druce, he's mashed flatter than a stinking tin-can on a rock, can't move a motor. Bring that junk in here and let's get him ready."

Druce had a mechanic's coveralls on over his street suit and a tool box slung under one arm. He carried a little black metal can at arms length, trying to get as far from it as possible. Coleman shouted at him with annoyance.

"That bomb can't go off until it's armed, stop acting like a child. Put it on that grease-can's leg and *quick!*"

Grumbling under his breath Druce spot welded the metal flanges of the bomb onto Jon's leg a few inches above his knee. Coleman tugged at it to be certain it was secure, then twisted a knob in the side and pulled out a glistening length of pin. There was a cold little click from inside the mechanism as it armed itself.

Jon could do nothing except watch, even his vocal diaphragm was locked by the magnetic field. He had more than a suspicion however that he was involved in something other than a "secret business deal." He cursed his own stupidity for walking blindly into the situation.

The magnetic field cut off and he instantly raced his extensor motors to leap forward. Coleman took a plastic box out of his pocket and held his thumb over a switch inset into its top.

"Don't make any quick moves, junk-yard, this little transmitter is keyed to a receiver in that bomb on your leg. One touch of my thumb, up you go in a cloud of smoke and come down in a shower of nuts and bolts." He signalled to Druce who opened a closet door. "And in case you want to be heroic, just think of him."

Coleman jerked his thumb at the sodden shape on the floor; a filthily attired man of indistinguishable age whose only interesting feature was the black bomb strapped tightly across his chest. He peered unseeingly from red-rimmed eyes and raised the almost empty whiskey bottle to his mouth. Coleman kicked the door shut.

"He's just some Bowery bum we dragged in, Venex, but that doesn't make any difference to you, does it? He's human —and a robot can't kill *anybody!* That rummy has a bomb on him tuned to the same frequency as yours, if you don't play ball with us he gets a two-foot hole blown in his chest."

Coleman was right, Jon didn't dare make any false moves. All of his early mental training as well as Circuit 92 sealed inside his brain case would prevent him from harming a hu-

man being. He felt trapped, caught by these people for some unknown purpose.

Coleman had pushed back a tarpaulin to disclose a ragged hole in the concrete floor, the opening extended into the earth below. He waved Jon over.

"The tunnel is in good shape for about thirty feet, then you'll find a fall. Clean all the rock and dirt out until you break through into the storm sewer, then come back. And you better be alone. If you tip the cops both you and the old stew go out together—now move."

The shaft had been dug recently and shored with packing crates from the warehouse overhead. It ended abruptly in a wall of fresh sand and stone. Jon began shoveling it into the little wheelbarrow they had given him.

He had emptied four barrow loads and was filling the fifth when he uncovered the hand, a robot's hand made of green metal. He turned his headlight power up and examined the hand closely, there could be no doubt about it. These gaskets on the joints, the rivet pattern at the base of the thumb meant only one thing, it was the dismembered hand of a Venex robot.

Quickly, yet gently, he shoveled away the rubble behind the hand and unearthed the rest of the robot. The torso was crushed and the power circuits shorted, battery acid was dripping from an ugly rent in the side. With infinite care Jon snapped the few remaining wires that joined the neck to the body and laid the green head on the barrow. It stared at him like a skull, the shutters completely dilated, but no glow of life from the tubes behind them.

He was scraping the mud from the number on the battered chestplate when Druce lowered himself into the tunnel and flashed the brilliant beam of a hand-spot down its length.

"Stop playing with that junk and get digging—or you'll end up the same as him. This tunnel has gotta be through by tonight."

Jon put the dismembered parts on the barrow with the

sand and rock and pushed the whole load back up the tunnel, his thoughts running in unhappy circles. A dead robot was a terrible thing, and one of his family too. But there was something wrong about this robot, something that was quite inexplicable, the number on the plate had been "17," yet he remembered only too well the day that a water-shorted motor had killed Venex 17 in the Orange Sea.

It took Jon four hours to drive the tunnel as far as the ancient granite wall of the storm sewer. Druce gave him a short pinch bar and he levered out enough of the big blocks to make a hole large enough to let him through into the sewer.

When he climbed back into the office he tried to look casual as he dropped the pinch bar to the floor by his feet and seated himself on the pile of rubble in the corner. He moved around to make a comfortable seat for himself and his fingers grabbed the severed neck of Venex 17.

Coleman swiveled around in his chair and squinted at the wall clock. He checked the time against his tie-pin watch, with a grunt of satisfaction he turned back and stabbed a finger at Jon.

"Listen, you green junk-pile, at 1900 hours you're going to do a job, and there aren't going to be any slip ups. You go down that sewer and into the Hudson River. The outlet is under water, so you won't be seen from the docks. Climb down to the bottom and walk 200 yards north, that should put you just under a ship. Keep your eyes open, *but don't show any lights!* About halfway down the keel of the ship you'll find a chain hanging.

"Climb the chain, pull loose the box that's fastened to the hull at the top and bring it back here. No mistakes—or you know what happens."

Jon nodded his head. His busy fingers had been separating the wires in the amputated neck. When they had been straightened and put into a row he memorized their order with one flashing glance.

He ran over the color code in his mind and compared it with the memorized leads. The twelfth wire was the main cranial power lead, number six was the return wire.

With his precise touch he separated these two from the pack and glanced idly around the room. Druce was dozing in a chair in the opposite corner, Coleman was talking on the phone, his voice occasionally rising in a petulant whine. This wasn't interfering with his attention to Jon—and the radio switch still held tightly in his left hand.

Jon's body blocked Coleman's vision, as long as Druce stayed asleep he would be able to work on the head unobserved. He activated a relay in his forearm and there was a click as the waterproof cover on an exterior socket swung open. This was a power outlet from his battery that was used to operate motorized tools and lights underwater.

If Venex 17's head had been severed for less than three weeks he could reactivate it. Every robot had a small storage battery inside his skull, if the power to the brain was cut off the battery would provide the minimum standby current to keep the brain alive. The robe would be unconscious until full power was restored.

Jon plugged the wires into his arm-outlet and slowly raised the current to operating level. There was a tense moment of waiting, then 17's eye shutters suddenly closed. When they opened again the eye tubes were glowing warmly. They swept the room with one glance then focused on Jon.

The right shutter clicked shut while the other began opening and closing in rapid fashion. It was International code—being sent as fast as the solenoid could be operated. Jon concentrated on the message.

Telephone—call emergency operator—tell her "signal 14" help will—The shutter stopped in the middle of a code group, the light of reason dying from the eyes.

For one instant Jon's heart leaped in panic, until he realized that 17 had deliberately cut the power.

"What you doing with that? None of your funny robot tricks, I know your kind, plotting all kinds of things in them tin domes." His voice trailed off into a stream of incomprehensible profanity. With sudden spite he lashed his foot out and sent 17's head crushing against the wall.

The dented, green head rolled to a stop at Jon's feet, the face staring up at him in mute agony. It was only Circuit 92 that prevented him from injuring a *human*. As his motors revved up to send him hurtling forward the control relays clicked open. He sank against the debris, paralyzed for the instant. As soon as the rush of anger was gone he would regain control of his body.

They stood as if frozen in a tableau. The robot slumped backward, the man leaning forward, his face twisted with unreasoning hatred. The head lay between them like a symbol of death.

Coleman's voice cut through the air of tenseness like a knife.

"*Druce*, stop playing with the grease-can and get down to the main door to let Little Willy and his Junk-brokers in. You can have it all to yourself afterward."

The angry man turned reluctantly, but pushed out of the door at Coleman's annoyed growl. Jon sat down against the wall, his mind sorting out the few facts with lightning precision. There was no room in his thoughts for Druce, the man had become just one more factor in a complex problem.

Call the emergency operator—that meant this was no local matter, responsible authorities must be involved. Only the government could be behind a thing as major as this. Signal 14—that inferred a complex set of arrangements, forces that could swing into action at a moment's notice. There was no indication where this might lead, but the only thing to do was to get out of here and make that phone call. And quick. Druce was bringing in more people, junk-bro-

kers, whatever they were. Any action that he took would have to be done before they returned.

Even as Jon followed this train of logic his fingers were busy. Palming a wrench, he was swiftly loosening the main retaining nut on his hip joint. It dropped free in his hand, only the pivot pin remained now to hold his leg on. He climbed slowly to his feet and moved towards Coleman's desk.

"Mr. Coleman, sir, it's time to go down to the ship now, should I leave now, sir?"

Jon spoke the words slowly as he walked forward, apparently going to the door, but angling at the same time towards the plump man's desk.

"You got thirty minutes yet, go sit—*say* . . . !"

The words were cut off. Fast as a human reflex is, it is the barest crawl compared to the lightning action of electronic reflex. At the instant Coleman was first aware of Jon's motion, the robot had finished his leap and lay sprawled across the desk, his leg off at the hip and clutched in his hand.

"YOU'LL KILL YOURSELF IF YOU TOUCH THE BUTTON!"

The words were part of the calculated plan. Jon bellowed them in the startled man's ear as he stuffed the dismembered leg down the front of the man's baggy slacks. It had the desired effect, Coleman's finger stabbed at the button but stopped before it made contact. He stared down with bulging eyes at the little black box of death peeping out of his waistband.

Jon hadn't waited for the reaction. He pushed backward from the desk and stopped to grab the stolen pinch-bar off the floor. A mighty one-legged leap brought him to the locked closet; he stabbed the bar into the space between the door and frame and heaved.

Coleman was just starting to struggle the bomb out of his pants when the action was over. The closet open, Jon seized the heavy strap holding the second bomb on the

rummy's chest and snapped it like a thread. He threw the bomb into Coleman's corner, giving the man one more thing to worry about. It had cost him a leg, but Jon had escaped the bomb threat without injuring a human. Now he had to get to a phone and make that call.

Coleman stopped tugging at the bomb and plunged his hand into the desk drawer for a gun. The returning men would block the door soon, the only other exit from the room was a frosted-glass window that opened onto the mammoth bay of the warehouse.

Jon Venex plunged through the window in a welter of flying glass. The heavy thud of a recoilless .75 came from the room behind him and a foot long section of metal window frame leaped outward. Another slug screamed by the robot's head as he scrambled towards the rear door of the warehouse.

He was a bare thirty feet away from the back entrance when the giant door hissed shut on silent rollers. All the doors would have closed at the same time, the thud of running feet indicated that they would be guarded as well. Jon hopped a section of packing cases and crouched out of sight.

He looked up over his head, there stretched a webbing of steel supports, crossing and recrossing until they joined the flat expanse of the roof. To human eyes the shadows there deepened into obscurity, but the infra-red from a network of steam pipes gave Jon all the illumination he needed.

The men would be quartering the floor of the warehouse soon, his only chance to escape recapture or death would be over their heads. Besides this, he was hampered by the loss of his leg. In the rafters he could use his arms for faster and easier travel.

Jon was just pulling himself up to one of the topmost cross beams when a hoarse shout from below was followed by a stream of bullets. They tore through the thin roof, one slug clanged off the steel beam under his body. Waiting until three of the newcomers had started up a nearby ladder, Jon

began to quietly work his way towards the back of the building.

Safe for the moment, he took stock of his position. The men were spread out through the building, it could only be a matter of time before they found him. The doors were all locked and—he had made a complete circuit of the building to be sure—there were no windows that he could force—the windows were blocked as well. If he could call the emergency operator, the unknown friends of Venex 17 might come to his aid. This, however, was out of the question. The only phone in the building was on Coleman's desk. He had traced the leads to make sure.

His eyes went automatically to the cables above his head. Plastic gaskets were set in the wall of the building, through them came the power and phone lines. The phone line! That was all he needed to make a call.

With smooth, fast motions he reached up and scratched a section of wire bare. He laughed to himself as he slipped the little microphone out of his left ear. Now he was half deaf as well as half lame—he was literally giving himself to this cause. He would have to remember the pun to tell Alec Diger later, if there was a later. Alec had a profound weakness for puns.

Jon attached jumpers to the mike and connected them to the bare wire. A touch of the ammeter showed that no one was on the line. He waited a few moments to be sure he had a dial tone then sent the eleven carefully spaced pulses that would connect him with the local operator. He placed the mike close to his mouth.

"Hello operator. Hello operator. I cannot hear you so do not answer. Call the emergency operator—signal 14, I repeat—signal 14."

Jon kept repeating the message until the searching men began to approach his position. He left the mike connected —the men wouldn't notice it in the dark but the open line would give the unknown powers his exact location. Using his

finger tips he did a careful traverse on an *I* beam to an alcove in the farthest corner of the room. Escape was impossible, all he could do was stall for time.

"Mr. Coleman, I'm sorry I ran away." With the volume on full his voice rolled like thunder from the echoing walls.

He could see the men below twisting their heads vainly to find the source.

"If you let me come back and don't kill me, I will do your work. I was afraid of the bomb, but now I am afraid of the guns." It sounded a little infantile, but he was pretty sure none of those present had any sound knowledge of robotic intelligence.

"Please let me come back . . . sir!" He had almost forgotten the last word, so he added another "Please, sir!" to make up.

Coleman needed that package under the boat very badly, he would promise anything to get it. Jon had no doubts as to his eventual fate, all he could hope to do was kill time in the hopes that the phone message would bring aid.

"Come on down, Junky, I won't be mad at you—if you follow directions." Jon could hear the hidden anger in his voice, the unspoken hatred for a robe who dared lay hands on him.

The descent wasn't difficult, but Jon did it slowly with much apparent discomfort. He hopped into the center of the floor—leaning on the cases as if for support. Coleman and Druce were both there as well as a group of hard-eyed newcomers. They raised their guns at his approach but Coleman stopped them with a gesture.

"This is *my* robe, boys, I'll see to it that he's happy."

He raised his gun and shot Jon's remaining leg off. Twisted around by the blast Jon fell helplessly to the floor. He looked up into the smoking mouth of the .75.

"Very smart for a tin-can, but not smart enough. We'll get the junk on the boat some other way, some way that won't mean having you around under foot." Death looked out of his narrowed eyes.

Less than two minutes had passed since Jon's call. The watchers must have been keeping 24 hour stations, waiting for Venex 17's phone message.

The main door went down with the sudden scream of torn steel. A whippet tank crunched over the wreck and covered the group with its multiple pom-poms. They were an instant too late, Coleman pulled the trigger.

Jon saw the tensing trigger finger and pushed hard against the floor. His head rolled clear but the bullet tore through his shoulder. Coleman didn't have a chance for a second shot, there was a fizzling hiss from the tank and the riot ports released a flood of tear gas. The stricken men never saw the gas-masked police that poured in from the street.

Jon lay on the floor of the police station while a tech made temporary repairs on his leg and shoulder. Across the room Venex 17 was moving his new body with evident pleasure.

"Now this really feels like *something!* I was sure my time was up when that land slip caught me. But maybe I ought to start from the beginning." He stamped across the room and shook Jon's inoperable hand.

"The name is Wil Counter-4951L3, not that *that* means much any more. I've worn so many different bodies that I forget what I originally looked like. I went right from factory-school to a police training school—and I have been on the job ever since—Force of Detectives, Sergeant Jr. Grade, Investigation Department. I spend most of my time selling candy bars or newspapers, or serving drinks in crumb joints. Gather information, make reports and keep tab on guys for other departments.

"This last job—and I'm sorry I had to use a Venex identity, I don't think I brought any dishonor to your family—I was on loan to the Customs department. Seems a ring was bringing uncut junk—heroin—into the country. F.B.I. tabbed all the operators here, but no one knew how the stuff got in. When Coleman, he's the local bigshot, called the

agencies for an underwater robot, I was packed into a new body and sent running.

"I alerted the squad as soon as I started the tunnel, but the damned thing caved in on me before I found out what ship was doing the carrying. From there on you know what happened.

"Not knowing I was out of the game the squad sat tight and waited. The hop merchants saw a half million in snow sailing back to the old country so they had you dragged in as a replacement. You made the phone call and the cavalry rushed in at the last moment to save two robots from a rusty grave."

Jon, who had been trying vainly to get in a word, saw his chance as Wil Counter turned to admire the reflection of his new figure in a window.

"You shouldn't be telling me those things—about your police investigations and department operations. Isn't this information supposed to be secret? Specially from robots!"

"Of course it is!" was Wil's airy answer. "Captain Edgecombe—he's the head of my department—is an expert on all kinds of blackmail. I'm supposed to tell you so much confidential police business that you'll have to either join the department or be shot as a possible informer." His laughter wasn't shared by the bewildered Jon.

"Truthfully, Jon, we need you and can use you. Robes that can think fast and act fast aren't easy to find. After hearing about the tricks you pulled in that warehouse, the Captain swore to decapitate me permanently if I couldn't get you to join up. Do you need a job? Long hours, short pay—but guaranteed to never get boring."

Wil's voice was suddenly serious. "You saved my life, Jon —those snowbirds would have left me in that sandpile until all hell froze over. I'd like you for a mate, I think we could get along well together." The gay note came back into his voice, "And besides that, I may be able to save your life some day—I hate owing debts."

The tech was finished, he snapped his tool box shut and left. Jon's shoulder motor was repaired now, he sat up. When they shook hands this time it was a firm clasp. The kind you know will last awhile.

Jon stayed in an empty cell that night. It was gigantic compared to the hotel and barrack rooms he was used to. He wished that he had his missing legs so he could take a little walk up and down the cell. He would have to wait until the morning. They were going to fix him up then before he started the new job.

He had recorded his testimony earlier and the impossible events of the past day kept whirling around in his head. He would think about it some other time; right now all he wanted to do was let his overworked circuits cool down, if he only had something to read, to focus his attention on. Then, with a start, he remembered the booklet. Everything had moved so fast that the earlier incident with the truck driver had slipped his mind completely.

He carefully worked it out from behind the generator shielding and opened the first page of *Robot Slaves in a World Economy*. A card slipped from between the pages and he read the short message on it.

PLEASE DESTROY THIS CARD AFTER READING

If you think there is truth in this book and would like to hear more, come to Room B, 107 George St. any Tuesday at 5 P.M.

The card flared briefly and was gone. But he knew that it wasn't only a perfect memory that would make him remember that message. . . .

THE DAY WILL COME . . .

SCHOLARS ARE AGREED that the terrestrial lion is the closest we can come to describing what the original Venusians—with whom we have so little contact these days—call *Bimpils*. Old Venusian legends, taken down on visitape by the early explorers, mention the thought-roars of the Bimpils who appear to have been held in considerable awe by the original inhabitants of the McCampbell Territory.

When it comes down to giffen-tacks, though, we don't really know Venus too well after all. In the old days they used to have all sorts of strange ideas about both climate and life on the planet—weird ideas really when you compare them to reality. In actuality, your problem on much of Venus is very much the same as your problem on Mars—survival on the deserts. True, there are swamps. True, there are fantastic marshes, eternally steaming jungles where strange creatures and even stranger human-like beings are said to live. But who, in their right senses, goes there?

I certainly haven't been that far down South. I've been over to Finchburg several times, that little mining settlement ignoring the desert where Trixie O'Neill lives, and I've been to Storington and Satterlee of course. And to Venusport, where the big liners land.

And I've been up to the hills—twice—the hills where the original Venusians still live. They claim we're too noisy and that we're much too violent in our thoughts and motions, so

have withdrawn to the hills. Late in the evenings—what passes for evenings in the hills of Venus—the old men chant of the days when Venus was younger and when the Bimpils roamed the green plains, and you can't help understanding the nostalgia in their shrill chants. Hanno Rock, the distinguished translator of a number of poems from the Tritonian, communicates something of the nostalgia in these cries of a dwindling race—

"The Bimpil of Bimpils never roars—he talks with his antennae—
and when these quiver the heavens cry out, in anger and in pain,
and lightning flashes from the Aakan hills where Bimpils live forever,
and we who once did rule this land, we cower in our huts.
There was a golden time when the Bimpil ranged the green plains,—
today we huddle here in these cold, dakka hills,
while the barbarians trample down the sacred sand-lillies,
but the day will come when the Bimpil of Bimpils will *roar!"*

VITHALDAS H. O'QUINN