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A MILE BEYOND THE MOON

C. M. KORNBLUTH

MANOR
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INC.

A MANOR BOOK 1976

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Make Mine Mars

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*"X is for the ecstasy she ga-a-ave me;
E is for her eyes—one, two, and three-ee;
T is for the teeth with which she'd sha-a-ave me;
S is for her scales of i-vo-ree-ee-ee..."*

Somebody was singing, and my throbbing head objected. I seemed to have a mouthful of sawdust.

*"T is for her tentacles ah-round me;
J is for her jowls—were none soo-oo fair;
H is for the happy day she found me;
Fe is for the iron in her hair..."*

I ran my tongue around inside my mouth. It was full of sawdust—spruce and cedar, rocketed in from Earth.

"Put them all to-gether, they spell Xetstjhfe..."

My eyes snapped open, and I sat up, cracking my head on the underside of the table beneath which I was lying. I lay down and waited for the pinwheels to stop spinning. I tried to think it out. Spruce and cedar ... Honest Blogri's Olde Earthe Saloon ... eleven stingers with a Sirian named Wenjtkpli...

"A worrud that means the wur-r-l-l-d too-oo mee-ee-ee!"

Through the fading pinwheels I saw a long and horrid face, a Sirian face, peering at me with kindly interest under the table. It was Wenjtkpli.

"Good morning, little Earth chum," he said. "You feel not so tired now?"

"Morning?" I yelled, sitting up again and cracking my head again and lying down again to wait for the pinwheels to fade again.

"You sleep," I heard him say, "fourteen hours—so happy, so peaceful!"

"I gotta get out of here," I mumbled, scrambling about on the imported sawdust for my hat. I found I was wearing it, and climbed out, stood up, and leaned against the table, swaying and spitting out the last of the spruce and cedar.

"You like another stinger?" asked Wenjtkpli brightly. I retched feebly.

"Fourteen hours," I mumbled. "That makes it 0900 Mars now, or exactly ten hours past the time I was supposed to report for the night side at the bureau."

"But last night you talk different," the Sirian told me in surprise. "You say many times how bureau chief McGillicuddy can take lousy job and jam—"

"That was last night," I moaned. "This is this morning."

"Relax, little Earth chum. I sing again song you taught me:

*X is for the ecstasy she ga-a-ave me;
E is for—"*

My throbbing head still objected. I flapped good-by at him and set a course for the door of Blogri's joint. The quaint period mottoes:

"QUAFFE YE NUT-BROWN AYLE"

"DROPPE DEAD TWYCE"

and so on—didn't look so quaint by the cold light of the Martian dawn.

An unpleasant little character, Venusian or something, I'd seen around the place oozed up to me. "Head hurt plenty, huh?" he simpered.

"This is no time for sympathy," I said. "Now one side or a flipper off—I gotta go to work."

"No sympathy," he said, his voice dropping to a whisper. He fumbled oddly in his belt, then showed me a little white capsule. "Clear your head, huh? Work like lightning, you bet!"

I was interested. "How much?"

"For you, friend, nothing. Because I hate seeing fellows suffer with big head."

"Beat it," I told him, and shoved past through the door. That pitch of his with a free sample meant he was pushing J-K-B. I was in enough trouble without adding an unbreakable addiction to the stuff. If I'd taken his free sample, I would have been back to see him in 12 hours, sweating blood for more. And that time he would have named his own price.

I fell into an eastbound chair and fumbled a quarter into the slot. The thin, cold air of the pressure dome was clearing my head already. I was sorry for all the times I'd cussed a skinflint dome administration for not supplying a richer air mix or heating the outdoors more lavishly. I felt good enough to shave, and luckily had my razor in my wallet. By the time the chair was gliding past the building where Interstellar News had a floor, I had the whiskers off my jaw and most of the sawdust out of my hair.

The floater took me up to our floor while I tried not to think of what McGillicuddy would have to say.

The newsroom was full of noise as usual. McGillicuddy was in the copydesk slot chewing his way through a pile of dispatches due to be filed on the pressure dome split for A.M. newscasts in four minutes by the big wall clock. He fed his copy, without looking, to an operator battering the keys of the old-fashioned radioteletype that was good enough to serve our local clients.

"Two minutes short!" he yelled at one of the men on the rim. "Gimme a brightener! Gimme a god-damned brightener!" The rim man raced to the receiving ethertypes from Gammadion, Betelgeuse, and the other Interstellar bureaus. He yanked an item from one of the clicking machines and scaled it at McGillicuddy, who slashed at it with his pencil and passed it to the operator. The tape the operator was cutting started through the transmitter-distributor, and on all local clients' radioteletypes appeared:

"FIFTEEN-MINUTE INTERSTELLAR NEWSCAST AM MARS PRESSURE DOMES."

Everybody leaned back and lit up. McGillicuddy's eye fell on me, and I cleared my throat.

"Got a cold?" he asked genially.

"Nope. No cold."

"Touch of indigestion? Flu, maybe? You're tardy today."

"I know it."

"Bright boy." He was smiling. That was bad.

"Spencer," he told me. "I thought long and hard about you. I thought about you when you failed to show up for the nightside. I thought about you intermittently through the night as I took your shift. Along about 0300 I decided what to do with you. It was as though Providence had taken a hand. It was as though I prayed 'Lord, what shall I do with a drunken, no-good son of a spacecook who ranks in my opinion with the boils of Job as an affliction to man?' Here's the answer, Spencer."

He tossed me a piece of ethertype paper, torn from one of our interstellar-circuit machines. On it was the following dialogue:

ANYBODY TTHURE I MEAN THERE THIS MARSBUO ISN GA PLS WOT TTHUT I MEAN WOT THAT MEAN PLEASE

THIS IS THE MARS BUREAU OF INTERSTELLAR NEWS. WHO ARE YOU AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING HORSING AROUND ON OUR KRUEGER 60-B CIRCUIT TELETYPE QUESTIONMARK. WHERE IS REGULAR STAFFER. GO AHEAD

THATIS WOT I AM CALLING YOU ABBOUUT. KENNEDY DIED THIS MORNINGPNEUMONIA. I AM WEEMS EDITOR PHOENIX. U SENDING REPLACEMENT KENNEDY PLEAS

THIS MCGILLICUDDY, MARSBUO ISN CHIEF. SENDING REPLACEMENT KENNEDY SOONEST. HAVE IDEAL MAN FOR JOB. END.

That was all. It was enough.

"Chief," I said to McGillicuddy. "Chief, you can't. You wouldn't—*would* you?"

"Better get packed," he told me, busily marking up copy. "Better take plenty of nice, warm clothing. I understand Krueger 60-B is about one thousand times dimmer than the sun. That's absolute magnitude, of course—Frostbite's in quite close. A primitive community, I'm told. Kennedy didn't like it. But of course the poor old duffer wasn't good enough to handle anything swifter than a one-man bureau on a one-planet split. Better take *lots* of warm clothing."

"I quit," I said.

"Sam," said somebody, in a voice that always makes me turn to custard inside.

"Hello, Ellie," I said. "I was just telling Mr. McGillicuddy that he isn't going to shoot me off to Frostbite to rot."

"Freeze," corrected McGillicuddy with relish. "Freeze. Good morning, Miss Masters. Did you want to say a few parting words to your friend?"

"I do," she told him, and drew me aside to no man's land where the ladies of the press prepared strange copy for the gentler sex. "Don't quit, Sam," she said in that voice. "I could never love a quitter. What if it *is* a minor assignment?"

"Minor," I said. "What a gem of understatement *that* is!"

"It'll be good for you," she insisted. "You can show him what you've got on the ball. You'll be on your own except for the regular dispatches to the main circuit and your local split. You could dig up all sorts of cute feature stories that'd get your name known." And so on. It was partly her logic, partly that voice and partly her promise to kiss me good-by at the port.

"I'll take it," I told McGillicuddy. He looked up with a pleased smile and murmured: "The power of prayer..."

The good-by kiss from Ellie was the only thing about the journey that wasn't nightmarish. ISN's expense account stuck me on a rusty bucket that I shared with glamorous freight like yak kids and tenpenny nails. The little yaks blatted whenever we went into overdrive to break through the speed of light. The Greenhough Effect—known to readers of the science features as "supertime"—scared hell out of them. On ordinary rocket drive, they just groaned and whimpered to each other the yak equivalent of "Thibet was never like this!"

The Frostbite spaceport wasn't like the South Pole, but it was like Greenland. There was a bunch of farmers waiting for their yaks, beating their mittened hands together and exhaling long plumes of vapor. The collector of customs, a rat-faced city boy, didn't have the decency to turn them over and let the hayseeds get back to the administration building. I watched through a porthole and saw him stalling and dawdling over a sheaf of papers for each of the farmers. Oddly enough, the stalling and dawdling stopped as soon as the farmers caught on and passed over a few dollars. Nobody even bothered to slip it shamefacedly from one hand to another. They just handed it over, not caring who saw—Rat-Face sneering, the farmers dumbly accepting the racket.

My turn came. Rat-Face came aboard and we were introduced by the chief engineer. "Harya," he said. "Twenny bucks."

"What for?"

"Landing permit. Later at the administration you can pay your visitor's permit. That's twenny bucks too."

"I'm not a visitor. I'm coming here to work."

"Work, schmurk. So you'll need a work permit—twenny bucks." His eyes wandered. "Whaddaya got there?"

"Ethertype parts. May need them for replacements."

He was on his knees in front of the box, crooning, "Triple ad valorem plus twenny dollars security bond for each part plus twenny dollars inspection fee plus twenny dollars for decontamination plus twenny dollars for failure to declare plus—"

"Break it up, Joe," said a new arrival—a grey-mustached little man, lost in his parka. "He's a friend of mine. Extend the courtesies of the port."

Rat-Face—Joe—didn't like it, but he took it. He muttered about doing his duty and gave me a card.

"Twenny bucks?" I asked, studying it.

"Nah," he said angrily. "You're free-loading." He got out.

"Looks as if you saved ISN some money," I said to the little man. He threw back the hood of his parka in the relative warmth of the ship.

"Why not? We'll be working together. I'm Chenery from the *Phoenix*."

"Oh, yeah—the client."

"That's right," he agreed, grinning. "*The client*. What exactly did you do to get banished to Frostbite?"

Since there was probably a spacemail aboard from McGillicuddy telling him exactly what I did, I told him. "Chief thought I was generally shiftless."

"You'll do here," he said. "It's a shiftless, easy-going kind of place. I have the key to your bureau. Want me to lead the way?"

"What about my baggage?"

"Your stuff's safe. Port officers won't loot it when they know you're a friend of the *Phoenix*."

That wasn't exactly what I'd meant; I'd always taken it for granted that port officers didn't loot anybody's baggage, no matter whose friends they were or weren't. As Chenery had said, it seemed to be a shiftless, easy-going place. I let him lead the way; he had a jeep waiting to take us to the administration building, a musty, too-tight hodgepodge of desks. A lot of them were vacant, and the dowdy women and fattish men at the others didn't seem to be very busy. The women were doing their nails or reading; the men mostly were playing blotto with pocket-size dials for small change. A couple were sleeping.

From the administration building a jet job took us the 20 kilos to town. Frostbite, the capital of Frostbite, housed maybe 40,000 people. No pressure dome. Just the glorious outdoors, complete with dust, weather, insects, and a steady, icy wind. Hick towns seem to be the same the universe over. There was a main street called Main Street with clothing shops and restaurants, gambling houses, and more or less fancy saloons, a couple of vaudeville theaters, and dance halls. At the unfashionable end of Main Street were some farm implement shops, places to buy surveying instruments and geologic detectors and the building that housed the Interstellar News Service Frostbite Bureau. It was a couple of front rooms on the second floor, with a mechanical dentist below, an osteopath above, and a "ride-up-and-save" parka emporium to the rear.

Chenery let me in, and it was easy to see at once why Kennedy had died of pneumonia. Bottles. The air conditioning

must have carried away every last sniff of liquor, but it still seemed to me that I could smell the rancid, home-brew stuff he'd been drinking. They were everywhere, the relics of a shameless, hopeless alcoholic who'd been good for nothing better than Frostbite. Sticky glasses and bottles everywhere told the story.

I slid open the hatch of the incinerator and started tossing down bottles and glasses from the copy desk, the morgue, the ethertype. Chenery helped, and decently kept his mouth shut. When we'd got the place kind of cleaned up I wanted to know what the daily routine was like.

Chenery shrugged. "Anything you make it, I guess. I used to push Kennedy to get more low-temperature agriculture stories for us. And those yaks that landed with you started as a civic-betterment stunt the *Phoenix* ran. It was all tractors until our farm editor had a brainstorm and brought in a pair. It's a hell of a good idea—you can't get milk, butter and meat out of a tractor. Kennedy helped us get advice from some Earthside agronomy station to set it up and helped get clearance for the first pair too. I don't have much idea of what copy he filed back to ISN. Frankly, we used him mostly as a contact man."

I asked miserably: "What the hell kind of copy *can* you file from a hole like this?" He laughed and cheerfully agreed that things were pretty slow.

"Here's today's *Phoenix*," he said, as the faxer began to hum. A neat, 16-page tabloid, stapled, pushed its way out in a couple of seconds. I flipped through it and asked: "No color at *all*?"

Chenery gave me a wink. "What the subscribers and advertisers don't know won't hurt them. Sometimes we break down and give them a page-one color pic."

I studied the *Phoenix*. Very conservative layout—naturally. It's competition that leads to circus make-up, and the *Phoenix* was the only sheet on the planet. The number-one story under a modest two-column head was an ISN farm piece on fertilizers for high-altitude agriculture, virtually unedited. The number-two story was an ISN piece on the current United Planets assembly.

"Is Frostbite in the UP, by the way?" I asked.

"No. It's the big political question here. The *Phoenix* is against applying. We figure the planet can't afford the assessment in the first place, and if it could there wouldn't be anything to gain by joining."

"Um." I studied the ISN piece closer and saw that the *Phoenix* was very much opposed indeed. The paper had doctored our story plenty. I hadn't seen the original, but ISN is—in fact and according to its charter—as impartial as it's humanly possible to be. But our story, as it emerged in the *Phoenix*, consisted of: a paragraph about an undignified, wrangling debate over the Mars-excavation question; a fist-fight between a Titanian and an Earth delegate in a corridor; a Sirian's red-hot denunciation of the UP as a power-politics instrument of the old planets; and a report of UP administrative expenses—without a corresponding report of achievements.

"I suppose," I supposed, "that the majority of the planet is stringing along with the *Phoenix*?"

"Eight to one, the last time a plebiscite was run off," said Chenery proudly.

"You amaze me." I went on through the paper. It was about 70 per cent ads, most of them from the Main Street stores we'd passed. The editorial page had an anti-UP cartoon showing the secretary-general of the UP as the greasy, affable conductor of a jetbus jammed to the roof with passengers. A sign on the bus said "Fare, \$15,000,000 and up per year." A road sign pointing in the direction the bus was heading said, "To Nowhere." The conductor was saying to a small, worried-looking man in a parka labeled "New Agricultural Planets" that, "There's always room for one more!!" The outline said: "But is there—and is it worth it?"

The top editorial was a glowing tribute from the *Phoenix* to the *Phoenix* for its pioneering work in yaks, pinned on the shipment that arrived today. The second editorial was anti-UP, echoing the cartoon and quoting from the Sirian in the page-one ISN piece.

It was a good, efficient job of the kind that turns a working newsman's stomach while he admires the technique.

"Well, what do you think of it?" asked Chenery proudly.

I was saved from answering by a *brrp* from the ethertype.

"GPM FRB GA PLS" it said. "Good-afternoon, Frostbite Bureau—go ahead, please." What with? I hunted around and found a typed schedule on the wall that Kennedy had evidently once drawn up in a spasm of activity.

"MIN PLS" I punched out on the ethertype, and studied the sked.

It was quite a document.

0900-1030: BREAKFAST
1030-1100: PHONE WEEMS FOR BITCHES RE SVS
1100-1200: NOTE MARSBUO RE BITCHES
1200-1330: LUNCH
1330-1530: RUN DROPS TO WEEMS: GAB WITH CHENERY
1530-1700: CLIP PHOENIX, REWRITE PUNCH & FILE

SUNDAYS

0900-1700: WRITE AND FILE ENTERPRISERS.

Chenery spared my blushes by looking out the window as I read the awful thing. I hadn't quite realized how low I'd sunk until then.

"Think it's funny?" I asked him—unfairly, I knew. He was being decent. It was decent of him not to spit in my eye and shove me off the sidewalk for that matter. I had hit bottom.

He didn't answer. He was embarrassed, and in the damn-fool way people have of finding a scapegoat I tried to make him feel worse. Maybe if I rubbed it in real hard he'd begin to feel almost as bad as I did. "I see," I told him, "that I've wasted a morning. Do you or Weems have any bitches for me to messenger-boy to Mars?"

"Nothing special," he said. "The way I said, we always like low-temperature and high-altitude agriculture stuff. And good farm-and-home material."

"You'll get it," I told him. "And now I see I'm behind clipping and rewriting and filing stories from your paper."

"Don't take it so hard," he said unhappily. "It's not such a bad place. I'll have them take your personal stuff to the Hamilton House and the bureau stuff here. It's the only decent hotel in town except the *Phoenix* and that's kind of high—" He saw that I didn't like him jumping to such accurate conclusions about my pay check and beat it with an apologetic grimace of a smile.

The ethertype went *brrp* again and said "GB FRB CU LTR" "Good-by, Frostbite. See you later." There must have been many days when old Kennedy was too sick or too sick at heart to rewrite pieces from the lone client. Then the machine began beating out news items which I'd tear off eventually and run over to the *Phoenix*.

"Okay, sweetheart," I told the clattering printer. "You'll get copy from Frostbite. You'll get copy that'll make the whole damned ISN sit up and take notice—" and I went on kidding myself in that vein for a couple of minutes but it went dry very soon.

Good God, but they've got me! I thought. If I'm no good on the job they'll keep me here because there's nothing lower. And if I'm good on the job they'll keep me here because I'm good at it. Not a chance in a trillion to *do* anything that'll get noticed—just plain stuck on a crummy planet with a crummy political machine that'll never make news in a million years!

I yanked down Kennedy's library—"YOUR FUTURE ON FROSTBITE," which was a C. of C. recruiting pamphlet, "MANUAL OF ETHERTYPE MAINTENANCE AND REPAIR," an ISN house handbook and "THE UNITED PLANETS ORGANIZATION SECRETARIAT COMMITTEE INTERIM REPORT ON HABIT-FORMING DRUGS IN INTERPLANETARY COMMERCE," a grey-backed UP monograph that got to Frostbite God knew how. Maybe Kennedy had planned to switch from home brew to something that would kill him quicker.

The Chamber of Commerce job gave a thumbnail sketch of my new home. Frostbite had been colonized about five

generations ago for the usual reason. Somebody had smelled money. A trading company planted a power reactor—still going strong—at the South Pole in exchange for choice tracts of land which they'd sold off to homesteaders, all from Earth and Earth-colonized planets. In fine print the pamphlet gave lip service to the UP ideal of interspecific brotherhood, *but*—So Frostbite, in typical hick fashion, thought only genus homo was good enough for its sacred soil and that all non-human species were more or less alarming monsters.

I looked at that editorial-page cartoon in the *Phoenix* again and really noticed this time that there were Sirians, Venusians, Martians, Lyrans, and other non-human beings jammed into the jetbus, and that they were made to look sinister. On my first glance, I'd taken them in casually, the way you would on Earth or Mars or Vega's Quembrill, but here they were supposed to scare me stiff and I was supposed to go around saying, "Now, don't get me wrong, some of my best friends are Martians, *but*—"

Back to the pamphlet. The trading company suddenly dropped out of the chronology. By reading between the lines I could figure out that it was one of the outfits which had over-extended itself planting colonies so it could have a monopoly hauling to and from the new centers. A lot of them had gone smash when the Greenhough Effect took interstellar flight out of the exclusive hands of the supergiant corporations and put it in the reach of medium-sized operators like the rusty-bucket line that had hauled in me, the yaks, and the tenpenny nails.

In a constitutional convention two generations back the colonists had set up a world government of the standard type, with a president, a unicameral house, and a three-step hierarchy of courts. They'd adopted the United Planets model code of laws except for the bill of rights—to keep the slimy extra-terrestrials out—with no thanks to the UP.

And that was it, except for the paean of praise to the independent farmer, the backbone of his planet, beholden to no man, etc.

I pawed through the ethertype handbook. The introduction told me that the perfection of instantaneous transmission had opened the farthest planets to the Interstellar News Service, which I knew; that it was knitting the colonized universe together with bonds of understanding, which I doubted; and that it was a boon to all human and non-human intelligences, which I thought was a bare-faced lie. The rest of it was "see Fig. 76 3b," "Wire 944 will slip easily through orifice 459j," "if Knob 545 still refuses to turn, take Wrench 31 and gently, without forcing—" Nothing I couldn't handle.

The ethertype was beating out:

FARM—NOTE FROSTBITE

NOME, ALASKA, EARTH—ISN—HOUSEWIVES OF THE COLDER FARM PLANETS WOULD DO WELL TO TAKE A LEAF FROM THE BOOK OF THE PRIMITIVE AMERINDIAN SEAMSTRESS. SO SAYS PROFESSOR OF DOMESTIC SCIENCE MADGE MCGUINNESS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF NOME'S SCHOOL OF LOW-TEMPERATURE AGRONOMY. THE INDIAN MAID BY SEWING LONG, NARROW STRIPS OF FUR AND BASKET-WEAVING THEM INTO A BLANKET TURNED OUT COVERINGS WITH TWICE THE WARMTH AND HALF THE WEIGHT OF FUR ROBES SIMPLY SEWED EDGE TO EDGE—

That was my darling, with her incurable weakness for quote leads and the unspeakable "so says." Ellie Masters, I thought, you're a lousy writer but I love you and I'd like to wring your neck for helping McGillicuddy con me into this. "Dig up all sorts of cute feature stories," you told me and you made it sound sensible. Better I should be under the table at Blogri's with a hangover and sawdust in my hair than writing little by-liners about seventeen tasty recipes for yak manure, which is all that's ever going to come out of this God-forsaken planet.

Rat-Face barged in without knocking; a moronic-looking boy was with him toting the box of ethertype spare parts.

"Just set it anywhere," I said. "Thanks for getting it right over here. Uh, Joe, isn't it?—Joe, where could I get me a parka like that? I like those lines. Real mink?"

It was the one way to his heart. "You betcha. Only plaid mink lining on Frostbite. Ya notice the lapels? Look!" He turned them forward and showed me useless little hidden pockets with zippers that looked like gold.

"I can see you're a man with taste."

"Yeah. Not like some of these bums. If a man's Collector of the Port he's got a position to live up to. Look, I hope ya

didn't get me wrong there at the field. Nobody told me you were coming. If you're right with the *Phoenix* you're right with the Organization. If you're right with the Organization, you're right with Joe Downing. I'm regular."

He said that last word the way a new bishop might say: "I am consecrated."

"Glad to hear that. Joe, when could I get a chance to meet some of the other regular Boys?"

"Ya wanna get In, huh?" he asked shrewdly. "There's been guys here a lot longer than you, Spencer."

"In, Out," I shrugged. "I want to play it smart. It won't do me any harm."

He barked with laughter. "Not a bit," he said. "Old man Kennedy didn't see it that way. You'll get along here. Keep ya nose clean and we'll see about The Boys." He beckoned the loutish porter and left me to my musings.

That little rat had killed his man, I thought—but where, why, and for whom?

I went out into the little corridor and walked into the "ride-up-and-save" parka emporium that shared the second floor with me. Leon Portwanger, said the sign on the door. He was a fat old man sitting cross-legged, peering through bulging shell-rimmed glasses at his needle as it flashed through fur.

"Mr. Portwanger? I'm the new ISN man, Sam Spencer."

"So?" he grunted, not looking up.

"I guess you knew Kennedy pretty well."

"Never. Never."

"But he was right in front there—"

"Never," grunted the old man. He stuck himself with the needle, swore, and put his finger in his mouth. "Now see what you made me do?" he said angrily and indistinctly around the finger. "You shouldn't bother me when I'm working. Can't you see when a man's working?"

"I'm sorry," I said, and went back into the newsroom. A man as old as Leon, tailoring as long as Leon, didn't stick himself. He didn't even wear a thimble—the forefinger was calloused enough to be a thimble itself. He didn't stick himself unless he was very, very excited—or unless he wanted to get rid of somebody. I began to wish I hadn't fired those bottles of Kennedy's home brew down to the incinerator so quickly.

At that point I began a thorough shakedown of the bureau. I found memos torn from the machine concerning overfiling or failure to file, clippings from the *Phoenix*, laundry lists, style memos from ISN, paid bills, blacksheets of letters to Marsbuo requesting a transfer to practically anywhere but Frostbite, a list of phone numbers and a nasty space-mailed memo from McGillicuddy.

It said: "Re worldshaker, wll blv whn see. Meanwhile sggst keep closer sked avoid wastage costly wiretime. Reminder guppy's firstest job offhead orchidbitches three which bypassed u yestermonth. How? McG."

It was typical of McGillicuddy to memo in cablese. Since news bureaus began—as "wire services"; see his archaic "wiretime"—their executives have been memoing underlings in cablese as part of one-of-the-working-press-Jones-boys act that they affect. They also type badly so they can slash up their memo with copyreader symbols. This McGillicuddy did too, of course. The cablese, the bad typing, and the copy-reading made it just about unintelligible to an outsider.

To me it said that McGillicuddy doubted Kennedy's promise to file a worldshaking story, that he was sore about Kennedy missing his scheduled times for filing on the ethertype, and that he was plenty sore about Kennedy failing to intercept complaints from the client *Phoenix*, three of which McGillicuddy had been bothered by during the last month.

So old Kennedy had dreamed of filing a worldshaker. I dug further into the bureau files and the desk drawers, finding only an out of date "WHO'S WHO IN THE GALAXY." No notes, no plans, no lists of interviewees, no tipsters—no blacksheet, I realized, of the letter to which McGillicuddy's cutting memo was a reply.

God only knew what it all meant. I was hungry, sleepy and sick at heart. I looked up the number of the Hamilton House

and found that helpful little Chenery had got me a reservation and that my luggage had arrived from the field. I headed for a square meal and my first night in bed for a week without yaks blatting at me through a thin bulkhead.

It wasn't hard to fit in. Frostbite was a swell place to lose your ambition and acquire a permanent thirst. The sardonic sked posted on the bureau wall—I had been planning to tear it down for a month, but the inclination became weaker and weaker. It was so true to life.

I would wake up the Hamilton House, have a skimpy breakfast and get down to the bureau. Then there'd be a phone conversation with Weems during which he'd nag me for more and better Frostbite-slant stories. In an hour of "wiretime" I'd check in with Marsbuo. At first I risked trying to sneak a chat with Ellie, but the jokers around Marsbuo cured me of that. One of them pretended he was Ellie on the other end of the wire and before I caught on had me believing that she was six months pregnant with a child by McGillicuddy and was going to kill herself for betraying me. Good clean fun, and after that I stuck to spacemail for my happy talk.

After lunch, at the Hamilton House or more often in a tavern, I'd tear up the copy from the printer into neat sheets and deliver them to the *Phoenix* building on the better end of Main Street. (If anything big had come up, I would have phoned them to hold the front page open. If not, local items filled it, and ISN copy padded out the rest of their sheet.) As in Kennedy's sked, I gabbed with Chenery or watched the compositors or proof pullers or transmittermen at work, and then went back to the office to clip my copy rolling out of the faxer. On a good day I'd get four or five items—maybe a human interester about a yak mothering an orphaned baby goat, a new wrinkle on barn insulation with native materials that the other cold-farming planets we served could use, a municipal election or a murder trial verdict to be filed just for the record.

Evenings I spent at a tavern talking and sopping up home brew, or at one of the two-a-day vaudeville houses, or at the Clubhouse. I once worked on the Philadelphia *Bulletin*, so the political setup was nothing new to me. After Joe Downing decided I wouldn't get pushy, he took me around to meet The Boys.

The Clubhouse was across the street from the three-story capitol building of Frostbite's World Government. It was a little bigger than the capitol and in much better repair. Officially it was the headquarters of the Frostbite Benevolent Society, a charitable, hence tax-free, organization. Actually it was the headquarters of the Frostbite Planetary Party, a standard gang of brigands. Down on the wrong end of Main Street somewhere was an upper room where the Frostbite Interplanetary Party, made up of liberals, screwballs, and disgruntled ex-members of the Organization but actually run by stooges of that Organization, hung out.

The Boys observed an orderly rotation of officers based on seniority. If you got in at the age of 18, didn't bolt and didn't drop dead you'd be president some day. To the party you had to bring loyalty, hard work—not on your payroll job, naturally, but on your electioneering—and cash. You kept bringing cash all your life; salary kickbacks, graft kickbacks, contributions for gold dinner services, tickets to testimonial banquets, campaign chest assignments, widows' and orphans' fund contributions, burial insurance, and dues, dues, dues.

As usual, it was hard to learn who was who. The President of Frostbite was a simple-minded old boy named Witherspoon, so far gone in senile decay that he had come to believe the testimonial-banquet platitudes he uttered. You could check him off as a wheelhorse. He was serving the second and last year of his second and last term, and there was a mild battle going on between his Vice-President and the Speaker of the House as to who would succeed him. It was a traditional battle and didn't mean much; whoever lost would be next in line. When one of the contestants was so old or ill that he might not live to claim his term if he lost, the scrap would be waived in a spirit of good sportsmanship that the voters would probably admire if they ever heard of it.

Joe Downing was a comer. His sponsorship of me meant more than the friendship of Witherspoon would have. He was Chenery's ally; they were the leadership of the younger, sportier element. Chenery's boss Weems was with the older crowd that ate more, talked more, and drank less.

I had to join a committee before I heard of George, though. That's the way those things work.

It was a special committee for organizing a testimonial banquet for Witherspoon on his 40th year in the party. I wound up

in the subcommittee to determine a testimonial gift for the old buffer. I knew damned well that we'd be expected to start the subscription for the gift rolling, so I suggested a handsome—and—inexpensive—illuminated scroll with a sentiment lettered on it. The others were scandalized. One fat old woman called me "cheap" and a fat male pay-roller came close to accusing me of irregularity, at which I was supposed to tremble and withdraw my suggestion. I stood on my rights, and wrote a minority report standing up for the scroll while the majority of the subcommittee agreed on an inscribed sterling tea service.

At the next full committee meeting we delivered our reports and I thought it would come to a vote right away. But it seemed they weren't used to there being two opinions about anything. They were flustered, and the secretary slipped out with both reports during a five-minute adjournment. He came back and told me, beaming, "Chenery says George liked your idea." The committee was reconvened and because George liked my idea my report was adopted and I was appointed a subcommittee of one to procure the scroll.

I didn't learn any more about George after the meeting except that some people who liked me were glad I'd been favorably noticed and others were envious about the triumph of the Johnny-come-lately.

I asked Chenery in the bar. He laughed at my ignorance and said, "George *Parsons*."

"Publisher of the *Phoenix*? I thought he was an absentee owner."

"He doesn't spend a lot of time on Frostbite. At least I don't think he does. As a matter of fact, I don't know a lot about his comings and goings. Maybe Weems does."

"He swings a lot of weight in the Organization."

Chenery looked puzzled. "I guess he does at that. Every once in a while he does speak up and you generally do what he says. It's the paper, I suppose. He could wreck any of the boys." Chenery wasn't being irregular: newsmen are always in a special position.

I went back to the office and, late as it was, sent a note to the desk to get the one man subcommittee job cleaned up:

ATTN MCGILLICUDDY RE CLIENT RELATIONS NEED SOONEST ILLUMINATED SCROLL PRESENT
HOMER WITHERSPOON PRESIDENT FROSTBITE HONORING HIM 40 YEARS MEMBERSHIP
FROSTBITE PLANETARY PARTY USUAL SENTIMENTS NOTE MUST BE TERRESTRIAL STYLE ART IF
NOT ACTUAL WORK EARTHER ACCOUNT ANTIBEM PREJUDICE HERE FRBBUO END.

That happened on one of those Sundays which, according to Kennedy's sardonic sked, was to be devoted to writing and filing enterprisers.

The scroll came through with a memo from McGillicuddy: "Fyi cking w/ clnt etif this gag wll hv ur hide. Reminder guppy's firstest job offheading orchidbitches one which bypassed u yesterweek. How? McG."

There was a sadly sweet letter from Ellie aboard the same rust-bucket. She wanted me to come back to her, but not a broken man. She wanted me to do something really big on Frostbite to show what I had in me. She was sure that if I really looked there'd be something more to file than the copy I'd been sending in. Yeah.

Well, the big news that week would be the arrival of a loaded immigrant ship from Thetis of Procyon, a planet whose ecology had been wrecked beyond repair in a few short generations by DDT, hydraulic mining, unrestricted logging, introduction of rabbits and house cats and the use of poison bait to kill varmints. In a few thousand years maybe the planet would have topsoil, cover crops, forests, and a balanced animal population again, but Thetis as of now was a ruin whose population was streaming away to whatever heavens it could find.

Frostbite had agreed to take 500 couples provided they were of terrestrial descent and could pass a means test—that is, provided they had money to be fleeced of. They were arriving on a bottom called *Esmeralda*. According to my year-old "LLOYDS' SHIPPING INDEX"—"exclusive accurate and up-to-date, being the result of daily advices from every part of the galaxy"—*Esmeralda* was owned by the Frimstedt Atomic Astrogation Company, Gammadion, gross tonnage 830,000, net tonnage 800,000, class GX—"freighter/steerage passengers"—insurance rating: hull A, atomics A. The tonnage difference meant real room for only about 850. If she took the full 1,000 she'd be jammed. She was due to arrive at Frostbite in the very early morning. Normally I would have kept a deathwatch, but the AA rating lulled me and I went

to the Hamilton House to sleep.

At 4:30, the bedside phone chimed. "This Willie Egan," a frightened voice said. "You remember—on the desk at the *Phoenix*." Desk, hell—he was a 17-year-old copyboy I'd tipped to alert me on any hot breaks.

"There's some kind of trouble with the *Esmeralda*," he said. "That big immigrant ship. They had a welcoming committee out, but the ship's overdue. I thought there might be a story in it. You got my home address? You better send the check there. Mr. Weems doesn't like us to do string work. How much do I get?"

"Depends," I said, waking up abruptly. "Thanks, kid." I was into my clothes and down the street in five minutes. It looked good; mighty good.

The ship was overcrowded, the AA insurance rating I had was a year old—maybe it had gone to pot since then and we'd have a major disaster on our hands.

I snapped on the newsroom lights and grabbed the desk phone, knocked down one toggle on the key box and demanded: "Space operator! Space operator!"

"Yes, sir. Let me have your call, please?"

"Gimme the bridge of the *Esmeralda* due to dock at the Frostbite spaceport today. While you're setting up the call gimme interplanetary and break in when you get the *Esmeralda*."

"Yes, sir." Click-click-click.

"Interplanetary operator."

"Gimme Planet Gammadion. Person-to-person, to the public relations officer of the Frimstedt Atomic Astrogation Company. No, I don't know his name. No, I *don't* know the Gammadion routing. While you're setting up the call gimme the local operator and break in when you get my party."

"Yes, sir." Click-click-click.

"Your call, please."

"Person-to-person, captain of the spaceport."

"Yes, sir."

Click-click-click. "Here is *Esmeralda*, sir."

"Who's calling?" yelled a voice. "This is the purser's office, who's calling?"

"Interstellar News, Frostbite Bureau. What's up about the ship being late?"

"I can't talk now! Oh, my God! I can't talk now! They're going crazy in the steerage—" He hung up and I swore a little.

"Space operator!" I yelled. "Get me *Esmeralda* again—if you can't get the bridge get the radio shack, the captain's cabin, anything in-board!"

"Yes, sir."

Click-click-click. "Here is your party, sir."

"Captain of the port's office," said the phone.

"This is Interstellar News. What's up about *Esmeralda*? I just talked to the purser in space and there's some trouble aboard."

"I don't know anything more about it than you boys," said the captain of the port. But his voice didn't sound right.

"How about those safety-standard stories?" I fired into the dark.

"That's a tomfool rumor!" he exploded. "Her atomics are perfectly safe!"

"Still," I told him, fishing, "it was an engineer's report—"

"Eh? What was? I don't know what you're talking about." He realized he'd been had. "Other ships have been an hour late before and there are always rumors about shipping. That's absolutely all I have to say—absolutely all!" He hung up.

Click-click-click. "Interplanetary operator. I am trying to place your call, sir." She must be too excited to plug in the right hole on her switchboard. A Frostbite Gammadion call probably cost more than her annual salary, and it was a gamble at that on the feeble and mysteriously erratic sub-radiation that carried voices across segments of the galaxy.

But there came a faint harumph from the phone. "This is Captain Gulbransen. Who is calling, please?"

I yelled into the phone respectfully: "Captain Gulbransen, this is Interstellar News Service on Frostbite." I knew the way conservative shipping companies have of putting ancient, irritable astrogators into public-relations berths after they are ripe to retire from space. "I was wondering, sir," I shouted, "if you'd care to comment on the fact that *Esmeralda* is overdue at Frostbite with 1,000 immigrants."

"Young man," wheezed Gulbransen dimly, "it is clearly stated in our tariffs filed with the ICC that all times of arrival are to be read as plus or minus eight Terrestrial Hours, and that the company assumes no liability in such cases as—"

"Excuse me, sir, but I'm aware that the eight-hour leeway is traditional. But isn't it a fact that the average voyage hits, the E.T.A. plus or minus only fifteen minutes T.H.?"

"That's so, but—"

"Please excuse me once more, sir—I'd like to ask just one more question. There is, of course, no reason for alarm in the lateness of *Esmeralda*, but wouldn't you consider a ship as much as one hour overdue as possibly in danger? And wouldn't the situation be rather alarming?"

"Well, one full hour, perhaps you would. Yes, I suppose so—but the eight-hour leeway, you understand—" I laid the phone down quietly on the desk and ripped through the *Phoenix* for yesterday. In the business section it said "*Esmeralda* due 0330." And the big clock on the wall said 0458.

I hung up the phone and sprinted for the ethertype, with the successive stories clear in my head, ready to be punched and fired off to Marsbuo for relay on the galactic trunk. I would beat out 15 clanging bells on the printer and follow them with

INTERSTELLAR FLASH

IMMIGRANT SHIP ESMERALDA SCHEDULED TO LAND FROSTBITE WITH 1,000 FROM THETIS PROCYON ONE AND ONE HALF HOURS OVERDUE: OWNER ADMITS SITUATION "ALARMING," CRAFT "IN DANGER."

And immediately after that a five-bell bulletin:

INTERSTELLAR BULLETIN

FROSTBITE—THE IMMIGRANT SHIP ESMERALDA, DUE TODAY AT FROSTBITE FROM THETIS PROCYON WITH 1,000 STEERAGE PASSENGERS ABOARD IS ONE AND ONE HALF HOURS OVERDUE. A SPOKESMAN FOR THE OWNERS, THE FRIMSTEDT ATOMIC ASTROGATION COMPANY, SAID SUCH A SITUATION IS "ALARMING" AND THAT THE CRAFT MIGHT BE CONSIDERED "IN DANGER." ESMERALDA IS AN 830 THOUSAND-TON FREIGHTER-STEERAGE PASSENGER CARRIER.

THE CAPTAIN OF THE PORT AT FROSTBITE ADMITTED THAT THERE HAVE BEEN RUMORS CIRCULATING ABOUT THE CONDITION OF THE CRAFTS ATOMICS THOUGH THESE WERE RATED "A" ONE YEAR AGO.

THE PURSER OF THE SPACESHIP, CONTACTED IN SPACE, WAS AGITATED AND INCOHERENT WHEN QUESTIONED. HE SAID—

"Get up, Spencer, get away from the machine."

It was Joe Downing, with a gun in his hand.

"I've got a story to file," I said blankly.

"Some other time." He stepped closer to the ethertype and let out a satisfied grunt when he saw the paper was clean. "Port captain called me," he said. "Told me you were nosing around."

"Will you get out of here?" I asked, stupefied. "Man, I've flash and bulletin matter to clear. Let me alone!"

"I said to get away from that machine or I'll cut ya down, boy."

"But why? *Why?*"

"George don't want any big stories out of Frostbite."

"You're crazy. Mr. Parsons is a newsman himself. Put that damn-fool gun away and let me get this out!"

I turned to the printer when a new voice said, "No! Don't do it, Mr. Spencer. He is a Nietzschean. He'll kill you, all right. He'll kill you, all right."

It was Leon Portwanger, the furrier, my neighbor, the man who claimed he never knew Kennedy. His fat, sagging face, his drooping white mustache, his sad black eyes enormous behind the bull's-eye spectacles were very matter-of-fact. He meant what he said. I got up and backed away from the ethertype.

"I don't understand it," I told them.

"You don't have to understand it," said the rat-faced collector of the port. "All you have to understand is that George don't like it." He fired one bullet through the printer and I let out a yelp. I'd felt that bullet going right through me.

"Don't," the steady voice of the furrier cautioned. I hadn't realized that I was walking toward Downing and that his gun was now on my middle. I stopped.

"That's better," said Downing. He kicked the phone connection box off the baseboard, wires snapping and trailing. "Now go to the Hamilton House and stay there for a couple of days."

I couldn't get it through my head. "But *Esmeralda's* a cinch to blow up," I told him. "It'll be a major space disaster. *Half of them are women!* I've got to get it out!"

"I'll take him back to his hotel, Mr. Downing," said Portwanger. He took my arm in his flabby old hand and led me out while that beautiful flash and bulletin and the first lead disaster and the new lead disaster went running through my head to a futile obbligation of: "They can't *do* this to me!" But they did it.

Somebody gave me a drink at the hotel and I got sick and a couple of bellboys helped me to bed. The next thing I knew I was feeling very clear-headed and wakeful and Chenery was hovering over me looking worried.

"You've been out cold for forty-eight hours," he said. "You had a high fever, chills, the works. What happened to you and Downing?"

"How's *Esmeralda*?" I demanded.

"Huh? Exploded about half a million miles off. The atomics went."

"Did anybody get it to ISN for me?"

"Couldn't. Interplanetary phones are out again. You seem to have got the last clear call through to Gammadion. And you put a bullet through your ethertype—"

"I did? Like hell—Downing did!"

"Oh? Well, that makes better sense. The fact is, Downing's dead. He went crazy with that gun of his and Chief Selig shot

him. But old Portwanger said you broke the ethertype when you got the gun away from Downing for a minute—no, that doesn't make sense. What's the old guy up to?"

"I don't give a damn. You see my pants anywhere? I want to get that printer fixed."

He helped me dress. I was a little weak on my pins and he insisted on pouring expensive eggnog into me before he'd let me go to the bureau.

Downing hadn't done much of a job, or maybe you can't do much of a job on an ethertype without running it through an induction furnace. Everything comes apart, everything's replaceable. With a lot of thumbing through the handbook I had all the busted bits and pieces out and new ones in. The adjustment was harder, needing two pairs of eyes. Chenery watched the meters while I turned the screws. In about four hours I was ready to call. I punched out:

NOTE MARSBUO ISN. FRBBUO RESTORED TO SVC AFTR MECHNCL TRBL ETILLNESS.

The machine spat back:

NOTE FRBBUO. HW ILLNSS COINCDE WTH MJR DISSTR YR TRRTRY? FYI GAMMADION BUO ISN
OUTRCHD FR ESMEALDA AFTR YR INXPLCBL SLNCE ETWS BDLY BTN GAMMADION BUOS
COMPTSHN. MCG END.

He didn't want to hear any more about it. I could see him stalking away from the printer to the copydesk slot to chew his way viciously through wordage for the major splits. I wished I could see in my mind's eye Ellie slipping over to the Krueger 60-B circuit sending printer and punching out a word or two of kindness—the machine stirred again. It said: "JOE JOE HOW COULD YOU? ELLIE."

Oh, God.

"Leave me alone, will you?" I asked Chenery.

"Sure—sure. Anything you say," he humored me, and slipped out.

I sat for a while at the desk, noticing that the smashed phone connection had been installed again, that the place had been policed up.

Leon Portwanger came waddling in with a bottle in his hand. "I have here some prune brandy," he said.

Things began to clear up. "*You* gave me that mickey," I said slowly. "And you've been lying about me. You said I wrecked the ethertype."

"You are a determinist and I was trying to save your life," he said, setting down two glasses and filling them. "Take your choice and I will have the other. No mickeys." I picked one and gulped it down—nasty, too-sweet stuff that tasted like plum peelings. He sipped his and seemed to enjoy it.

"I thought," he said, "that you were in with their gang. What *was* I to think? They got rid of poor Kennedy. Pneumonia! You too would have pneumonia if they drenched you with water and put you on the roof in your underwear overnight. The bottles were planted here. He used to drink a little with me, he used to get drunk now and then—so did I—nothing bad."

"You thought I was in their gang." I said. "What gang are you in?"

"The Frostbite Interplanetary Party," he said wryly. "I would smile with you if the joke were not on me. I know, I know—we are Outs who want to be Ins, we are neurotic youngsters, we are led by stooges of the Planetary Party. So what should I do—start a one-man party alone on a mountain-top, so pure that I must blackball everybody except myself from membership? I am an incorrigible reformer and idealist whether I like it or not—and sometimes, I assure you, I don't like it very well.

"Kennedy was no reformer and idealist. He was a pragmatist, a good man who wanted a good news story that would incidentally blow the present administration up. He used me, I used him. He got his story and they killed him and

burglarized the bureau to remove all traces of it. Or did they?"

"I don't know," I muttered. "Why did you dope me? Did Downing really go crazy?"

"I poisoned you a little because Downing did *not* go crazy. Downing was under orders to keep you from sending out that story. Probably after he had got you away from the ethertype he would have killed you if I had not poisoned you with some of my heart medicine. They realized while you were ill and feverish that it might as well be one as another. If they killed you, there would only be another newsman sent out to be inveigled into their gang. If they killed Downing, they could blame everything on him, you would never be able to have anything more than suspicions, and—there are a lot more Downings available, are there not?"

My brain began to click. "So your mysterious 'they' didn't want a top-drawer story to center around Frostbite. If it did, there'd be follow-ups, more reporters, ICC people investigating the explosion. Since the news break came from Gammadion, that's where the reporters would head and that's where the ICC investigation would be based. But what have they got to hide? The political setup here smells to high heaven, but it's no worse than on fifty other planets. Graft, liquor, vice, drugs, gambling—"

"No drugs," said the furrier.

"That's silly," I told him. "Of course they have drugs. With everything else, why not drugs?"

He shrugged apologetically. "Excuse me," he said. "I told you I was a reformer and an idealist. I did not mention that I used to be an occasional user of narcotics. A little something to take the pressure off—those very small morphine sulphate tablets. You can imagine my horror when I emigrated to this planet twenty-eight years ago and found there were no drugs—literally. Believe me when I tell you that I—*looked hard*. Now, of course, I am grateful. But I had a few very difficult weeks." He shuddered, finished his prune brandy and filled both our glasses again.

He tossed down his glass.

"Damn it all!" he exploded. "Must I rub your nose in it? Are you going to figure it out for yourself? And are you going to get killed like my poor friend, Kennedy? Look here! And here!" He lurched to his feet and yanked down "WHO'S WHO IN THE GALAXY" and the United Planets Drug Committee Report.

His pudgy finger pointed to:

"PARSONS, George Warmerdam, organic chemist, news-ppr pubr, b. Gammadion 172, s. Henry and Dolores (Warmerdam) P., studied Gammadion Chem. Inst. B.Ch 191, M.Ch 193, D.Ch 194; empl. dir research Hawley Mfg Co., (Gammadion) 194-198; founded Parsons Chem Mfg Labs (Gammadion) 198, headed same 198-203; removed Frostbite 203; founded newspaper Frostbite *Phoenix* 203. Author, tech papers organ chem 193-196. Mem Univ Organ Chem Soc. Address c/o Frostbite *Phoenix*, Frostbite."

And in the other book:

"—particular difficulty encountered with the stupefiant known as 'J-K-B.' It was first reported on Gammadion in the year 197, when a few isolated cases presented themselves for medical treatment. The problem rapidly worsened through the year 203, by which time the drug was in widespread illicit interplanetary commerce. The years 203-204 saw a cutting-off of the supply of J-K-B for reasons unknown. Prices soared to fantastic levels, unnumbered robberies and murders were committed by addicts to obtain possession of the minute quantities remaining on the market, and other addicts, by the hundreds, of thousands presented themselves to the authorities hoping more or less in vain for a 'cure.' J-K-B appeared again in the year 205, not confined to any segment of the inhabited galaxy. Supplies have since remained at a constant level—enough to brutalize, torment, and shorten the lives of the several score million terrestrial and extra-terrestrial beings who have come into its grip. Interrogation of peddlers intercepted with J-K-B has so far only led back through a seemingly endless chain of middlemen. The nature of the drug is such that it cannot be analyzed and synthesized —"

My head spun over the damning parallel trails. Where Parsons tried his wings in chemistry, J-K-B appeared. When he went on his own, the quantity increased. When he moved to another planet, the supply was cut off. When he was established, the supply grew to a constant level and stayed there.

And what could be sweeter than a thoroughly corrupt planet to take over with his money and his newspaper? Dominate a machine and the members' "regularity" will lead them to kill for you—or to kill killers if need be. Encourage planetary ignorance and isolationism; keep the planet unattractive and depressed by letting your free-booters run wild—that'll discourage intelligent immigration. Let token parties in, fleece them fast and close, let them spread the word that Frostbite's no place for anybody with brains.

"A reformer and idealist I am," said Portwanger calmly. "Not a man of action. What should be done next?"

I thought it over and told him; "If it kills me, and it might, I am going to send a rash of flashes and bulletins from this God-forsaken planet. My love life depends on it. Leon, do you know anybody on Mars?"

"A Sirian fellow named Wenjtkpli—a philosophical anarchist. An unreal position to take. This is the world we are in, there are certain social leverages to apply. Who is he to say—?"

I held up my hand. "I know him too." I could taste that eleventh stinger again; by comparison the prune brandy was mellow. I took a gulp. "Do you think you could go to Mars without getting bumped off?"

"A man could try."

The next two weeks were agonizing. Those Assyrian commissars or Russian belshazzars or whatever they were who walked down prison corridors waiting to be shot in the back of the head never went through what I did. I walked down the corridor for fourteen days.

First Leon got off all right on a bucket of bolts. I had no guarantee that he wouldn't be plugged by a crew member who was in on the party. Then there was a period of waiting for the first note that I'd swap you for a mad tarantula.

It came:

NOTE FRBBUO HOW HELL XPCT KP CLNT IF UNABL DROP COPY? MCG MARSBUO.

I'd paved the way for that one by drinking myself into a hangover on home brew and lying in bed and groaning when I should have been delivering the printer copy to the *Phoenix*. I'd been insulting as possible to Weems to insure that he'd phone a squawk to McGillicuddy—I hoped. The tipoff was "hell." Profanity was never, ever used on our circuits—I hoped. "Hell" meant "Portwanger contacted me, I got the story, I am notifying United Planets Patrol in utmost secrecy."

Two days later came:

NOTE FRBBUO BD CHMN WNTS KNO WHT KIND DAMN KNUCKLHED FILING ONLY FOURFIVE ITMS DAILY FM XPNSVE ONEMAN BUO. XPCT UPSTEP PRDCTN IMMY, RPT IMMY MCG MARSBUO.

"Damn" meant "Patrol contacted, preparing to raid Frostbite." "Fourfive" meant "fourfive"—days from message.

The next note would have got ISN in trouble with the Interplanetary Communications Commission if it hadn't been in a good cause. I'm unable to quote it. But it came as I was in the bureau about to leave for the Honorable Homer Witherspoon's testimonial banquet. I locked the door, took off my parka and rolled up my sleeves. I was going to sweat for the next few hours.

When I heard the multiple roar of the Patrol ships on rockets I very calmly beat out fifteen bells and sent:

INTERSTELLAR FLASH
UNITED PLANETS PATROL DESCENDING ON FROSTBITE, KRUEGER 60-B'S ONLY PLANET, IN UNPRECEDENTED MASS RAID ON TIP OF INTERSTELLAR NEWS SERVICE THAT WORLD IS SOLE SOURCE OF DEADLY DRUG J-K-B.

INTERSTELLAR BULLETIN
THE MASSED PATROL OF THE UNITED PLANETS ORGANIZATION DESCENDED ON THE ONLY

PLANET OF KRUEGER 60-B, FROSTBITE, IN AN UNPRECEDENTED MASS RAID THIS EVENING. ON INFORMATION FURNISHED BY INTERSTELLAR NEWS REPORTER JOE SPENCER THE PATROL HOPES TO WIPE OUT THE SOURCE OF THE DEADLY DRUG J-K-B, WHICH HAS PLAGUED THE GALAXY FOR 20 YEARS. THE CHEMICAL GENIUS SUSPECTED OF INVENTING AND PRODUCING THE DRUG IS GEORGE PARSONS, RESPECTED PUBLISHER OF FROSTBITE'S ONLY NEWSPAPER.

INTERSTELLAR FLASH

FIRST UNITED PLANETS PATROL SHIP LANDS IN FROSTBITE CAPITAL CITY OF PLANET.

INTERSTELLAR FLASH

PATROL COMMANDER PHONES EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW TO INTERSTELLAR NEWS SERVICE FROSTBITE BUREAU REPORTING ROUND-UP OF PLANETARY GOVERNMENT LEADERS AT TESTIMONIAL DINNER

(WITH FROSTBITE)

FROSTBITE—ISN—ONE INTERSTELLAR NEWS REPORTER HAS ALREADY GIVEN HIS LIFE IN THE CAMPAIGN TO EXPOSE THE MAKER OF J-K-B. ED KENNEDY, ISN BUREAU CHIEF, WAS ASSASSINATED BY AGENTS OF DRUGMAKER GEORGE PARSONS THREE MONTHS AGO. AGENTS OF PARSONS STRIPPED KENNEDY AND EXPOSED HIM OVERNIGHT TO THE BITTER COLD OF THIS PLANET, CAUSING HIS DEATH BY PNEUMONIA. A SECOND INTERSTELLAR NEWS SERVICE REPORTER, JOE SPENCER, NARROWLY ESCAPED DEATH AT THE HANDS OF A DRUG-RING MEMBER WHO SOUGHT TO PREVENT HIM FROM SENDING NEWS OVER THE CIRCUITS OF THE INTERSTELLAR NEWS SERVICE.

INTERSTELLAR FLASH

PATROL SEIZES PARSONS

INTERSTELLAR BULLETIN

FROSTBITE—IN A TELEPHONE MESSAGE TO INTERSTELLAR NEWS SERVICE A PATROL SPOKESMAN SAID GEORGE PARSONS HAD BEEN TAKEN INTO CUSTODY AND UNMISTAKABLY IDENTIFIED. PARSONS HAD BEEN LIVING A LIE ON FROSTBITE, USING THE NAME CHENERY AND THE GUISE OF A COLUMNIST FOR PARSONS' NEWSPAPER. SAID THE PATROL SPOKESMAN;—"IT IS A TYPICAL MANEUVER. WE NEVER GOT SO FAR ALONG THE CHAIN OF J-K-B PEDDLERS THAT WE NEVER FOUND ONE MORE. APPARENTLY THE SOURCE OF THE DRUG HIMSELF THOUGHT HE COULD PUT HIMSELF OUT OF THE REACH OF INTERPLANETARY JUSTICE BY ASSUMING A FICTITIOUS PERSONALITY. HOWEVER, WE HAVE ABSOLUTELY IDENTIFIED HIM AND EXPECT A CONFESSION WITHIN THE HOUR. PARSONS APPEARS TO BE A J-K-B ADDICT HIMSELF."

INTERSTELLAR FLASH

PARSONS CONFESSES

(FIRST LEAD FROSTBITE)

FROSTBITE—ISN—THE UNITED PLANETS PATROL AND THE INTERSTELLAR NEWS SERVICE JOINED HANDS TODAY IN TRIUMPH AFTER WIPING OUT THE MOST VICIOUS NEST OF DRUGMAKERS IN THE GALAXY. J-K-B, THE INFAMOUS NARCOTIC WHICH HAS MENACED—

I ground out nearly thirty thousand words of copy that night. Bleary-eyed at the end of the run, I could barely read a note that came across:

NOTE FRBBUO: WELL DONE. RETURN MARS IMMY: SNDNG REPLCEMNT. MARSBUO MCG.

The Patrol flagship took me back in a quick, smooth trip with lots of service and no yaks.

After a smooth landing I took an eastbound chair from the field and whistled as the floater lifted me to the ISN floor. The newsroom was quiet for a change and the boys and girls stood up for me.

McGillicuddy stepped out from the copy table slot to say: "Welcome back. Frankly, I didn't think you had it in you, but you proved me wrong. You're a credit to the profession and the ISN." Portwanger was there, too. "A pragmatist, your

McGillicuddy," he muttered. "But you did a good job."

I didn't pay very much attention; my eyes were roving over no man's land. Finally I asked McGillicuddy: "Where's Miss Masters? Day off?"

"How do you like that?" laughed McGillicuddy. "I forgot to tell you. She's your replacement on Frostbite. Fired her off yesterday. I thought the woman's angle—where do you think *you're* going?"

"Honest Blogri's Olde Earthe Saloon," I told him with dignity. "If you want me, I'll be under the third table from the left as you come in. With sawdust in my hair."

The Events Leading Down to the Tragedy

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DOCUMENT ONE

Being the First Draft of a Paper to be Read before the Tuscarora Township Historical Society by Mr. Hardeign Spoynte, B.A.

Madame President, members, guests:

It is with unabashed pride that I stand before you this evening. You will recall from your perusal of our Society's *Bulletin* (Vol. XLII, No. 3, Fall, 1955, pp. 7-8) [pp. correct? check before making fair copy. HS] that I had undertaken a research into the origins of that event so fraught with consequences to the development of our township, the Watling-Fraskell duel. I virtually promised that the cause of the fatal strife would be revealed by, so to speak, the spotlight of science [metaphor here suff. graceful? perh. "magic" better? HS]. I am here to carry out that promise.

Major Watling *did* [tell a lie] prevaricate. Colonel Fraskell *rightly* reproached him with mendacity. Perhaps from this day the breach between Watlingist and Fraskellite may begin to heal, the former honestly acknowledging themselves in error and the latter magnanimous in victory.

My report reflects great credit on a certain modest resident of historic old Northumberland County who, to my regret, is evidently away on a well-earned vacation from his arduous labors [perh. cliché? No. Fine phrase. *Stet!* HS]. Who he is you will learn in good time.

I shall begin with a survey of known facts relating to the Watling-Fraskell duel, and as we are all aware, there is for such a quest no starting point better than the monumental work of our late learned county historian, Dr. Donge. Donge states (*Old Times on the Oquanantic*, 2nd ed., 1873, pp. 771-2): "No less to be deplored than the routing of the West Brance Canal to bypass Eleusis was the duel in which perished miserably Major Elisha Watling and Colonel Hiram Fraskell, those two venerable pioneers of the Oquanantic Valley. Though in no way to be compared with the barbarous *blood feuds* of the benighted Southern States of our Union, there has persisted to our own day a certain division of loyalty among residents of Tuscarora Township and particularly the borough of Eleusis. Do we not see elm-shaded Northumberland Street adorned by *two* gracefully pillared bank buildings, one the stronghold of the Fraskellite and the other of the Watlingist? Is not the debating society of Eleusis Academy sundered annually by the proposition, 'Resolved: that Major Elisha Watling (on alternate years, Colonel Hiram Fraskell) was no gentleman'? And did not the Watlingist propensities of the Eleusis Colonial Dames and the Fraskellite inclination of the Eleusis Daughters of the American Revolution 'clash' in September, 1869, at the storied Last Joint Lawn Fête during which éclairs and (some say) tea cups were hurled?" [Dear old Donge! Prose equal Dr. Johnson!]

If I may venture to follow those stately periods with my own faltering style, it is of course known to us all that the controversy has scarcely diminished to the present time. Eleusis Academy, famed *alma mater* (*i.e.*, "foster mother") of the immortal Hovington^[1] is, alas, no more. It expired in flames on the tragic night of August 17, 1901, while the Watlingist members of that Eleusis Hose Company Number One which was stabled in Northumberland Street battled for possession of the fire hydrant which might have saved the venerable pile against the members of the predominantly Fraskellite Eleusis Hose Company Number One which was then stabled in Oquanantic Street. (The confusion of the nomenclature is only a part of the duel's bitter heritage.) Nevertheless, though the Academy and its Debating Society be gone, the youth of Eleusis still carries on the fray in a more modern fashion which rises each November to a truly disastrous climax during "Football Pep Week" when the "Colonels" of Central High School meet in sometimes gory combat with the "Majors" of North Side High. I am privately informed by our borough's Supervising Principal, George Croud, Ph.B., that last November's bill for replacement of broken window panes in both school buildings amounted to \$231.47, exclusive of state sales tax; and that the two school nurses are already "stockpiling" gauze, liniment, disinfectants and splints in anticipation of the seemingly inevitable autumnal crop of abrasions, lacerations and fractures. [*mem.* Must ask Croud whether willing be publ. quoted or "informed source." HS] And the adults of Eleusis no less assiduously prosecute the controversy by choice of merchants, the granting of

credit, and social exclusiveness.

The need for a determination of the rights and wrongs in the *affaire* Fraskell-Watling is, clearly, no less urgent now than it has ever been.

Dr. Donge, by incredible, indeed almost impossible, labor has proved that the issue was one of *veracity*. Colonel Fraskell intimated to Joseph Cooper, following a meeting of the Society of the Cincinnati, that Major Watling had been, in the words of Cooper's letter of July 18, 1789, to his brother Puntell in Philadelphia, "drauin [drawing] the long Bow."^[2]

O fatal indiscretion! For Puntell Cooper delayed not a week to "relay" the intelligence to Major Watling by post, as a newsy appendix to his order for cordwood from the major's lot!

The brief, fatally terminated correspondence between the major and the colonel then began; I suppose most of us have it [better change to "at least key passages of corresp." HS] committed to memory.

The first letter offers a tantalizing glimpse. Watling writes to Fraskell, *inter alia*: "I said I seen it at the Meetin the Nigh before Milkin Time by my Hoss Barn and I seen it are you a Atheist Colonel?" It has long been agreed that the masterly conjectural emendation of this passage proposed by Miss Stolp in her epoch-making paper^[3] is the correct one, *i.e.*: "I said at the meeting [of the Society of the Cincinnati] that I saw it the night before [the meeting] at milking time, by my horse barn; and I [maintain in the face of your expressions of disbelief that I] saw it. Are you an atheist, colonel?"

There thus appears to have been at the outset of the correspondence a clear-cut issue: did or did not Major Watling see "it"? The reference to atheism suggests that "it" may have been some apparition deemed supernatural by the major, but we know absolutely nothing more of what "it" may have been.

Alas, but the correspondents at once lost sight of the "point." The legendary Watling Temper and the formidable Fraskell Pride made it certain that one would sooner or later question the gentility of the other as they wrangled by post. The fact is that both did so simultaneously, on August 20, in letters that crossed. Once this stone was hurled [say "these stones"? HS] there was in those days no turning back. The circumstance that both parties were simultaneously offended and offending perplexed their seconds, and ultimately the choice of weapons had to be referred to a third party mutually agreeable to the duelists, Judge E. Z. C. Mosh.

Woe that he chose the deadly Pennsylvania Rifle!^[4] Woe that the two old soldiers knew that dread arm as the husbandman his sickle! At six o'clock on the morning of September 1, 1789, the major and the colonel expired on the sward behind Brashear's Creek, each shot through the heart. The long division of our beloved borough into Fraskellite and Watlingist had begun.

After this preamble, I come now to the modern part of my tale. It begins in 1954, with the purchase of the Haddam property by our respected fellow-townsmen, that adoptive son of Eleusis, Dr. Gaspar Mord. I much regret that Dr. Mord is apparently on an extended vacation [where *can* the man be? HS]; since he is not available [confound it! HS] to grant permission, I must necessarily "skirt" certain topics, with a plea that to do otherwise might involve a violation of confidence. [Positively, there are times when one wishes that one were *not* a gentleman! HS]

I am quite aware that there was an element in our town which once chose to deprecate Dr. Mord, to question his degree, to inquire suspiciously into matters which are indubitably his own business and no one else's, such as his source of income. This element of which I speak came perilously close to sullyng the hospitable name of Eleusis by calling on Dr. Mord in a delegation afire with the ridiculous rumor that the doctor had been "hounded out of Peoria in 1929 for vivisection."

Dr. Mord, far from reacting with justified wrath, chose the way of the true scientist. He showed this delegation through his laboratory to demonstrate that his activities were innocent, and it departed singing his praises, so to speak. They were particularly enthusiastic about two "phases" of his work which he demonstrated: some sort of "waking anaesthesia" gas, and a mechanical device for the induction of the hypnotic state.

I myself called on Dr. Mord as soon as he had settled down, in my capacity as President of the Eleusis Committee for the Preservation of Local Historical Buildings and Sites. I explained to the good doctor that in the parlor of the

Haddam house had been formed in 1861 the Oquanantic Zouaves, that famed regiment of daredevils who with zeal and dash guarded the Boston (Massachusetts) Customs House through the four sanguinary years of conflict. I expressed the hope that the intricate fretsaw work, the stained glass, the elegant mansard roof and the soaring central tower would remain mute witnesses to the martial glory of Eleusis, and not fall victim to the "remodeling" craze.

Dr. Mord, with his characteristic smile (its first effect is unsettling, I confess, but when one later learns of the kindly intentions behind it, one grows accustomed to his face) replied somewhat irrelevantly by asking whether I had any dependents. He proceeded to a rather searching inquiry, explaining that as a man of science he liked to be sure of his facts. I advised him that I understood, diffidently mentioning that I was no stranger to scientific rigor, my own grandfather having published a massive *Evidences for the Phlogiston Theory of Heat*.^[5] Somehow the interview concluded with Dr. Mord asking: "Mr. Spoynte, what do you consider your greatest contribution to human knowledge and welfare, and do you suppose that you will ever surpass that contribution?"

I replied after consideration that no doubt my "high water mark" was my discovery of the 1777 Order Book of the Wyalusing Militia Company in the basement of the Spodder Memorial Library, where it had been lost to sight for thirty-eight years after being misfiled under "Indian Religions (Local)." To the second part of his question I could only answer that it was given to few men twice to perform so momentous a service to scholarship.

On this odd note we parted; it occurred to me as I wended my way home that I had not succeeded in eliciting from the doctor a reply as to his intentions of preserving intact the Haddam house! But he "struck" me as an innately conservative person, and I had little real fear of the remodeler's ruthless hammer and saw.

This impression was reinforced during the subsequent month, for the doctor intimated that he would be pleased to have me call on him Thursday evenings for a chat over the coffee cups.

These chats were the customary conversations of two learned men of the world, skimming lightly over knowledge's whole domain. Once, for example, Dr. Mord amusingly theorized that one of the most difficult things in the world for a private person to do was to find a completely useless human being. The bad men were in prison or hiding, he explained, and when one investigated the others it always turned out that they had some redeeming quality or usefulness to somebody. "Almost always," he amended with a laugh. At other times he would question me deeply about my life and activities, now and then muttering: "I must be sure; I must be *sure*"—typical of his scientist's passion for precision. Yet again, he would speak of the glorious Age of Pericles, saying fervently: "Spoynte, I would give anything, do anything, to look upon ancient Athens in its flower!"

Now, I claim no genius inspired my rejoinder. I was merely "the right man in the right place." I replied: "Dr. Mord, your wish to visit ancient Athens could be no more fervent than mine to visit Major Watling's horse barn at milking time the evening of July 17, 1789."

I must, at this point, [confound it! I am *sure* Dr. M. would give permission to elaborate if he were only here! HS] drop an impenetrable veil of secrecy over certain episodes, for reasons which I have already stated.

I am, however, in a position to state with absolute authority *that there was NO apparition at Major Watling's horse barn at milking time the evening of—*

[Steady on, Hardeign. Think. Think. Major W. turned. I looked about. No apparitions, spooks, goblins. Just Major W. and myself. He looked at me and made a curious sort of face. No. Nonono. Can't be. Oh, my God! *I* was the— Fault all mine. Duel, feud. Traitor to dear Eleusis. Feel *sick*. HS]

vide Spoynte, H.: "Egney Hovington, Nineteenth-Century American Nature Poet, and his career at Eleusis Academy, October 4-October 28, 1881" (art.) in *Bull. of the Tuscarora Township Hist. Soc.*, Vol. XVI, No. 4, Winter, 1929, pp. 4-18.

DONGE, Dr. J.: *supra*, p. 774, n.

STOLP, A. DeW.: "Some Textual Problems Relating to the Correspondence between Major Elisha Watling and Colonel Hiram Fraskell, Eleusis, Pennsylvania, July 27-September 1, 1789" (art.) in *Bull. of the Tuscarora Township Hist. Soc.*, Vol. IV, No. 1, Spring, 1917.

Amusingly known to *hoi polloi* and some who should know better as the "Kentucky" Rifle.

Generally considered the last word on the subject though, as I understand it, somewhat eclipsed at present by the flashy and mystical "molecular theory" of the notorious Tory sympathizer and renegade Benjamin Thompson, styled "Count" Rumford. "A fool can always find a bigger fool to admire him." [Quote in orig. French? Check source and exact text. HS]

DOCUMENT TWO

Being a note delivered by Mrs. Irving McGuinness, Domestic, to Miss Agnes DeW. Stolp, President, the Tuscarora Township Historical Society.

"The Elms"
Wednesday

Dear Miss Stolp,

Pray forgive my failure to attend the last meeting of the Society to read my paper. I was writing the last words when—I can tell you no more. Young Dr. Scantt has been in constant attendance at my bedside, and my temperature has not fallen below 99.8 degrees in the past 48 hours. I have been, I am, a sick and suffering man. I abjectly hope that you and everybody in Eleusis will bear this in mind if certain facts should come to your attention.

I cannot close without a warning against that rascal, "Dr." Gaspar Mord. A pledge prevents me from entering into details, but I urge you, should he dare to rear his head in Eleusis again, to hound him out of town as he was hounded out of Peoria in 1929. *Verbum sapientibus satis.*

Hardeign Spoynte

The Little Black Bag

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Old Dr. Full felt the winter in his bones as he limped down the alley. It was the alley and the back door he had chosen rather than the sidewalk and the front door because of the brown paper bag under his arm. He knew perfectly well that the flat-faced, stringy-haired women of his street and their gap-toothed, sour-smelling husbands did not notice if he brought a bottle of cheap wine to his room. They all but lived on the stuff themselves, varied with whiskey when pay checks were boosted by overtime. But Dr. Full, unlike them, was ashamed. A complicated disaster occurred as he limped down the littered alley. One of the neighborhood dogs—a mean little black one he knew and hated, with its teeth always bared and always snarling with menace—hurled at his legs through a hole in the board fence that lined his path. Dr. Full flinched, then swung his leg in what was to have been a satisfying kick to the animal's gaunt ribs. But the winter in his bones weighed down the leg. His foot failed to clear a half-buried brick, and he sat down abruptly, cursing. When he smelled unbottled wine and realized his brown paper package had slipped from under his arm and smashed, his curses died on his lips. The snarling black dog was circling him at a yard's distance, tensely stalking, but he ignored it in the greater disaster.

With stiff fingers as he sat on the filth of the alley, Dr. Full unfolded the brown paper bag's top, which had been crimped over, grocer-wise. The early autumnal dusk had come; he could not see plainly what was left. He lifted out the jug-handled top of his half gallon, and some fragments, and then the bottom of the bottle. Dr. Full was far too occupied to exult as he noted that there was a good pint left. He had a problem, and emotions could be deferred until the fitting time.

The dog closed in, its snarl rising in pitch. He set down the bottom of the bottle and pelted the dog with the curved triangular glass fragments of its top. One of them connected, and the dog ducked back through the fence, howling. Dr. Full then placed a razor-like edge of the half-gallon bottle's foundation to his lips and drank from it as though it were a giant's cup. Twice he had to put it down to rest his arms, but in one minute he had swallowed the pint of wine.

He thought of rising to his feet and walking through the alley to his room, but a flood of well-being drowned the notion. It was, after all, inexpressibly pleasant to sit there and feel the frost-hardened mud of the alley turn soft, or seem to, and to feel the winter evaporating from his bones under a warmth which spread from his stomach through his limbs.

A three-year-old girl in a cut-down winter coat squeezed through the same hole in the board fence from which the black dog had sprung its ambush. Gravely she toddled up to Dr. Full and inspected him with her dirty forefinger in her mouth. Dr. Full's happiness had been providentially made complete; he had been supplied with an audience.

"Ah, my dear," he said hoarsely. And then: "Preposserous accusation. 'If that's what you call evidence,' I should have told them, 'you better stick to your doctoring.' I should have told them: 'I was here before your County Medical Society. And the License Commissioner never proved a thing on me. So, gennulmen, doesn't it stand to reason? I appeal to you as fellow memmers of a great profession—'"

The little girl, bored, moved away, picking up one of the triangular pieces of glass to play with as she left. Dr. Full forgot her immediately, and continued to himself earnestly: "But so help me, they *couldn't* prove a thing. Hasn't a man got any *rights*?" He brooded over the question, of whose answer he was so sure, but on which the Committee on Ethics of the County Medical Society had been equally certain. The winter was creeping into his bones again, and he had no money and no more wine.

Dr. Full pretended to himself that there was a bottle of whiskey somewhere in the fearful litter of his room. It was an old and cruel trick he played on himself when he simply had to be galvanized into getting up and going home. He might freeze there in the alley. In his room he would be bitten by bugs and would cough at the moldy reek from his sink, but he would not freeze and be cheated of the hundreds of bottles of wine that he still might drink, the thousands of hours of glowing content he still might feel. He thought about that bottle of whiskey—was it back of a mounded heap of medical journals? No; he had looked there last time. Was it under the sink, shoved well to the rear, behind the rusty drain? The cruel trick began to play itself out again. Yes, he told himself with mounting excitement, yes, it might be! Your memory isn't so good nowadays, he told himself with rueful good-fellowship. You know perfectly well you might have bought a bottle of whiskey and shoved it behind the sink drain for a moment just like this.

The amber bottle, the crisp snap of the sealing as he cut it, the pleasurable exertion of starting the screw cap on its threads, and then the refreshing tangs in his throat, the warmth in his stomach, the dark, dull happy oblivion of drunkenness—they became real to him. You *could* have, you know! You *could* have! he told himself. With the blessed conviction growing in his mind—It *could* have happened, you know! It *could* have!—he struggled to his right knee. As he did, he heard a yelp behind him, and curiously craned his neck around while resting. It was the little girl, who had cut her hand quite badly on her toy, the piece of glass. Dr. Full could see the rilling bright blood down her coat, pooling at her feet.

He almost felt inclined to defer the image of the amber bottle for her, but not seriously. He knew that it was there, shoved well to the rear under the sink, behind the rusty drain where he had hidden it. He would have a drink and then magnanimously return to help the child. Dr. Full got to his other knee and then his feet, and proceeded at a rapid totter down the littered alley toward his room, where he would hunt with calm optimism at first for the bottle that was not there, then with anxiety, and then with frantic violence. He would hurl books and dishes about before he was done looking for the amber bottle of whiskey, and finally would beat his swollen knuckles against the brick wall until old scars on them opened and his thick old blood oozed over his hands. Last of all, he would sit down somewhere on the floor, whimpering, and would plunge into the abyss of purgative nightmare that was his sleep.

After twenty generations of shilly-shallying and "we'll cross that bridge when we come to it," genus homo had bred himself into an impasse. Dogged biometricians had pointed out with irrefutable logic that mental subnormals were outbreeding mental normals and supernormals, and that the process was occurring on an exponential curve. Every fact that could be mustered in the argument proved the biometricians' case, and led inevitably to the conclusion that genus homo was going to wind up in a preposterous jam quite soon. If you think that had any effect on breeding practices, you do not know genus homo.

There was, of course, a sort of masking effect produced by that other exponential function, the accumulation of technological devices. A moron trained to punch an adding machine seems to be a more skillful computer than a medieval mathematician trained to count on his fingers. A moron trained to operate the twenty-first century equivalent of a linotype seems to be a better typographer than a Renaissance printer limited to a few fonts of movable type. This is also true of medical practice.

It was a complicated affair of many factors. The supernormals "improved the product" at greater speed than the subnormals degraded it, but in smaller quantity because elaborate training of their children was practiced on a custom-made basis. The fetish of higher education had some weird avatars by the twentieth generation: "colleges" where not a member of the student body could read words of three syllables; "universities" where such degrees as "Bachelor of Typewriting," "Master of Shorthand" and "Doctor of Philosophy (Card Filing)" were conferred with the traditional pomp. The handful of supernormals used such devices in order that the vast majority might keep some semblance of a social order going.

Some day the supernormals would mercilessly cross the bridge; at the twentieth generation they were standing irresolutely at its approaches wondering what had hit them. And the ghosts of twenty generations of biometricians chuckled malignantly.

It is a certain Doctor of Medicine of this twentieth generation that we are concerned with. His name was Hemingway—John Hemingway, B.Sc., M.D. He was a general practitioner, and did not hold with running to specialists with every trifling ailment. He often said as much, in approximately these words: "Now, uh, what I mean is you got a good old G.P. See what I mean? Well, uh, now a good old G.P. don't claim he knows all about lungs and glands and them things, get me? But you got a G.P., you got, uh, you got a, well, you got a ... *all-around man!* That's what you got when you got a G.P.—you got a all-around man."

But from this, do not imagine that Dr. Hemingway was a poor doctor. He could remove tonsils or appendixes, assist at practically any confinement and deliver a living, uninjured infant, correctly diagnose hundreds of ailments, and prescribe and administer the correct medication or treatment for each. There was, in fact, only one thing he could not do in the medical line, and that was, violate the ancient canons of medical ethics. And Dr. Hemingway knew better than to try.

Dr. Hemingway and a few friends were chatting one evening when the event occurred that precipitates him into our story. He had been through a hard day at the clinic, and he wished his physicist friend Walter Gillis, B.Sc., M.Sc., Ph.D., would shut up so he could tell everybody about it. But Gillis kept rambling on, in his stilted fashion: "You got to hand it

to old Mike; he don't have what we call the scientific method, but you got to hand it to him. There this poor little dope is, puttering around with some glassware and I come up and I ask him, kidding of course, 'How's about a time-travel machine, Mike?'"

Dr. Gillis was not aware of it, but "Mike" had an I.Q. six times his own, and was—to be blunt—his keeper. "Mike" rode herd on the pseudo-physicists in the pseudo-laboratory, in the guise of a bottle-washer. It was a social waste—but as has been mentioned before, the supernormals were still standing at the approaches to a bridge. Their irresolution led to many such preposterous situations. And it happens that "Mike," having grown frantically bored with his task, was malevolent enough to—but let Dr. Gillis tell it:

"So he gives me these here tube numbers and says, 'Series circuit. Now stop bothering me. Build your time machine, sit down at it and turn on the switch. That's all I ask, Dr. Gillis—that's all I ask.'"

"Say," marveled a brittle and lovely blond guest, "you remember real good, don't you, doc?" She gave him a melting smile.

"Heck," said Gillis modestly, "I always remember good. It's what you call an inherent facility. And besides I told it quick to my secretary, so she wrote it down. I don't read so good, but I sure remember good, all right. Now, where was I?"

Everybody thought hard, and there were various suggestions:

"Something about bottles, doc?"

"You was starting a fight. You said 'time somebody was traveling.'"

"Yeah—you called somebody a swish. Who did you call a swish?"

"Not swish—*switch*."

Dr. Gillis' noble brow grooved with thought, and he declared: "Switch is right. It was about time travel. What we call travel through time. So I took the tube numbers he gave me and I put them into the circuit-builder; I set it for 'series' and there it is—my time-traveling machine. It travels things through time real good." He displayed a box.

"What's in the box?" asked the lovely blond.

Dr. Hemingway told her: "Time travel. It travels things through time."

"Look," said Gillis, the physicist. He took Dr. Hemingway's little black bag and put it on the box. He turned on the switch and the little black bag vanished.

"Say," said Dr. Hemingway, "that was, uh, swell. Now bring it back."

"Huh?"

"Bring back my little black bag."

"Well," said Dr. Gillis, "they don't come back. I tried it backwards and they don't come back. I guess maybe that dummy Mike give me a bum steer."

There was wholesale condemnation of "Mike" but Dr. Hemingway took no part in it. He was nagged by a vague feeling that there was something he would have to do. He reasoned: "I am a doctor, and a doctor has got to have a little black bag. I ain't got a little black bag—so ain't I a doctor no more?" He decided that this was absurd. He *knew* he was a doctor. So it must be the bag's fault for not being there. It was no good, and he would get another one tomorrow from that dummy Al, at the clinic. Al could find things good, but he was a dummy—never liked to talk sociable to you.

So the next day Dr. Hemingway remembered to get another little black bag from his keeper—another little black bag with which he could perform tonsillectomies, appendectomies and the most difficult confinements, and with which he could diagnose and cure his kind until the day when the supernormals could bring themselves to cross that bridge. Al was kinda nasty about the missing little black bag, but Dr. Hemingway didn't exactly remember what had happened, so no tracer was sent out, so—

Old Dr. Full awoke from the horrors of the night to the horrors of the day. His gummy eyelashes pulled apart convulsively. He was propped against a corner of his room, and something was making a little drumming noise. He felt very cold and cramped. As his eyes focused on his lower body, he croaked out a laugh. The drumming noise was being made by his left heel, agitated by fine tremors against the bare floor. It was going to be the D.T.'s again, he decided dispassionately. He wiped his mouth with his bloody knuckles, and the fine tremor coarsened; the snare-drum beat became louder and slower. He was getting a break this fine morning, he decided sardonically. You didn't get the horrors until you had been tightened like a violin string, just to the breaking point. He had a reprieve, if a reprieve into his old body with the blazing, endless headache just back of the eyes and the screaming stiffness in the joints were anything to be thankful for.

There was something or other about a kid, he thought vaguely. He was going to doctor some kid. His eyes rested on a little black bag in the center of the room, and he forgot about the kid. "I could have sworn," said Dr. Full, "I hocked that two years ago!" He hitched over and reached the bag, and then realized it was some stranger's kit, arriving here he did not know how. He tentatively touched the lock and it snapped open and lay flat, rows and rows of instruments and medications tucked into loops in its four walls. It seemed vastly larger open than closed. He didn't see how it could possibly fold up into that compact size again, but decided it was some stunt of the instrument makers. Since his time—that made it worth more at the hock shop, he thought with satisfaction.

Just for old times' sake, he let his eyes and fingers rove over the instruments before he snapped the bag shut and headed for Uncle's. More than a few were a little hard to recognize—exactly that is. You could see the things with blades for cutting, the forceps for holding and pulling, the retractors for holding fast, the needles and gut for suturing, the hypos—a fleeting thought crossed his mind that he could peddle the hypos separately to drug addicts.

Let's go, he decided, and tried to fold up the case. It didn't fold until he happened to touch the lock, and then it folded all at once into a little black bag. Sure have forged ahead, he thought, almost able to forget that what he was primarily interested in was its pawn value.

With a definite objective, it was not too hard for him to get to his feet. He decided to go down the front steps, out the front door and down the sidewalk. But first—

He snapped the bag open again on his kitchen table, and pored through the medication tubes. "Anything to sock the autonomic nervous system good and hard," he mumbled. The tubes were numbered, and there was a plastic card which seemed to list them. The left margin of the card was a rundown of the systems—vascular, muscular, nervous. He followed the last entry across to the right. There were columns for "stimulant," "depressant," and so on. Under "nervous system" and "depressant" he found the number 17, and shakily located the little glass tube which bore it. It was full of pretty blue pills and he took one.

It was like being struck by a thunderbolt.

Dr. Full had so long lacked any sense of well-being except the brief glow of alcohol that he had forgotten its very nature. He was panic-stricken for a long moment at the sensation that spread through him slowly, finally tingling in his fingertips. He straightened up, his pains gone and his leg tremor stilled.

That was great, he thought. He'd be able to *run* to the hock shop, pawn the little black bag and get some booze. He started down the stairs. Not even the street, bright with mid-morning sun, into which he emerged made him quail. The little black bag in his left hand had a satisfying, authoritative weight. He was walking erect, he noted, and not in the somewhat furtive crouch that had grown on him in recent years. A little self-respect, he told himself, that's what I need. Just because a man's down doesn't mean—

"Docta, please-a come with'!—" somebody yelled at him, tugging his arm. "Da litt-la girl, she's-a burn' up!" It was one of the slum's innumerable flat-faced, stringy-haired women, in a slovenly wrapper.

"Ah, I happen to be retired from practice—" he began hoarsely, but she would not be put off.

"In by here, Docta!" she urged, tugging him to a doorway. "You come look-a da litt-la girl. I got two dolla, you come look!" That put a different complexion on the matter. He allowed himself to be towed through the doorway into a mussy,

cabbage-smelling flat. He knew the woman now, or rather knew who she must be—a new arrival who had moved in the other night. These people moved at night, in motorcades of battered cars supplied by friends and relations, with furniture lashed to the tops, swearing and drinking until the small hours. It explained why she had stopped him: she did not yet know he was old Dr. Full, a drunken reprobate whom nobody would trust. The little black bag had been his guarantee, outweighing his whiskery face and stained black suit.

He was looking down on a three-year-old girl who had, he rather suspected, just been placed in the mathematical center of a freshly changed double bed. God knew what sour and dirty mattress she usually slept on. He seemed to recognize her as he noted a crusted bandage on her right hand. Two dollars, he thought—An ugly flush had spread up her pipe-stem arm. He poked a finger into the socket of her elbow, and felt little spheres like marbles under the skin and ligaments roll apart. The child began to squall thinly; beside him, the woman gasped and began to weep herself.

"Out," he gestured briskly at her, and she thudded away, still sobbing.

Two dollars, he thought—Give her some mumbo jumbo, take the money and tell her to go to a clinic. Strep, I guess, from that stinking alley. It's a wonder any of them grow up. He put down the little black bag and forgetfully fumbled for his key, then remembered and touched the lock. It flew open, and he selected a bandage shears, with a blunt wafer for the lower jaw. He fitted the lower jaw under the bandage, trying not to hurt the kid by its pressure on the infection, and began to cut. It was amazing how easily and swiftly the shining shears snipped through the crusty rag around the wound. He hardly seemed to be driving the shears with fingers at all. It almost seemed as though the shears were driving his fingers instead as they scissored a clean, light line through the bandage.

Certainly have forged ahead since my time, he thought—sharper than a microtome knife. He replaced the shears in their loop on the extraordinarily big board that the little black bag turned into when it unfolded, and leaned over the wound. He whistled at the ugly gash, and the violent infection which had taken immediate root in the sickly child's thin body. Now what can you do with a thing like that? He pawed over the contents of the little black bag, nervously. If he lanced it and let some of the pus out, the old woman would think he'd done something for her and he'd get the two dollars. But at the clinic they'd want to know who did it and if they got sore enough they might send a cop around. Maybe there was something in the kit—

He ran down the left edge of the card to "lymphatic" and read across to the column under "infection." It didn't sound right at all to him; he checked again, but it still said that. In the square to which the line and column led were the symbols: "IV-g-3cc." He couldn't find any bottles marked with Roman numerals, and then noticed that that was how the hypodermic needles were designated. He lifted number IV from its loop, noting that it was fitted with a needle already and even seemed to be charged. What a way to carry those things around! So—three cc. of whatever was in hypo number IV ought to do something or other about infections settled in the lymphatic system—which, God knows, this one was. What did the lower-case "g" mean, though? He studied the glass hypo and saw letters engraved on what looked like a rotating disk at the top of the barrel. They ran from "a" to "i," and there was an index line engraved on the barrel on the opposite side from the calibrations.

Shrugging, old Dr. Full turned the disk until "g" coincided with the index line, and lifted the hypo to eye level. As he pressed in the plunger he did not see the tiny thread of fluid squirt from the tip of the needle. There was a sort of dark mist for a moment about the tip. A closer inspection showed that the needle was not even pierced at the tip. It had the usual slanting cut across the bias of the shaft, but the cut did not expose an oval hole. Baffled, he tried pressing the plunger again. Again *something* appeared around the tip and vanished. "We'll settle this," said the doctor. He slipped the needle into the skin of his forearm. He thought at first that he had missed—that the point had glided over the top of his skin instead of catching and slipping under it. But he saw a tiny blood-spot and realized that somehow he just hadn't felt the puncture. Whatever was in the barrel, he decided, couldn't do him any harm if it lived up to its billing—and if it could come out through a needle that had no hole. He gave himself three cc. and twitched the needle out. There was the swelling—painless, but otherwise typical.

Dr. Full decided it was his eyes or something, and gave three cc. of "g" from hypodermic IV to the feverish child. There was no interruption to her wailing as the needle went in and the swelling rose. But a long instant later, she gave a final gasp and was silent.

Well, he told himself, cold with horror, you did it that time. You killed her with that stuff.

Then the child sat up and said: "Where's my mommy?"

Incredulously, the doctor seized her arm and palpated the elbow. The gland infection was zero, and the temperature seemed normal. The blood-congested tissues surrounding the wound were subsiding as he watched. The child's pulse was stronger and no faster than a child's should be. In the sudden silence of the room he could hear the little girl's mother sobbing in her kitchen, outside. And he also heard a girl's insinuating voice:

"She gonna be O.K., doc?"

He turned and saw a gaunt-faced, dirty-blond sloven of perhaps eighteen leaning in the doorway and eying him with amused contempt. She continued: "I heard about you, *Doc-tor* Full. So don't go try and put the bite on the old lady. You couldn't doctor up a sick cat."

"Indeed?" he rumbled. This young person was going to get a lesson she richly deserved. "Perhaps you would care to look at my patient?"

"Where's my mommy?" insisted the little girl, and the blond's jaw fell. She went to the bed and cautiously asked: "You O.K. now, Teresa? You all fixed up?"

"Where's my mommy?" demanded Teresa. Then, accusingly, she gestured with her wounded hand at the doctor. "You *poke* me!" she complained, and giggled pointlessly.

"Well—" said the blond girl, "I guess I got to hand it to you, doc. These loud-mouth women around here said you didn't know your ... I mean, didn't know how to cure people. They said you ain't a real doctor."

"I *have* retired from practice," he said. "But I happened to be taking this case to a colleague as a favor, your good mother noticed me, and—" a deprecating smile. He touched the lock of the case and it folded up into the little black bag again.

"You stole it," the girl said flatly.

He sputtered.

"Nobody'd trust you with a thing like that. It must be worth plenty. You stole that case. I was going to stop you when I come in and saw you working over Teresa, but it looked like you wasn't doing her any harm. But when you give me that line about taking that case to a colleague I know you stole it. You gimme a cut or I go to the cops. A thing like that must be worth twenty-thirty dollars."

The mother came timidly in, her eyes red. But she let out a whoop of joy when she saw the little girl sitting up and babbling to herself, embraced her madly, fell on her knees for a quick prayer, hopped up to kiss the doctor's hand, and then dragged him into the kitchen, all the while rattling in her native language while the blond girl let her eyes go cold with disgust. Dr. Full allowed himself to be towed into the kitchen, but flatly declined a cup of coffee and a plate of anise cakes and St. John's Bread.

"Try him on some wine, ma," said the girl sardonically.

"Hyass! Hyass!" breathed the woman delightedly. "You like-a wine, docta?" She had a carafe of purplish liquid before him in an instant, and the blond girl snickered as the doctor's hand twitched out at it. He drew his hand back, while there grew in his head the old image of how it would smell and then taste and then warm his stomach and limbs. He made the kind of calculation at which he was practiced; the delighted woman would not notice as he downed two tumblers, and he could overawe her through two tumblers more with his tale of Teresa's narrow brush with the Destroying Angel, and then—why, then it would not matter. He would be drunk.

But for the first time in years, there was a sort of counter-image: a blend of the rage he felt at the blond girl to whom he was so transparent, and of pride at the cure he had just effected. Much to his own surprise, he drew back his hand from the carafe and said, luxuriating in the words: "No, thank you. I don't believe I'd care for any so early in the day." He covertly watched the blond girl's face, and was gratified at her surprise. Then the mother was shyly handing him two bills and saying: "Is no much-a money, docta—but you come again, see Teresa?"

"I shall be glad to follow the case through," he said. "But now excuse me—I really must be running along." He grasped the little black bag firmly and got up; he wanted very much to get away from the wine and the older girl.

"Wait up, doc," said she, "I'm going your way." She followed him out and down the street. He ignored her until he felt her hand on the black bag. Then old Dr. Full stopped and tried to reason with her:

"Look, my dear. Perhaps you're right. I might have stolen it. To be perfectly frank, I don't remember how I got it. But you're young and you can earn your own money—"

"Fifty-fifty," she said, "or I go to the cops. And if I get another word outta you, it's sixty-forty. And you know who gets the short end, don't you, doc?"

Defeated, he marched to the pawnshop, her impudent hand still on the handle with his, and her heels beating out a tattoo against his stately tread.

In the pawnshop, they both got a shock.

"It ain't standard," said Uncle, unimpressed by the ingenious lock. "I ain't nevva seen one like it. Some cheap Jap stuff, maybe? Try down the street. This I nevva could sell."

Down the street they got an offer of one dollar. The same complaint was made: "I ain't a collecta, mista—I buy stuff that got resale value. Who could I sell this to, a Chinaman who don't know medical instruments? Every one of them looks funny. You sure you didn't make these yourself?" They didn't take the one-dollar offer.

The girl was baffled and angry; the doctor was baffled too, but triumphant. He had two dollars, and the girl had a half-interest in something nobody wanted. But, he suddenly marveled, the thing had been all right to cure the kid, hadn't it?

"Well," he asked her, "do you give up? As you see, the kit is practically valueless."

She was thinking hard. "Don't fly off the handle, doc. I don't get this but something's going on all right ... would those guys know good stuff if they saw it?"

"They would. They make a living from it. Wherever this kit came from—"

She seized on that, with a devilish faculty she seemed to have of eliciting answers without asking questions. "I thought so. You don't know either, huh? Well, maybe I can find out for you. C'mon in here. I ain't letting go of that thing. There's money in it—some way, I don't know how, there's money in it." He followed her into a cafeteria and to an almost-empty corner. She was oblivious to stares and snickers from the other customers as she opened the little black bag—it almost covered a cafeteria table—and ferreted through it. She picked out a retractor from a loop, scrutinized it, contemptuously threw it down, picked out a speculum, threw it down, picked out the lower half of an O.B. forceps, turned it over, close to her sharp young eyes—and saw what the doctor's dim old ones could not have seen.

All old Dr. Full knew was that she was peering at the neck of the forceps and then turned white. Very carefully, she placed the half of the forceps back in its loop of cloth and then replaced the retractor and the speculum. "Well?" he asked. "What did you see?"

"Made in U.S.A.," she quoted hoarsely. "Patent Applied for July 2450."

He wanted to tell her she must have misread the inscription, that it must be a practical joke, that—

But he knew she had read correctly. Those bandage shears: they *had* driven his fingers, rather than his fingers driving them. The hypo needle that had no hole. The pretty blue pill that had struck him like a thunderbolt.

"You know what I'm going to do?" asked the girl, with sudden animation. "I'm going to go to charm school. You'll like that, won't ya, doc? Because we're sure going to be seeing a lot of each other."

Old Dr. Full didn't answer. His hands had been playing idly with that plastic card from the kit on which had been printed the rows and columns that had guided him twice before. The card had a slight convexity; you could snap the convexity back and forth from one side to the other. He noted, in a daze, that with each snap a different text appeared on the cards, *Snap*. "The knife with the blue dot in the handle is for tumors only. Diagnose tumors with your Instrument Seven, the Swelling Tester. Place the Swelling Tester—" *Snap*. "An overdose of the pink pills in Bottle 3 can be fixed with one white pill from Bottle—" *Snap*. "Hold the suture needle by the end without the hole in it. Touch it to one end of the wound you want to close and let go. After it has made the knot, touch it—" *Snap*. "Place the top half of the O.B. Forceps

near the opening. Let go. After it has entered and conformed to the shape of—" *Snap*.

The slot man saw "FLANNERY 1—MEDICAL" in the upper left corner of the hunk of copy. He automatically scribbled "trim to .75" on it and skimmed it across the horseshoe-shaped copy desk to Piper, who had been handling Edna Flannery's quack-exposé series. She was a nice youngster, he thought, but like all youngsters she over-wrote. Hence, the "trim."

Piper dealt back a city hall story to the slot, pinned down Flannery's feature with one hand and began to tap his pencil across it, one tap to a word, at the same steady beat as a teletype carriage traveling across the roller. He wasn't exactly reading it this first time. He was just looking at the letters and words to find out whether, as letters and words, they conformed to *Herald* style. The steady tap of his pencil ceased at intervals as it drew a black line ending with a stylized letter "d" through the word "breast" and scribbled in "chest" instead, or knocked down the capital "E" in "East" to lower case with a diagonal, or closed up a split word—in whose middle Flannery had bumped the space bar of her typewriter—with two curved lines like parentheses rotated through ninety degrees. The thick black pencil zipped a ring around the "30" which, like all youngsters, she put at the end of her stories. He turned back to the first page for the second reading. This time the pencil drew lines with the stylized "d's" at the end of them through adjectives and whole phrases, printed big "L's" to mark paragraphs, hooked some of Flannery's own paragraphs together with swooping re-curved lines.

At the bottom of "FLANNERY ADD 2—MEDICAL" the pencil slowed down and stopped. The slot man, sensitive to the rhythm of his beloved copy desk, looked up almost at once. He saw Piper squinting at the story, at a loss. Without wasting words, the copy reader skimmed it back across the Masonite horseshoe to the chief, caught a police story in return and buckled down, his pencil tapping. The slot man read as far as the fourth add, barked at Howard, on the rim: "Sit in for me," and stumped through the clattering city room toward the alcove where the managing editor presided over his own bedlam.

The copy chief waited his turn while the make-up editor, the press-room foreman and the chief photographer had words with the M.E. When his turn came, he dropped Flannery's copy on his desk and said: "She says this one isn't a quack."

The M.E. read:

"FLANNERY 1—MEDICAL, by Edna Flannery, *Herald* Staff Writer.

"The sordid tale of medical quackery which the *Herald* has exposed in this series of articles undergoes a change of pace today which the reporter found a welcome surprise. Her quest for the facts in the case of today's subject started just the same way that her exposure of one dozen shyster M.D.'s and faith-healing phonies did. But she can report for a change that Dr. Bayard Full is, despite unorthodox practices which have drawn the suspicion of the rightly hypersensitive medical associations, a true healer living up to the highest ideals of his profession.

"Dr. Full's name was given to the *Herald's* reporter by the ethical committee of a county medical association, which reported that he had been expelled from the association on July 18, 1941 for allegedly 'milking' several patients suffering from trivial complaints. According to sworn statements in the committee's files, Dr. Full had told them they suffered from cancer, and that he had a treatment which would prolong their lives. After his expulsion from the association, Dr. Full dropped out of their sight—until he opened a mid-town 'sanitarium' in a brownstone front which had for years served as a rooming house.

"The *Herald's* reporter went to that sanitarium, on East 89th Street, with the full expectation of having numerous imaginary ailments diagnosed and of being promised a sure cure for a flat sum of money. She expected to find unkempt quarters, dirty instruments and the mumbo-jumbo paraphernalia of the shyster M.D. which she had seen a dozen times before.

"She was wrong.

"Dr. Full's sanitarium is spotlessly clean, from its tastefully furnished entrance hall to its shining, white treatment rooms. The attractive, blond receptionist who greeted the reporter was soft-spoken and correct, asking only the reporter's name, address and the general nature of her complaint. This was given, as usual, as 'nagging backache.' The receptionist asked

the *Herald's* reporter to be seated, and a short while later conducted her to a second-floor treatment room and introduced her to Dr. Full.

"Dr. Full's alleged past, as described by the medical society spokesman, is hard to reconcile with his present appearance. He is a clear-eyed, white-haired man in his sixties, to judge by his appearance—a little above middle height and apparently in good physical condition. His voice was firm and friendly, untainted by the ingratiating whine of the shyster M.D. which the reporter has come to know too well.

"The receptionist did not leave the room as he began his examination after a few questions as to the nature and location of the pain. As the reporter lay face down on a treatment table the doctor pressed some instrument to the small of her back. In about one minute he made this astounding statement: 'Young woman, there is no reason for you to have any pain where you say you do. I understand they're saying nowadays that emotional upsets cause pains like that. You'd better go to a psychologist or psychiatrist if the pain keeps up. There is no physical cause for it, so I can do nothing for you.'

"His frankness took the reporter's breath away. Had he guessed she was, so to speak, a spy in his camp? She tried again: 'Well, doctor, perhaps you'd give me a physical checkup, I feel run-down all the time, besides the pains. Maybe I need a tonic.' This is never-failing bait to shyster M.D.'s—an invitation for them to find all sorts of mysterious conditions wrong with a patient, each of which 'requires' an expensive treatment. As explained in the first article of this series, of course, the reporter underwent a thorough physical checkup before she embarked on her quack-hunt, and was found to be in one hundred percent perfect condition, with the exception of a 'scarred' area at the bottom tip of her left lung resulting from a childhood attack of tuberculosis and a tendency toward 'hyperthyroidism'—overactivity of the thyroid gland which makes it difficult to put on weight and sometimes causes a slight shortness of breath.

"Dr. Full consented to perform the examination, and took a number of shining, spotlessly clean instruments from loops in a large board literally covered with instruments—most of them unfamiliar to the reporter. The instrument with which he approached first was a tube with a curved dial in its surface and two wires that ended on flat disks growing from its ends. He placed one of the disks on the back of the reporter's right hand and the other on the back of her left. 'Reading the meter,' he called out some number which the attentive receptionist took down on a ruled form. The same procedure was repeated several times, thoroughly covering the reporter's anatomy and thoroughly convincing her that the doctor was a complete quack. The reporter had never seen any such diagnostic procedure practiced during the weeks she put in preparing for this series.

"The doctor then took the ruled sheet from the receptionist, conferred with her in low tones and said: 'You have a slightly overactive thyroid, young woman. And there's something wrong with your left lung—not seriously, but I'd like to take a closer look.'

"He selected an instrument from the board which, the reporter knew, is called a 'speculum'—a scissorlike device which spreads apart body openings such as the orifice of the ear, the nostril and so on, so that a doctor can look in during an examination. The instrument was, however, too large to be an aural or nasal speculum but too small to be anything else. As the *Herald's* reporter was about to ask further questions, the attending receptionist told her: 'It's customary for us to blindfold our patients during lung examinations—do you mind?' The reporter, bewildered, allowed her to tie a spotlessly clean bandage over her eyes, and waited nervously for what would come next.

"She still cannot say exactly what happened while she was blindfolded—but X rays confirm her suspicions. She felt a cold sensation at her ribs on the left side—a cold that seemed to enter inside her body. Then there was a snapping feeling, and the cold sensation was gone. She heard Dr. Full say in a matter-of-fact voice: 'You have an old tubercular scar down there. It isn't doing any particular harm, but an active person like you needs all the oxygen she can get. Lie still and I'll fix it for you.'

"Then there was a repetition of the cold sensation, lasting for a longer time. 'Another batch of alveoli and some more vascular glue,' the *Herald's* reporter heard Dr. Full say, and the receptionist's crisp response to the order. Then the strange sensation departed and the eye-bandage was removed. The reporter saw no scar on her ribs, and yet the doctor assured her: 'That did it. We took out the fibrosis—and a good fibrosis it was, too; it walled off the infection so you're still alive to tell the tale. Then we planted a few clumps of alveoli—they're the little gadgets that get the oxygen from the air you breathe into your blood. I won't monkey with your thyroxin supply. You've got used to being the kind of person you are, and if you suddenly found yourself easy-going and all the rest of it, chances are you'd only be upset. About the backache: just check with the county medical society for the name of a good psychologist or psychiatrist. And look out

for quacks; the woods are full of them.'

"The doctor's self-assurance took the reporter's breath away. She asked what the charge would be, and was told to pay the receptionist fifty dollars. As usual, the reporter delayed paying until she got a receipt signed by the doctor himself, detailing the services for which it paid. Unlike most, the doctor cheerfully wrote: 'For removal of fibrosis from left lung and restoration of alveoli,' and signed it.

"The reporter's first move when she left the sanitarium was to head for the chest specialist who had examined her in preparation for this series. A comparison of X rays taken on the day of the 'operation' and those taken previously would, the *Herald's* reporter then thought, expose Dr. Full as a prince of shyster M.D.'s and quacks.

"The chest specialist made time on his crowded schedule for the reporter, in whose series he has shown a lively interest from the planning stage on. He laughed uproariously in his staid Park Avenue examining room as she described the weird procedure to which she had been subjected. But he did not laugh when he took a chest X ray of the reporter, developed it, dried it, and compared it with the ones he had taken earlier. The chest specialist took six more X rays that afternoon, but finally admitted that they all told the same story. The *Herald's* reporter has it on his authority that the scar she had eighteen days ago from her tuberculosis is now gone and has been replaced by healthy lung-tissue. He declares that this is a happening unparalleled in medical history. He does not go along with the reporter in her firm conviction that Dr. Full is responsible for the change.

"The *Herald's* reporter, however, sees no two ways about it. She concludes that Dr. Bayard Full—whatever his alleged past may have been—is now an unorthodox but highly successful practitioner of medicine, to whose hands the reporter would trust herself in any emergency.

"Not so is the case of 'Rev.' Annie Dimsworth—a female harpy who, under the guise of 'faith' preys on the ignorant and suffering who come to her sordid 'healing parlor' for help and remain to feed 'Rev.' Annie's bank account, which now totals up to \$53,238.64. Tomorrow's article will show, with photostats of bank statements and sworn testimony that—"

The managing editor turned down "FLANNERY LAST ADD—MEDICAL" and tapped his front teeth with a pencil, trying to think straight. He finally told the copy chief: "Kill the story. Run the teaser as a box." He tore off the last paragraph—the "teaser" about "Rev." Annie—and handed it to the desk man, who stumped back to his Masonite horseshoe.

The make-up editor was back, dancing with impatience as he tried to catch the M.E.'s eye. The interphone buzzed with the red light which indicated that the editor and publisher wanted to talk to him. The M.E. thought briefly of a special series on this Dr. Full, decided nobody would believe it and that he probably was a phony anyway. He spiked the story on the "dead" hook and answered his interphone.

Dr. Full had become almost fond of Angie. As his practice had grown to engross the neighborhood illnesses, and then to a corner suite in an uptown taxpayer building, and finally to the sanitarium, she seemed to have grown with it. Oh, he thought, we have our little disputes—

The girl, for instance, was too much interested in money. She had wanted to specialize in cosmetic surgery—removing wrinkles from wealthy old women and whatnot. She didn't realize, at first, that a thing like this was in their trust, that they were the stewards and not the owners of the little black bag and its fabulous contents.

He had tried, ever so cautiously, to analyze them, but without success. All the instruments were slightly radioactive, for instance, but not quite so. They would make a Geiger-Mueller counter indicate, but they would not collapse the leaves of an electroscope. He didn't pretend to be up on the latest developments, but as he understood it, that was just plain *wrong*. Under the highest magnification there were lines on the instruments' superfinished surfaces: incredibly fine lines, engraved in random hatchments which made no particular sense. Their magnetic properties were preposterous. Sometimes the instruments were strongly attracted to magnets, sometimes less so, and sometimes not at all.

Dr. Full had taken X rays in fear and trembling lest he disrupt whatever delicate machinery worked in them. He was *sure* they were not solid, that the handles and perhaps the blades must be mere shells filled with busy little watch-works—but

the X rays showed nothing of the sort. Oh, yes—and they were always sterile, and they wouldn't rust. Dust *fell* off them if you shook them: now, that was something he understood. They ionized the dust, or were ionized themselves, or something of the sort. At any rate, he had read of something similar that had to do with phonograph records.

She wouldn't know about that, he proudly thought. She kept the books well enough, and perhaps she gave him a useful prod now and then when he was inclined to settle down. The move from the neighborhood slum to the uptown quarters had been her idea, and so had the sanitarium. Good, good, it enlarged his sphere of usefulness. Let the child have her mink coats and her convertible, as they seemed to be calling roadsters nowadays. He himself was too busy and too old. He had so much to make up for.

Dr. Full thought happily of his Master Plan. She would not like it much, but she would have to see the logic of it. This marvelous thing that had happened to them must be handed on. She was herself no doctor; even though the instruments practically ran themselves, there was more to doctoring than skill. There were the ancient canons of the healing art. And so, having seen the logic of it, Angie would yield; she would assent to his turning over the little black bag to all humanity.

He would probably present it to the College of Surgeons, with as little fuss as possible—well, perhaps a *small* ceremony, and he would like a souvenir of the occasion, a cup or a framed testimonial. It would be a relief to have the thing out of his hands, in a way; let the giants of the healing art decide who was to have its benefits. No, Angie would understand. She was a goodhearted girl.

It was nice that she had been showing so much interest in the surgical side lately—asking about the instruments, reading the instruction card for hours, even practicing on guinea pigs. If something of his love for humanity had been communicated to her, old Dr. Full sentimentally thought, his life would not have been in vain. Surely she would realize that a greater good would be served by surrendering the instruments to wiser hands than theirs, and by throwing aside the cloak of secrecy necessary to work on their small scale.

Dr. Full was in the treatment room that had been the brownstone's front parlor; through the window he saw Angie's yellow convertible roll to a stop before the stoop. He liked the way she looked as she climbed the stairs; neat, not flashy, he thought. A sensible girl like her, she'd understand. There was somebody with her—a fat woman, puffing up the steps, overdressed and petulant. Now, what could she want?

Angie let herself in and went into the treatment room, followed by the fat woman. "Doctor," said the blond girl gravely, "may I present Mrs. Coleman?" Charm school had not taught her everything, but Mrs. Coleman, evidently *nouveau riche*, thought the doctor, did not notice the blunder.

"Miss Aquella told me *so* much about you, doctor, and your remarkable system!" she gushed.

Before he could answer, Angie smoothly interposed: "Would you excuse us for just a moment, Mrs. Coleman?"

She took the doctor's arm and led him into the reception hall. "Listen," she said swiftly, "I know this goes against your grain, but I couldn't pass it up. I met this old thing in the exercise class at Elizabeth Barton's. Nobody else'll talk to her there. She's a widow. I guess her husband was a black marketeer or something, and she has a pile of dough. I gave her a line about how you had a system of massaging wrinkles out. My idea is, you blindfold her, cut her neck open with the Cutaneous Series knife, shoot some Firmol into the muscles, spoon out some of that blubber with an Adipose Series curette and spray it all with Skintite. When you take the blindfold off she's got rid of a wrinkle and doesn't know what happened. She'll pay five hundred dollars. Now, don't say 'no,' doc. Just this once, let's do it my way, can't you? I've been working on this deal all along too, haven't I?"

"Oh," said the doctor, "very well." He was going to have to tell her about the Master Plan before long anyway. He would let her have it her way this time.

Back in the treatment room, Mrs. Coleman had been thinking things over. She told the doctor sternly as he entered: "Of course, your system is permanent, isn't it?"

"It is, madam," he said shortly. "Would you please lie down there? Miss Aquella, get a sterile three-inch bandage for Mrs. Coleman's eyes." He turned his back on the fat woman to avoid conversation, and pretended to be adjusting the lights. Angie blindfolded the woman, and the doctor selected the instruments he would need. He handed the blond girl a

pair of retractors, and told her: "Just slip the corners of the blades in as I cut—" She gave him an alarmed look, and gestured at the reclining woman. He lowered his voice: "Very well. Slip in the corners and rock them along the incision. I'll tell you when to pull them out."

Dr. Full held the Cutaneous Series knife to his eyes as he adjusted the little slide for three centimeters depth. He sighed a little as he recalled that its last use had been in the extirpation of an "inoperable" tumor of the throat.

"Very well," he said, bending over the woman. He tried a tentative pass through her tissues. The blade dipped in and flowed through them, like a finger through quicksilver, with no wound left in the wake. Only the retractors could hold the edges of the incision apart.

Mrs. Coleman stirred and jabbered: "Doctor, that felt so peculiar! Are you sure you're rubbing the right way?"

"Quite sure, madam," said the doctor wearily. "Would you please try not to talk during the massage?"

He nodded at Angie, who stood ready with the retractors. The blade sank in to its three centimeters, miraculously cutting only the dead horny tissues of the epidermis and the live tissue of the dermis, pushing aside mysteriously all major and minor blood vessels and muscular tissue, declining to affect any system or organ except the one it was—tuned to, could you say? The doctor didn't know the answer, but he felt tired and bitter at this prostitution. Angie slipped in the retractor blades and rocked them as he withdrew the knife, then pulled to separate the lips of the incision. It bloodlessly exposed an unhealthy string of muscle, sagging in a dead-looking loop from blue-gray ligaments. The doctor took a hypo. Number IX, pre-set to "g" and raised it to his eye level. The mist came and went; there probably was no possibility of an embolus with one of these gadgets, but why take chances? He shot one cc. of "g"—identified as "Firmol" by the card—into the muscle. He and Angie watched as it tightened up against the pharynx.

He took the Adipose Series curette, a small one, and spooned out yellowish tissue, dropping it into the incinerator box, and then nodded to Angie. She eased out the retractors and the gaping incision slipped together into unbroken skin, sagging now. The doctor had the atomizer—dialed to "Skintite"—ready. He sprayed, and the skin shrank up into the new firm throat line.

As he replaced the instruments, Angie removed Mrs. Coleman's bandage and gayly announced: "We're finished! And there's a mirror in the reception hall—"

Mrs. Coleman didn't need to be invited twice. With incredulous fingers she felt her chin, and then dashed for the hall. The doctor grimaced as he heard her yelp of delight, and Angie turned to him with a tight smile. "I'll get the money and get her out," she said. "You won't have to be bothered with her any more."

He was grateful for that much.

She followed Mrs. Coleman into the reception hall, and the doctor dreamed over the case of instruments. A ceremony, certainly—he was *entitled* to one. Not everybody, he thought, would turn such a sure source of money over to the good of humanity. But you reached an age when money mattered less, and when you thought of these things you had done that *might* be open to misunderstanding if, just if, there chanced to be any of that, well, that judgment business. The doctor wasn't a religious man, but you certainly found yourself thinking hard about some things when your time drew near—

Angie was back, with a bit of paper in her hands. "Five hundred dollars," she said matter-of-factly. "And you realize, don't you, that we could go over her an inch at a time—at five hundred dollars an inch?"

"I've been meaning to talk to you about that," he said.

There was bright fear in her eyes, he thought—but why?

"Angie, you've been a good girl and an understanding girl, but we can't keep this up forever, you know."

"Let's talk about it some other time," she said flatly. "I'm tired now."

"No—I really feel we've gone far enough on our own. The instruments—"

"Don't say it, doc!" she hissed. "Don't say it, or you'll be sorry!" In her face there was a look that reminded him of the hollow-eyed, gaunt-faced, dirty-blond creature she had been. From under the charm-school finish there burned the

guttersnipe whose infancy had been spent on a sour and filthy mattress, whose childhood had been play in the littered alley and whose adolescence had been the sweatshops and the aimless gatherings at night under the glaring street lamps.

He shook his head to dispel the puzzling notion. "It's this way," he patiently began. "I told you about the family that invented the O.B. forceps and kept them a secret for so many generations, how they could have given them to the world but didn't?"

"They knew what they were doing," said the guttersnipe flatly.

"Well, that's neither here nor there," said the doctor, irritated. "My mind is made up about it. I'm going to turn the instruments over to the College of Surgeons. We have enough money to be comfortable. You can even have the house. I've been thinking of going to a warmer climate, myself." He felt peeved with her for making the unpleasant scene. He was unprepared for what happened next.

Angie snatched the little black bag and dashed for the door, with panic in her eyes. He scrambled after her, catching her arm, twisting it in a sudden rage. She clawed at his face with her free hand, babbling curses. Somehow, somebody's finger touched the little black bag, and it opened grotesquely into the enormous board, covered with shining instruments, large and small. Half a dozen of them joggled loose and fell to the floor.

"Now see what you've done!" roared the doctor, unreasonably. Her hand was still viselike on the handle, but she was standing still, trembling with choked-up rage. The doctor bent stiffly to pick up the fallen instruments. Unreasonable girl! he thought bitterly. Making a scene—

Pain drove in between his shoulderblades and he fell face-down. The light ebbed. "Unreasonable girl!" he tried to croak. And then: "They'll know I tried, anyway—"

Angie looked down on his prone body, with the handle of the Number Six Cautery Series knife protruding from it. "—will cut through all tissues. Use for amputations before you spread on the Re-Gro. Extreme caution should be used in the vicinity of vital organs and major blood vessels or nerve trunks—"

"I didn't mean to do that," said Angie, dully, cold with horror. Now the detective would come, the implacable detective who would reconstruct the crime from the dust in the room. She would run and turn and twist, but the detective would find her out and she would be tried in a courtroom before a judge and jury; the lawyer would make speeches, but the jury would convict her anyway, and the headlines would scream: "BLOND KILLER GUILTY!" and she'd maybe get the chair, walking down a plain corridor where a beam of sunlight struck through the dusty air, with an iron door at the end of it. Her mink, her convertible, her dresses, the handsome man she was going to meet and marry—

The mist of cinematic clichés cleared, and she knew what she would do next. Quite steadily, she picked the incinerator box from its loop in the board—a metal cube with a different-textured spot on one side. "—to dispose of fibroses or other unwanted matter, simply touch the disk—" You dropped something in and touched the disk. There was a sort of soundless whistle, very powerful and unpleasant if you were too close, and a sort of lightless flash. When you opened the box again, the contents were gone. Angie took another of the Cautery Series knives and went grimly to work. Good thing there wasn't any blood to speak of—She finished the awful task in three hours.

She slept heavily that night, totally exhausted by the wringing emotional demands of the slaying and the subsequent horror. But in the morning, it was as though the doctor had never been there. She ate breakfast, dressed with unusual care—and then undid the unusual care. Nothing out of the ordinary, she told herself. Don't do one thing different from the way you would have done it before. After a day or two, you can phone the cops. Say he walked out spoiling for a drunk, and you're worried. But don't rush it, baby—*don't rush it*.

Mrs. Coleman was due at 10:00 a.m. Angie had counted on being able to talk the doctor into at least one more five-hundred-dollar session. She'd have to do it herself now—but she'd have to start sooner or later.

The woman arrived early. Angie explained smoothly: "The doctor asked me to take care of the massage today. Now that he has the tissue-firming process beginning, it only requires somebody trained in his methods—" As she spoke, her eyes swiveled to the instrument case—open! She cursed herself for the single flaw as the woman followed her gaze and recoiled.

"What are those things!" she demanded. "Are you going to cut me with them? I *thought* there was something fishy—"

"Please, Mrs. Coleman," said Angie, "please, *dear* Mrs. Coleman—you don't understand about the ... the massage instruments!"

"Massage instruments, my foot!" squabbled the woman shrilly. "That doctor *operated* on me. Why, he might have killed me!"

Angie wordlessly took one of the smaller Cutaneous Series knives and passed it through her forearm. The blade flowed like a finger through quicksilver, leaving no wound in its wake. *That* should convince the old cow!

It didn't convince her, but it did startle her. "What did you do with it? The blade folds up into the handle—that's it!"

"Now look closely, Mrs. Coleman," said Angie, thinking desperately of the five hundred dollars. "Look very closely and you'll see that the, uh, the sub-skin massager simply slips beneath the tissues without doing any harm, tightening and firming the muscles themselves instead of having to work through layers of skin and adipose tissue. It's the secret of the doctor's method. Now, how can outside massage have the effect that we got last night?"

Mrs. Coleman was beginning to calm down. "It *did* work, all right," she admitted, stroking the new line of her neck. "But your arm's one thing and my neck's another! Let me see you do that with your neck!"

Angie smiled—

Al returned to the clinic after an excellent lunch that had almost reconciled him to three more months he would have to spend on duty. And then, he thought, and then a blessed year at the blessedly super-normal South Pole working on his specialty—which happened to be telekinesis exercises for ages three to six. Meanwhile, of course, the world had to go on and of course he had to shoulder his share in the running of it.

Before settling down to desk work he gave a routine glance at the bag board. What he saw made him stiffen with shocked surprise. A red light was on next to one of the numbers—the first since he couldn't think when. He read off the number and murmured "O.K., 674,101. That fixes *you*." He put the number on a card sorter and in a moment the record was in his hand. Oh, yes—Hemingway's bag. The big dummy didn't remember how or where he had lost it; none of them ever did. There were hundreds of them floating around.

Al's policy in such cases was to leave the bag turned on. The things practically ran themselves, it was practically impossible to do harm with them, so whoever found a lost one might as well be allowed to use it. You turn it off, you have a social loss—you leave it on, it may do some good. As he understood it, and not very well at that, the stuff wasn't "used up." A temporalist had tried to explain it to him with little success that the prototypes in the transmitter *had been transducted* through a series of point-events of transfinite cardinality. Al had innocently asked whether that meant prototypes had been stretched, so to speak, through all time, and the temporalist had thought he was joking and left in a huff.

"Like to see him do this," thought Al darkly, as he telekinized himself to the coinbox, after a cautious look to see that there were no medics around. To the box he said: "Police chief," and then to the police chief: "There's been a homicide committed with Medical Instrument Kit 674,101. It was lost some months ago by one of my people, Dr. John Hemingway. He didn't have a clear account of the circumstances."

The police chief groaned and said: "I'll call him in and question him." He was to be astonished by the answers, and was to learn that the homicide was well out of his jurisdiction.

Al stood for a moment at the bag board by the glowing red light that had been sparked into life by a departing vital force giving, as its last act, the warning that Kit 674,101 was in homicidal hands. With a sigh, Al pulled the plug and the light went out.

"Yah," jeered the woman. "You'd fool around with my neck, but you wouldn't risk your own with that thing!"

Angie smiled with serene confidence a smile that was to shock hardened morgue attendants. She set the Cutaneous Series knife to three centimeters before drawing it across her neck. Smiling, knowing the blade would cut only the dead horny tissue of the epidermis and the live tissue of the dermis, mysteriously push aside all major and minor blood vessels and muscular tissue—

Smiling, the knife plunging in and its microtomes sharp metal shearing through major and minor blood vessels and muscular tissue and pharynx, Angie cut her throat.

In the few minutes it took the police, summoned by the shrieking Mrs. Coleman, to arrive, the instruments had become crusted with rust, and the flasks which had held vascular glue and clumps of pink, rubbery alveoli and spare gray cells and coils of receptor nerves held only black slime, and from them when opened gushed the foul gases of decomposition.



Everybody Knows Joe

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Joe had quite a day for himself Thursday, and as usual I had to tag along. If I had a right arm to give, I'd give it for a day off now and then. Like on Thursday. On Thursday he really outdid himself.

He woke up in the hotel room and had a shower. He wasn't going to shave until I told him he looked like a bum. So he shaved and then he stood for a whole minute admiring his beauty in the mirror, forgetting whose idea it was in the first place.

So down to the coffee shop for breakfast. A hard-working man needs a good breakfast. So getting ready for a back-breaking day of copying references at the library, he had tomato juice, two fried eggs, three sausages, a sugared doughnut, and coffee—with cream and sugar.

He couldn't work that off his pot in a week of ditch-digging under a July sun, but a hard-working man needs a good breakfast. I was too disgusted to argue with him. He's hopeless when he smells that short-order smell of smoking grease, frying bacon and coffee.

He wanted to take a taxi to the library—eight blocks!

"Walk, you jerk!" I told him. He started to mumble about pulling down six hundred bucks for this week's work and then he must have thought I was going to mention the high-calory breakfast. To him that's hitting below the belt. He thinks he's an unfortunate man with an affliction—about twenty pounds of it. He walked and arrived at the library glowing with virtue.

Making out his slip at the newspaper room he blandly put down next to *firm*—*The Griffin Press, Inc.*—when he knew as well as I did that he was a free lance and hadn't even got a definite assignment from Griffin.

There's a line on the slip where you put down *reason for consulting files (please be specific)*. It's a shame to cramp Joe's style to just one line after you pitch him an essay-type question like that. He squeezed in, *Preparation of article on year in biochemistry for Griffin Pr. Encyc. 1952 Yrbk.*, and handed it with a flourish to the librarian.

The librarian, a nice old man, was polite to him, which is usually a mistake with Joe. After he finished telling the librarian how his microfilm files ought to be organized and how they ought to switch from microfilm to microcard and how in spite of everything the New York Public Library wasn't such a bad place to research, he got down to work.

He's pretty harmless when he's working—it's one of the things that keeps me from cutting his throat. With a noon break for apple pie and coffee he transcribed about a hundred entries onto his cards, mopping up the year in biochemistry nicely. He swaggered down the library steps, feeling like Herman Melville after finishing *Moby Dick*.

"Don't be so smug," I told him. "You still have to write the piece. And they still have to buy it."

"A detail," he said grandly. "Just journalism. I can do it with my eyes shut."

Just journalism. Somehow his three months of running copy for the A.P. before the war has made him an Ed Leahy.

"*When* are you going to do it with your eyes...?" I began but it wasn't any use. He began telling me about how Gautama Buddha didn't break with the world until he was 29 and Mohammed didn't announce that he was a prophet until he was 30, so why couldn't *he* one of these days suddenly bust loose with a new revelation or something and set the world on its ear? What it boiled down to was he didn't think he'd write the article tonight.

He postponed his break with the world long enough to have a ham and cheese on rye and more coffee at an automat and then phoned Maggie. She was available as usual. She said as usual, "Well then, why don't you just drop by and we'll spend a quiet evening with some records?"

As usual he thought that would be fine since he was so beat after a hard day. As usual I told him, "You're a louse, Joe. You know all she wants is a husband and you know it isn't going to be you, so why don't you let go of the girl so she can find somebody who means business?"

The usual answers rolled out automatically and we got that out of the way.

Maybe Maggie isn't very bright but she seemed glad to see him. She's shooting for her Doctorate in sociology at N.Y.U., she does part-time case work for the city, she has one of those three-room Greenwich Village apartments with dyed burlap drapes and studio couches and home-made mobiles. She thinks writing is something holy and Joe's careful not to tell her different.

They drank some rhine wine and seltzer while Joe talked about the day's work as though he'd won the Nobel prize for biochemistry. He got downright brutal about Maggie being mixed up in such an approximate unquantitative excuse for a science as sociology and she apologized humbly and eventually he forgave her. Big-hearted Joe.

But he wasn't so fried that he *had* to start talking about a man wanting to settle down—"not this year but maybe next. Thirty's a dividing point that makes you stop and wonder what you really want and what you've really got out of life, Maggie darlin'." It was as good as telling her that she should be a good girl and continue to keep open house for him and maybe some day ... maybe.

As I said, maybe Maggie isn't very bright. But as I also said, Thursday was the day Joe picked to outdo himself.

"Joe," she said with this look on her face, "I got a new LP of the Brahms Serenade Number One. It's on top of the stack. Would you tell me what you think of it?"

So he put it on and they sat sipping rhine wine and seltzer and he turned it over and they sat sipping rhine wine and seltzer until both sides were played. And she kept watching him. Not adoringly.

"Well," she asked with this new look, "what did you think of it?"

He told her, of course. There was some comment on Brahms' architectonics and his resurrection of the contrapuntal style. Because he'd sneaked a look at the record's envelope he was able to spend a couple of minutes on Brahms' debt to Haydn and the young Beethoven in the fifth movement (*allegro*, D Major) and the *gay rondo* of the——

"Joe," she said, not looking at him. "Joe," she said, "I got that record at one hell of a discount down the street. It's a wrong pressing. Somehow the first side is the first half of the Serenade but the second half is Schumann's Symphonic Studies Opus Thirteen. Somebody noticed it when they played it in a booth. But I guess you didn't notice it."

"Get out of *this one*, braino," I told him.

He got up and said in a strangled voice, "And I thought you were my friend. I suppose I'll never learn." He walked out.

I suppose he never will.

God help me, I ought to know.

Time Bum

Harry Twenty-Third Street suddenly burst into laughter. His friend and sometimes roper Farmer Brown looked inquisitive.

"I just thought of a new con," Harry Twenty-Third Street said, still chuckling.

Farmer Brown shook his head positively. "There's no such thing, my man," he said. "There are only new switches on old cons. What have you got—a store con? Shall you be needing a roper?" He tried not to look eager as a matter of principle, but everybody knew the Farmer needed a connection badly. His girl had two-timed him on a badger game, running off with the chump and marrying him after an expensive, month-long buildup.

Harry said, "Sorry, old boy. No details. It's too good to split up. I shall rip and tear the suckers with this con for many a year, I trust, before the details become available to the trade. Nobody, but nobody, is going to call copper after I take him. It's beautiful and it's mine. I will see you around, my friend."

Harry got up from the booth and left, nodding cheerfully to a safeblower here, a fixer there, on his way to the locked door of the hangout. Naturally he didn't nod to such small fry as pickpockets and dope peddlers. Harry had his pride.

The puzzled Farmer sipped his lemon squash and concluded that Harry had been kidding him. He noticed that Harry had left behind him in the booth a copy of a magazine with a space ship and a pretty girl in green bra and pants on the cover.

"A furnished ... bungalow?" the man said hesitantly, as though he knew what he wanted but wasn't quite sure of the word.

"Certainly, Mr. Clurg," Walter Lachlan said. "I'm sure we can suit you. Wife and family?"

"No," said Clurg. "They are ... far away." He seemed to get some secret amusement from the thought. And then, to Walter's horror, he sat down calmly in empty air beside the desk and, of course, crashed to the floor looking ludicrous and astonished.

Walter gaped and helped him up, sputtering apologies and wondering privately what was wrong with the man. There wasn't a chair there. There was a chair on the other side of the desk and a chair against the wall. But there just wasn't a chair where Clurg had sat down.

Clurg apparently was unhurt; he protested against Walter's apologies, saying: "I should have known, Master Lachlan. It's quite all right; it was all my fault. What about the bang—the bungalow?"

Business sense triumphed over Walter's bewilderment. He pulled out his listings and they conferred on the merits of several furnished bungalows. When Walter mentioned that the Curran place was especially nice, in an especially nice neighborhood—he lived up the street himself—Clurg was impressed. "I'll take that one," he said. "What is the ... feoff?"

Walter had learned a certain amount of law for his real-estate license examination; he recognized the word. "The *rent* is seventy-five dollars," he said. "You speak English very well, Mr. Clurg." He hadn't been certain that the man was a foreigner until the dictionary word came out. "You have hardly any accent."

"Thank you," Clurg said, pleased. "I worked hard at it. Let me see—seventy-five is six twelves and three." He opened one of his shiny-new leather suitcases and calmly laid six heavy little paper rolls on Walter's desk. He broke open a seventh and laid down three mint-new silver dollars. "There I am," he said. "I mean, there you are."

Walter didn't know what to say. It had never happened before. People paid by check or in bills. They just didn't pay in silver dollars. But it was money—why shouldn't Mr. Clurg pay in silver dollars if he wanted to? He shook himself, scooped the rolls into his top desk drawer and said: "I'll drive you out there if you like. It's nearly quitting time anyway."

Walter told his wife Betty over the dinner table: "We ought to have him in some evening. I can't imagine where on Earth he comes from. I had to show him how to turn on the kitchen range. When it went on he said, 'Oh, yes—electricity!' and laughed his head off. And he kept ducking the question when I tried to ask him in a nice way. Maybe he's some kind of a political refugee."

"Maybe ..." Betty began dreamily, and then shut her mouth. She didn't want Walter laughing at her again. As it was, he made her buy her science-fiction magazines downtown instead of at neighborhood newsstands. He thought it wasn't becoming for his wife to read them. He's so eager for success, she thought sentimentally.

That night, while Walter watched a television variety show, she read a story in one of her magazines. (Its cover, depicting a space ship and a girl in green bra and shorts, had been prudently torn off and thrown away.) It was about a man from the future who had gone back in time, bringing with him all sorts of marvelous inventions. In the end the Time Police punished him for unauthorized time traveling. They had come back and got him, brought him back to his own time. She smiled. It *would* be nice if Mr. Clurg, instead of being a slightly eccentric foreigner, were a man from the future with all sorts of interesting stories to tell and a satchelful of gadgets that could be sold for millions and millions of dollars.

After a week they did have Clurg over for dinner. It started badly. Once more he managed to sit down in empty air and crash to the floor. While they were brushing him off he said fretfully: "I *can't* get used to not—" and then said no more.

He was a picky eater. Betty had done one of her mother's specialties, veal cutlet with tomato sauce, topped by a poached egg. He ate the egg and sauce, made a clumsy attempt to cut up the meat, and abandoned it. She served a plate of cheese, half a dozen kinds, for dessert, and Clurg tasted them uncertainly, breaking off a crumb from each, while Betty wondered where that constituted good manners. His face lit up when he tried a ripe cheddar. He popped the whole wedge into his mouth and said to Betty: "I will have that, please."

"Seconds?" asked Walter. "Sure. Don't bother, Betty. I'll get it." He brought back a quarter-pound wedge of the cheddar.

Walter and Betty watched silently as Clurg calmly ate every crumb of it. He sighed. "Very good. Quite like—" The word, Walter and Betty later agreed, was *see-mon-joe*. They were able to agree quite early in the evening, because Clurg got up after eating the cheese, said warmly, "Thank you so much!" and walked out of the house.

Betty said, "*What—on—Earth!*"

Walter said uneasily, "I'm sorry, doll. I didn't think he'd be quite that peculiar—"

"—But after *all!*"

"—Of course he's a foreigner. What was that word?"

He jotted it down.

While they were doing the dishes Betty said, "I think he was drunk. Falling-down drunk."

"No," Walter said. "It's exactly the same thing he did in my office. As though he expected a chair to come to him instead of him going to a chair." He laughed and said uncertainly, "Or maybe he's royalty. I read once about Queen Victoria never looking around before she sat down, she was so sure there'd be a chair there."

"Well, there isn't any more royalty, not to speak of," she said angrily, hanging up the dish towel. "What's on TV tonight?"

"Uncle Miltie. But ... uh ... I think I'll read. Uh ... where do you keep those magazines of yours, doll? Believe I'll give them a try."

She gave him a look that he wouldn't meet, and she went to get him some of her magazines. She also got a slim green book which she hadn't looked at for years. While Walter flipped uneasily through the magazines she studied the book.

After about ten minutes she said: "Walter. *Seemonjoe*. I I think I know what language it is."

He was instantly alert "Yeah? What?"

"It should be spelled c-i-m-a-n-g-o, with little jiggers over the C and G. It means 'Universal food' in Esperanto."

"Where's Esperanto?" he demanded.

"Esperanto isn't anywhere. It's an artificial language. I played around with it a little once. It was supposed to end war and all sorts of things. Some people called it 'the language of the future'." Her voice was tremulous.

Walter said, "I'm going to get to the bottom of this."

He saw Clurg go into the neighborhood movie for the matinee. That gave him about three hours.

Walter hurried to the Curran bungalow, remembered to slow down and tried hard to look casual as he unlocked the door and went in. There wouldn't be any trouble—he was a good citizen, known and respected—he could let himself into a tenant's house and wait for him to talk about business if he wanted to.

He tried not to think of what people would think if he should be caught rifling Clurg's luggage, as he intended to do. He had brought along an assortment of luggage keys. Surprised by his own ingenuity, he had got them at a locksmith's by saying his own key was lost and he didn't want to haul a heavy packed bag downtown.

But he didn't need the keys. In the bedroom closet the two suitcases stood, unlocked.

There was nothing in the first except uniformly new clothes, bought locally at good shops. The second was full of the same. Going through a rather extreme sports jacket, Walter found a wad of paper in the breast pocket. It was a newspaper page. A number had been penciled on a margin; apparently the sheet had been torn out and stuck into the pocket and forgotten. The dateline on the paper was July 18th, 2403.

Walter had some trouble reading the stories at first, but found it was easy enough if he read them aloud and listened to his voice.

One said:

TAIM KOP NABD:
PROSKYOOTR ASKS DETH

Patrolm'n Oskr Garth 'v thi Taim Polis w'z arest'd toodei at hiz hom, 4365 9863th Strit, and bookd at 9768th Prisint on tchardg'z 'v Polis-Ekspozh'r. Thi aledjd Ekspozh'r okur'd hwaile Garth w'z on dooti in thi Twenti-Furst Sentch'ri. It konsist'd 'v hiz admish'n too a sit'zen 'v thi Twenti-Furst Sentch'ri that thi Taim Polis ekzisted and woz op'rated fr'm thi Twenti-Fifth Sentch'ri. Thi Proskyootr'z Ofis sed thi deth pen'liti wil be askt in vyoo 'v thi heinus neitch'r 'v thi ofens, hwitch thret'nz thi hwol fabrik 'v Twenti-Fifth-Sentch'ri eksiztens.

There was an advertisement on the other side:

BOIZ'ND YUNG MEN!
SERV EUR SENTCH'RI!
ENLIST IN THI TAIM POLIS RISURV NOW!
RIMEMB'R—

'V THI AJEZ! ONLY IN THI TAIM POLIS KAN EU PROTEKT EUR SIVILIZASH'N FR'M VARI'NS! THEIR IZ NO HAIER SERVIS TOO AR KULTCH'R! THEIR IZ NO K'REER SO FAS'NATING AZ A K'REER IN THI TAIM POLIS!

Underneath it another ad asked:

HWAI BI ASHEIM'D 'V EUR TCHAIRZ? GET ROLFASTS!

No uth'r tcheir haz thi immidjit respons 'v a Rolfast. Sit enihweir—eor Rolfast iz their!

Ear Rolfast met'l partz ar solid gold to avoid tairsum polishing. Eur Rolfast beirings are thi fain'st six-inch dupliks di'mondz for long wair.

Walter's heart pounded. Gold—to avoid tiresome polishing! Six-inch diamonds—for long wear!

And Clurg must be a time policeman. "Only in the time police can you see the pageant of the ages!" What did a time policeman do? He wasn't quite clear about that. But what they *didn't* do was let anybody else—anybody earlier—know that the Time Police existed. He, Walter Lachlan of the Twentieth Century, held in the palm of his hand Time Policeman Clurg of the Twenty-Fifth Century—the Twenty-Fifth Century where gold and diamonds were common as steel and glass in this!

He was there when Clurg came back from the matinee.

Mutely, Walter extended the page of newsprint. Clurg snatched it incredulously, stared at it and crumpled it in his fist. He collapsed on the floor with a groan. "I'm done for!" Walter heard him say.

"Listen, Clurg," Walter said. "Nobody ever needs to know about this—*nobody*."

Clurg looked up with sudden hope in his eyes. "You will keep silent?" he asked wildly. "It is my life!"

"What's it worth to you?" Walter demanded with brutal directness. "I can use some of those diamonds and some of that gold. Can you get it into this century?"

"It would be missed. It would be over my mass-balance," Clurg said. "But I have a Duplix. I can copy diamonds and gold for you; that was how I made my feoff money."

He snatched an instrument from his pocket—a fountain pen, Walter thought "It is low in charge. It would Duplix about five kilograms in one operation—"

"You mean," Walter demanded, "that if I brought you five kilograms of diamonds and gold you could duplicate it? And the originals wouldn't be harmed? Let me see that thing. Can I work it?"

Clurg passed over the "fountain pen". Walter saw that within the case was a tangle of wires, tiny tubes, lenses—he passed it back hastily. Clurg said, "That is correct. You could buy or borrow jewelry and I could duplix it. Then you could return the originals and retain the copies. You swear by your contemporary God that you would say nothing?"

Walter was thinking. He could scrape together a good thirty thousand dollars by pledging the house, the business, his own real estate, the bank account, the life insurance, the securities. Put it all into diamonds, of course and then—*doubled! Overnight!*

"I'll say nothing," he told Clurg. "If you come through." He took the sheet from the twenty-fifth-century newspaper from Clurg's hands and put it securely in his own pocket. "When I get those diamonds duplicated," he said, "I'll burn this and forget the rest. Until then, I want you to stay close to home. I'll come around in a day or so with the stuff for you to duplicate."

Clurg nervously promised.

The secrecy, of course, didn't include Betty. He told her when he got home and she let out a yell of delight. She demanded the newspaper, read it avidly, and then demanded to see Clurg.

"I don't think he'll talk," Walter said doubtfully. "But if you really want to ..."

She did, and they walked to the Curran bungalow. Clurg was gone, lock, stock and barrel, leaving not a trace behind. They waited for hours, nervously.

At last Betty said, "He's gone back."

Walter nodded. "He wouldn't keep his bargain, but by God I'm going to keep mine. Come along. We're going to the *Enterprise*."

"Walter," she said. "You wouldn't—would you?"

He went alone, after a bitter quarrel.

At the *Enterprise* office he was wearily listened to by a reporter, who wearily looked over the twenty-fifth-century newspaper. "I don't know what you're peddling, Mr. Lachlan," he said, "but we like people to buy their ads in the *Enterprise*. This is a pretty bare-faced publicity grab."

"But—" Walter sputtered.

"Sam, would you please ask Mr. Morris to come up here if he can?" the reporter was saying into the phone. To Walter he explained, "Mr. Morris is our press-room foreman."

The foreman was a huge, white-haired old fellow, partly deaf. The reporter showed him the newspaper from the twenty-fifth century and said, "How about this?"

Mr. Morris looked at it and smelled it and said, showing no interest in the reading matter: "American Type Foundry Futura number nine, discontinued about ten years ago. It's been hand-set. The ink—hard to say. Expensive stuff, not a news ink. A book ink, a job-printing ink. The paper, now, I know. A nice linen rag that Benziger jobs in Philadelphia."

"You see, Mr. Lachlan? It's a fake." The reporter shrugged.

Walter walked slowly from the city room. The press-room foreman *knew*. It was a fake. And Clurg was a faker. Suddenly Walter's heels touched the ground after twenty-four hours and stayed there. Good God, the diamonds! Clurg was a conman! He would have worked a package switch! He would have had thirty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds for less than a month's work!

He told Betty about it when he got home and she laughed unmercifully. "Time Policeman" was to become a family joke between the Lachlans.

Harry Twenty-Third Street stood, blinking, in a very peculiar place. Peculiarly, his feet were firmly encased, up to the ankles, in a block of clear plastic.

There were odd-looking people and a big voice was saying: "May it please the court. The People of the Twenty-Fifth Century versus Harold Parish, alias Harry Twenty-Third Street, alias Clurg, of the Twentieth Century. The charge is impersonating an officer of the Time Police. The Prosecutor's Office will ask the death penalty in view of the heinous nature of the offense, which threatens the whole fabric—"

Virginia

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James "Bunny" Coogler woke on the morning of his father's funeral with a confused feeling that it was awfully crowded in his bedroom. Ohara, his valet (of the Shimanoseki Oharas, and not to be confused with the Dublin branch of the family) was shaking his sleeve and saying: "You wake up, Missah Bunny! Ah, such important gentermen come see you!" Bunny groped on the bedside table for the sunglasses to shelter his pink-rimmed eyes from the light. Ohara popped them onto his face and then rapidly poured a prairie oyster, a bromo and a cup of black coffee laced with brandy into him. Bunny's usual rate of morning vibration began to dampen towards zero and he peered about the room through the dark lenses.

"Morning, young Coogler," said a gruff voice. The outline was that of J. G. Barsax, senior partner of his late father's firm. A murmur of greeting came from three other elephantine figures. They were Gonfalonieri of First American, Witz of Diversified Limited, and McChesney of Southern Development Inc. If an efficient bomb had gone off in the room at that moment, it would have liquidated eighteen-billion-dollars' worth of Top Management and Ownership.

"Sorry about your father," Barsax grunted. "Mind if we sit? Not much time before the funeral. Have to brief you fast."

Bunny said, "Mr. Sankton told me what I'd have to do, Mr. Barsax. Rise after the 'Amen,' lead the procession past the casket, up the center aisle to the limousine exit—"

"No, no, no. Of course you know the funeral form. I'm talking about the financial briefing. Coogler, you're a very wealthy young man."

Bunny took off his sunglasses. "I am?" he asked uncertainly. "Surely not. There's this trust thing he was always talking about to pay me twenty thousand a year—"

"Talked," said Gonfalonieri. "That's all he did. He never got it on paper. You're the sole heir to the liquid equivalent of, say, three and a half billion dollars."

Ohara hastily refilled the cup with laced coffee and put it in Bunny's hand.

"So," little Mr. Witz said softly, "there are certain things you must know. Certain rules that have sprung up which We observe." The capitalized plural pronoun was definitely sounded. Whether it was to be taken as royal, editorial, or theological, who can say?

They proceeded to brief Bunny.

Firstly, he must never admit that he was wealthy. He might use the phrase "what I have," accompanied by a whimsical shrug.

Secondly, he must never, under any circumstances, at any time, give anything to anybody. Whenever asked for anything he was to intimate that this one request he simply could not grant, that it was the one crushing straw atop his terrible burden of charitable contributions.

Thirdly, whenever offered anything—from a cigar to a million-dollar market tip from a climber—he must take it without thanks and complain bitterly that the gift was not handsomer.

Fourthly, he must look on Touching Capital as morally equivalent to coprophagia, but he must not attempt to sting himself by living on the interest of his interest; that was only for New Englanders.

Fifthly, when he married he must choose his bride from one of Us.

"You mean, one of you four gentlemen?" Bunny asked. He thought of J.G.'s eldest daughter and repressed a shudder.

"No," said Witz. "One of Us in the larger sense. You will come to know who is who, and eventually acquire an instinct that will enable you to distinguish between a millionaire and a person of real substance."

"And that," said Barsax, "is the sum of it. We shall see you at the funeral and approach you later, Coogler." He glanced at his watch. "Come, gentlemen."

Bunny had a mechanical turn of mind; he enjoyed the Museum of Suppressed Inventions at J.G.'s Carolina estate. The quavery old curator pottered after him complaining.

"This, sir, is the hundred-mile-per-gallon carburetor. I was more active when it came out in '36—I was a Field Operative then. I tracked it down to a little Iowa village on a rumor from a patent attorney; it was quite a struggle to suppress that one. Quite a struggle, sir! But—the next case, please, sir—it would have been rendered obsolete within two years. Yes, sir, that's when the Gasoline Pill came out. Let me show you, sir!"

He happily popped one of the green pills into a gallon of water and lectured as it bubbled and fumed and turned the water into 100-octane gasoline.

The Eternal Match was interesting, the Two-Cent Sirloin was delicious, and the Vanishing Cream vanished a half-inch roll of fat from Bunny's belly while he watched. "But Lord bless you, sir," tittered the curator, "what would be the point of giving people something that worked? They'd just go ahead and use it, and then when they had no more need they'd stop using it, eh?"

"And this one, sir, it isn't really what you'd call suppressed. We're just working on it to build it up some; perhaps in five years we'll have it looking like it costs five thousand dollars, and then we'll be able to sell it." "It" was three-dimensional, full-color television; the heart of the system was a flashlight battery, a small C-clamp and a pinch of baking soda.

Bunny visited also the vast pest-breeding establishment in the Rockies, where flies, roaches, mice, gnats, boll-weevils, the elm-rot fungus and the tobacco-mosaic virus were patiently raised to maximum virulence and dispatched by couriers to their proper places all over the world. The taciturn Connecticut Yankee who ran the sprawling plant snapped at him, "Danged better mousetraps almost wiped out the mousetrap industry. Think people'd have better sense. DDT almost killed off pesticide—whole danged business, employing two hundred thousand. They think of that? Naw! So we had ter breed them DDT-resistant strains and seed 'em everywhere."

Bunny began to acquire the instinct to which Witz had referred. When he encountered an Oil Texan he could tell that the man's nervous hilarity and brag stemmed from his poverty, and he pitied him. When he encountered one day at Gonfalonieri's place in Baja California a certain quiet fellow named Briggs, he knew without being told that Briggs was one of Us. It was no surprise to learn later that Briggs held all the basic patents on water.

Briggs it was, indeed, who took him aside for an important talk. The quiet man offered him a thousand-dollar cigar (for the growing of whose tobacco Briggs had caused an artificial island to be built in the deep Central Pacific at the exactly correct point of temperature, wind and humidity) and said to him, "It's time you took a wife."

Bunny, who could not these days leaf through *Vogue* or the *New Yorker* without a tender, reminiscent smile for each of the lovely models shown in the advertisements, disagreed. "Can't see why, Briggs," he muttered. "Having jolly good time. Never used to have much luck with girls—all different now. Mean to say, with—" he gave the whimsical little shrug—"what little I have, doing awfully well and it doesn't cost me anything. Queer. When I had ten-twenty thou', when I was poor, had to buy corsages, dinners. All different now. They buy me things. Platinum watches. Have simply *dozens*. But the rules—have to take 'em. Queer."

"We've all been through it," Briggs said. "When you get bored let me know."

"Oh, promise," Bunny said. "Absolutely promise."

He spent the next six months in Hollywood where golden girls vied in plying him with *coq au vin*, solid iridium meat grinders, and similar trifles. One charming lady who had come out to the sound stages in 1934 presented him with a genuine hand-embroidered antique scabbard said to date back to the Crusades. It was a pleasant gift and it varied the ...

... the *monotony*?

He sat up abruptly on the mutation-mink coverlet, causing the shapely blond head which remained on the silken pillow to emit a small sleepy snort.

"Monotony," Bunny said in a tragic whisper. "Definitely." He went home to Ohara, though not neglecting to pick up as he left his little present for the evening, a golden nutcracker set with diamonds and lined with unborn leopard pelt.

Ohara dipped into his store of Oriental wisdom in an effort to console him. He suggested, "Missah Bunny think if must be monotonized, what beautifurr way to *get* monotonized?"

It did not help.

Ohara suggested, "You try make funny, fo'get monotony. Fo' exampurr, spend coupe mirrion dorras make big reso't town, cawr same Schmir-ton, Ohio. Think how mad Missah Nickey be, he put up hoterr, have to cawr same Hoterr Hirton Schmir-ton! Oh, raffs!"

It would not do.

"Ohara," Bunny said tragically, "I would give—" he shrugged whimsically—"what little I have not to be bored with, ah, life."

The impassive Oriental countenance of his manservant flickered briefly in a grimace. His orders were clear, and he knew how terrible would be the consequences of disobedience.

Bunny tossed fitfully alone in his bed an hour later, and Ohara was on the phone to an unlisted New York number. "This Ohara," he whispered. "Missah Bunny talk about giving away money. Awr his money."

The responding voice was that of an Englishman. It said: "Thank you, Ohara. One hopes, of course, for your sake, that the information has arrived in time. One hopes devoutly that it will not be necessary to inflict the Death of a Thousand Cuts on you. A book could be written about Number Three Hundred and Twenty-Eight alone, and as for Number Four Hundred and One—! Well, I won't keep you with my chattering." He hung up.

Within minutes the lonely house in a canyon was surrounded; the Fourth Plutocratic Airborne and Amphibious Assault Force was the ultimate in efficient mercenary troops. By dawn they had Bunny on his way to Barsax' Carolina estate under heavy sedation.

He woke in the guest room he knew, just off the corridor which contained the Museum of Suppressed Inventions. Little Mr. Witz and quiet Mr. Briggs were there. With granite faces they told him: "You have broken the Code, young Coogler. You said there was something you valued above money. You have got to go."

"Please," Bunny blubbered. "I didn't mean it. I'll marry your daughter. I'll marry both your daughters! Just don't kill me."

Mr. Witz said implacably, "Our decent, money-fearing girls wouldn't have anything to do with a dirty plutophobe like you, young Coogler. If only your poor father had put through the trust fund in time—well, thank Heaven he's not alive to see this day. But we won't kill you, young Coogler. It is not within our power to cause the death of a billionaire as if he were an animal or mere human being. What we can and will do is quarantine you. In Virginia."

This sounded like a rank *non sequitur* to Bunny until they took him to the Museum and trundled out a one-man space ship invented early in 1923 by a Herr Rudolf Grenzbach of Czerhovitz, Upper Silesia, whose body had been found in Lower Silesia later that year.

Officers of the Fourth P.A.A.A.F. loaded him into the bomblike contrivance over his spirited protest and pre-set the course. Virginia, it seemed, was an asteroid rather than the neighboring state. They fired the rockets and Bunny was on his way.

Four years later Mr. Witz and Mr. Briggs conferred again. "Perhaps," said Mr. Witz, "we've put enough of a scare into him. Let's radio the lad and find out whether he's given up his wild seditious notions and is ready to be rescued."

They tuned in the asteroid Virginia on another suppressed invention. "Young Coogler," Briggs said into the microphone. "This is Briggs. We wish to know whether you've come to your senses and are ready to take your place in society—ours, of course."

There squawked over the loud-speaker the voice of Bunny. "I say, what *was* that. No, not now, not for a second please. Where did that voice come from? Can you hear me, Mr. Briggs?"

"I hear you," said Mr. Briggs.

"Extraordinary! Another invention, eh?"

"Yes," said Briggs. "I am calling, young Coogler, to learn whether you are properly contrite and if so to arrange for your rescue."

"Rescue?" said the voice of Bunny. "Why, no thanks. That won't be necessary. Having a fine time here. They need me, you know. They love me for, ah, myself alone. Not the dashed money. *Double-dash* the money, I say!"

Mr. Briggs, white to the lips, broke the connection.

"He meant you to do that," Mr. Witz remarked.

"I know. Let him rot there."

The quavery old curator had been listening. "On Virginia?" he asked tremulously. "You don't rot on Virginia. Don't you gentlemen know how it got its name?"

"Never bothered to find out," Mr. Briggs snapped. "Since you're bursting to tell us, you might as well."

The curator beamed. "They call it Virginia because it's the planetoid of virgins. The dangdest thing. *Perpetual* virgins. The Plutocratic Space Force says they've never seen anything like it, not on Mars, not on Callisto. Self-renewing—the *dangdest* thing!"

Mr. Briggs and Mr. Witz looked at each other. After a while Mr. Witz spoke.

"Bunny," he said reflectively. "Bunny. He was well named."

Kazam Collects

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"Hail, jewel in the lotus," half whispered the stringy, brown person. His eyes were shut in holy ecstasy, his mouth pursed as though he were tasting the sweetest fruit that ever grew.

"Hail, jewel in the lotus," mumbled back a hundred voices in a confused backwash of sound. The stringy, brown person turned and faced his congregation. He folded his hands.

"Children of Hagar," he intoned. His voice was smooth as old ivory and had a mellow sheen about it.

"Children of Hagar, you who have found delight and peace in the bosom of the Elemental, the Eternal, the Un-knowingness that is without bounds, make Peace with me." You could tell by his very voice that the words were capitalized.

"Let our Word," intoned the stringy, brown person, "be spread. Let our Will be brought about. Let us destroy, let us mould, let us build. Speak low and make your spirits white as Hagar's beard." With a reverent gesture he held before them two handfuls of an unattached beard that hung from the altar.

"Children of Hagar, unite your Wills into One." The congregation kneeled as he gestured at them, gestured as one would at a puppy one was training to play dead.

The meeting hall—or rather, temple—of the Cult of Hagar was on the third floor of a little building on East 59th Street, otherwise almost wholly unused. The hall had been fitted out to suit the sometimes peculiar requirements of the unguessable Will-Mind-Urge of Hagar Inscrutable; that meant that there was gilded wood everywhere there could be, and strips of scarlet cloth hanging from the ceiling in circles of five. There was, you see, a Sanctified Ineffability about the unequal lengths of the cloth strips.

The faces of the congregation were varying studies in rapture. As the stringy, brown person tinkled a bell they rose and blinked absently at him as he waved a benediction and vanished behind a door covered with chunks of gilded wood.

The congregation began to buzz quietly.

"Well?" demanded one of another. "What did you think of it?"

"I dunno. Who's *he*, anyway?" A respectful gesture at the door covered with gilded wood.

"Kazam's his name. They say he hasn't touched food since he saw the Ineluctable Modality."

"What's *that*?"

Pitying smile. "You couldn't understand it just yet. Wait till you've come around a few more times. Then maybe you'll be able to read *his* book—'The Unravelling.' After that you can tackle the 'Isba Kazhlunk' that he found in the Siberian ice. It opened the way to the Ineluctable Modality, but it's pretty deep stuff—even for me."

They filed from the hall buzzing quietly, dropping coins into a bowl that stood casually by the exit. Above the bowl hung from the ceiling strips of red cloth in a circle of five. The bowl, of course, was covered with chunks of gilded wood.

Beyond the door the stringy, brown man was having a little trouble. Detective Fitzgerald would not be convinced.

"In the first place," said the detective, "you aren't licensed to collect charities. In the second place this whole thing looks like fraud and escheatment. In the third place this building isn't a dwelling and you'll have to move that cot out of here." He gestured disdainfully at an army collapsible that stood by the battered rolltop desk. Detective Fitzgerald was a big, florid man who dressed with exquisite neatness.

"I am sorry," said the stringy, brown man. "What must I do?"

"Let's begin at the beginning. The Constitution guarantees freedom of worship, but I don't know if they meant something like this. Are you a citizen?"

"No. Here are my registration papers." The stringy, brown man took them from a cheap, new wallet.

"Born in Persia. Name's Joseph Kazam. Occupation, scholar. How do you make that out?"

"It's a good word," said Joseph Kazam with a hopeless little gesture. "Are you going to send me away—deport me?"

"I don't know," said the detective thoughtfully. "If you register your religion at City Hall before we get any more complaints, it'll be all right."

"Ah," breathed Kazam. "Complaints?"

Fitzgerald looked at him quizzically. "We got one from a man named Rooney," he said. "Do you know him?"

"Yes. Runi Sarif is his real name. He has hounded me out of Norway, Ireland and Canada—wherever I try to reestablish the Cult of Hagar."

Fitzgerald looked away. "I suppose," he said matter-of-factly, "you have lots of secret enemies plotting against you."

Kazam surprised him with a burst of rich laughter. "I have been investigated too often," grinned the Persian, "not to recognize that one. You think I'm mad."

"No," mumbled the detective, crestfallen. "I just wanted to find out. Anybody running a nut cult's automatically reserved a place in Bellevue."

"Forget it, sir. I spit on the Cult of Hagar. It is my livelihood, but I know better than any man that it is a mockery. Do you know what our highest mystery is? The Ineluctable Modality." Kazam sneered.

"That's Joyce," said Fitzgerald with grin. "You have a sense of humor, Mr. Kazam. That's a rare thing in the religious."

"Please," said Joseph Kazam. "Don't call me that. I am not worthy—the noble, sincere men who work for their various faiths are my envy. I have seen too much to be one of them."

"Go on," said Fitzgerald, leaning forward. He read books, this detective, and dearly loved an abstract discussion.

The Persian hesitated. "I," he said at length, "am an occult engineer. I am a man who can make the hidden forces work."

"Like staring a leprechaun in the eye till he finds you a pot of gold?" suggested the detective with a chuckle.

"One manifestation," said Kazam calmly. "Only one."

"Look," said Fitzgerald. "They still have that room in Bellevue. Don't say that in public—stick to the Ineluctable Modality if you know what's good for you."

"Tut," said the Persian regretfully. "He's working on you."

The detective looked around the room. "Meaning who?" he demanded.

"Runi Sarif. He's trying to reach your mind and turn you against me."

"Balony," said Fitzgerald coarsely. "You get yourself registered as a religion in twenty-four hours; then find yourself a place to live. I'll hold off any charges of fraud for a while. Just watch your step." He jammed a natty Homburg down over his sandy hair and strode pugnaciously from the office.

Joseph Kazman sighed. Obviously the detective had been disappointed.

That night, in his bachelor's flat, Fitzgerald tossed and turned uneasily on his modern bed. Being blessed with a sound digestion able to cope even with a steady diet of chain-restaurant food and the soundest of consciences, the detective was agitated profoundly by his wakefulness.

Being, like all bachelors, a cautious man, he hesitated to dose himself with the veronal he kept for occasions like this, few and far between though they were. Finally, as he heard the locals pass one by one on the El a few blocks away and then heard the first express of the morning, with its higher-pitched bickering of wheels and quicker vibration against the

track, he stumbled from bed and walked dazedly into his bathroom, fumbled open the medicine chest.

Only when he had the bottle and had shaken two pills into his hand did he think to turn on the light. He pulled the cord and dropped the pills in horror. They weren't the veronal at all but an old prescription which he had thriftily kept till they might be of use again.

Two would have been a fatal overdose. Shakily Fitzgerald filled a glass of water and drank it down, spilling about a third on his pajamas. He replaced the pills and threw away the entire bottle. You never know when a thing like that might happen again, he thought—too late to mend.

Now thoroughly sure that he needed the sedative, he swallowed a dose. By the time he had replaced the bottle he could scarcely find his way back to the bed, so sleepy was he.

He dreamed then. Detective Fitzgerald was standing on a plain, a white plain, that was very hot. His feet were bare. In the middle distance was a stone tower above which circled winged skulls—bat-winged skulls, whose rattling and flapping he could plainly hear.

From the plain—he realized then that it was a desert of fine, white sand—spouted up little funnels or vortices of fog in a circle around him. He began to run very slowly, much slower than he wanted to. He thought he was running away from the tower and the vortices, but somehow they continued to stay in his field of vision. No matter where he swerved the tower was always in front and the little twisters around him. The circle was growing smaller around him, and he redoubled his efforts to escape.

Finally he tried flying, leaping into the air. Though he drifted for yards at a time, slowly and easily, he could not land where he wanted to. From the air the vortices looked like petals of a flower, and when he came drifting down to the desert he would land in the very center of the strange blossom.

Again he ran, the circle of foggy cones following still, the tower still before him. He felt with his bare feet something tinglingly clammy. The circle had contracted to the point of coalescence, had gripped his two feet like a trap.

He shot into the air and headed straight for the tower. The creaking, flapping noise of the bat-winged skulls was very much louder now. He cast his eyes to the side and was just able to see the tips of his own black, flapping membranes.

As though regular nightmares—always the same, yet increasingly repulsive to the detective—were not enough woe for one man to bear, he was troubled with a sudden, appalling sharpness of hearing. This was strange, for Fitzgerald had always been a little deaf in one ear.

The noises he heard were distressing things, things like the ticking of a wristwatch two floors beneath his flat, the gurgle of water in sewers as he walked the streets, humming of underground telephone wires. Headquarters was a bedlam with its stentorian breathing, the machine-gun fire of a telephone being dialed, the howitzer crash of a cigarette case snapping shut.

He had his bedroom soundproofed and tried to bear it. The inches of fibreboard helped a little; he found that he could focus his attention on a book and practically exclude from his mind the regular swish of air in his bronchial tubes, the thudding at his wrists and temples, the slushing noise of food passing through his transverse colon.

Fitzgerald did not go mad for he was a man with ideals. He believed in clean government and total extirpation of what he fondly believed was a criminal class which could be detected by the ear lobes and other distinguishing physical characteristics.

He did not go to a doctor because he knew that the word would get back to headquarters that Fitzgerald heard things and would probably begin to see things pretty soon and that it wasn't good policy to have a man like that on the force.

The detective read up on the later Freudians, trying to interpret the recurrent dream. The book said that it meant he had been secretly in love with a third cousin on his mother's side and that he was ashamed of it now and wanted to die, but that he was afraid of heavenly judgment. He knew that wasn't so; his mother had had no relations and detective Fitzgerald wasn't afraid of anything under the sun.

After two weeks of increasing horror he was walking around like a corpse, moving by instinct and wearily doing his

best to dodge the accidents that seemed to trail him. It was then that he was assigned to check on the Cult of Hagar. The records showed that they had registered at City Hall, but records don't show everything.

He walked in on the cult during a service and dully noted that its members were more prosperous in appearance than they had been, and that there were more women present. Joseph Kazam was going through precisely the same ritual that the detective had last seen.

When the last bill had fallen into the pot covered with gilded wood and the last dowager had left Kazam emerged and greeted the detective.

"Fitzgerald," he said, "you damned fool, why didn't you come to me in the first place?"

"For what?" asked the detective, loosening the waxed cotton plugs in his ears.

The stringy, brown man chuckled. "Your friend Rooney's been at work on you. You hear things. You can't sleep and when you do—"

"That's plenty," interjected Fitzgerald. "Can you help me out of this mess I'm in?"

"Nothing to it. Nothing at all. Come into the office."

Dully the detective followed, wondering if the cot had been removed.

The ritual that Kazam performed was simple in the extreme, but a little revolting. The mucky aspects of it Fitzgerald completely excused when he suddenly realized that he no longer heard his own blood pumping through his veins, and that the asthmatic wheeze of the janitor in the basement was now private to the janitor again.

"How does it feel?" asked Kazam concernedly.

"Magnificent," breathed the detective, throwing away his cotton plugs. "Too wonderful for words."

"I'm sorry about what I had to do," said the other man, "but that was to get your attention principally. The real cure was mental projection." He then dismissed the bedevilment of Fitzgerald with an airy wave of the hand. "Look at this," he said.

"My God!" breathed the detective. "Is it real?"

Joseph Kazam was holding out an enormous diamond cut into a thousand glittering facets that shattered the light from his desk lamp into a glorious blaze of color.

"This," said the stringy, brown man, "is the Charity Diamond."

"You mean," sputtered the detective, "you got it from—"

"The very woman," said Kazam hastily. "And of her own free will. I have a receipt: 'For the sum of one dollar in payment for the Charity Diamond. Signed, Mrs. ——'"

"Yes," said the detective. "Happy days for the Sons of Hagar. Is this what you've been waiting for?"

"This," said Kazam curiously turning the stone in his hand, "is what I've been hunting over all the world for years. And only by starting a nut cult could I get it. Thank God it's legal."

"What are you going to do now?" asked the detective.

"Use the diamond for a little trip. You will want to come along, I think. You'll have a chance to meet your Mr. Rooney."

"Lead on," said Fitzgerald. "After the past two weeks I can stand anything."

"Very well." Kazam turned out the desk lamp.

"It glows," whispered Fitzgerald. He was referring to the diamond, over whose surface was passing an eerie blue light, like the invisible flame of anthracite.

"I'd like you to pray for success, Mr. Fitzgerald," said Kazam. The detective began silently to go over his brief stock of prayers. He was barely conscious of the fact that the other man was mumbling to himself and caressing the diamond with long, wiry fingers.

The shine of the stone grew brighter yet; strangely, though, it did not pick out any of the details of the room.

Then Kazam let out an ear-splitting howl. Fitzgerald winced, closing his eyes for just a moment. When he opened them he began to curse in real earnest.

"You damned rotter!" he cried. "Taking me here—"

The Persian looked at him coldly and snapped: "Easy, man! This is real—look around you!"

The detective looked around and saw that the tower of stone was rather far in the distance, farther than in his dreams, usually. He stooped and picked up a handful of the fine white desert sand, let it run through his fingers.

"How did you get us here?" he asked hoarsely.

"Same way I cured you of Runi Sarif's curse. The diamond has rare powers to draw the attention. Ask any jewel-thief. This one, being enormously expensive, is so completely engrossing that unsuspected powers of concentration are released. That, combined with my own sound knowledge of a particular traditional branch of psychology, was enough to break the walls down which held us pent to East 59th Street."

The detective was beginning to laugh, flatly and hysterically. "I come to you hag-ridden, you first cure me and then plunge me twice as deep into Hell, Kazam! What's the good of it?"

"This isn't Hell," said the Persian matter-of-factly. "It isn't Hell, but it isn't Heaven either. Sit down and let me explain." Obediently Fitzgerald squatted on the sand. He noticed that Kazam cast an apprehensive glance at the horizon before beginning.

"I was born in Persia," said Kazam, "but I am not Persian by blood, religion or culture. My life began in a little mountain village where I soon saw that I was treated not as the other children were. My slightest wish could command the elders of the village and if I gave an order it would be carried out.

"The reasons for all this were explained to me on my thirteenth birthday by an old man—a very old man whose beard reached to his knees. He said that he had in him only a small part of the blood of Kaidar, but that I was almost full of it, that there was little human blood in me.

"I cried and screamed and said that I didn't want to be Kaidar, that I just wanted to be a person. I ran away from the village after another year, before they began to teach me their twisted, ritualistic versions of occult principles. It was this flight which saved me from the usual fate of the Kaidar; had I stayed I would have become a celebrated miracle man, known for all of two hundred miles or so, curing the sick and cursing the well. My highest flight would be to create a new Islamic faction—number three hundred and eighty-two, I suppose.

"Instead I knocked around the world. And Lord, got knocked around too. Tramp steamers, maritime strike in Frisco, the Bela Kun regime in Hungary—I wound up in North Africa when I was about thirty years old.

"I was broke, as broke as any person could be and stay alive. A Scotswoman picked me up, hired me, taught me mathematics. I plunged into it, algebra, conics, analytics, calculus, relativity. Before I was done, I'd worked out wave-mechanics three years before that Frenchman had even begun to think about it.

"When I showed her the set of differential equations for the carbon molecule, all solved, she damned me for an unnatural monster and threw me out. But she'd given me the beginnings of mental discipline, and done it many thousands of times better than they could have in that Persian village. I began to realize what I was.

"It was then that I drifted into the nut cult business. I found out that all you need for capital is a stock of capitalized abstract qualities, like All-Knowingness, Will-Mind-Urge, Planetude and Exciliation. With that to work on I can make my living almost anywhere on the globe.

"I met Runi Sarif, who was running an older-established sect, the Pan-European Astral Confederation of Healers. He

was a Hindu from the Punjab plains in the North of India. Lord, what a mind he had! He worked me over quietly for three months before I realized what was up.

"Then there was a little interview with him. He began with the complicated salute of the Astral Confederation and got down to business. 'Brother Kazam,' he said, 'I wish to show you an ancient sacred book I have just discovered.' I laughed, of course. By that time I'd already discovered seven ancient books by myself, all ready-translated into the language of the country I would be working at the time. The 'Isba Kazhlunk' was the most successful; that's the one I found preserved in the hide of a mammoth in a Siberian glacier.

"Runi looked sour. 'Brother Kazam,' said he, 'do not scoff. Does the word *Kaidar* mean anything to you?' I played dumb and asked whether it was something out of the third chapter of the Lost Lore of Atlantis, but I remembered ever so faintly that I had been called that once.

"'A Kaidar,' said Runi, 'is an atavism to an older, stronger people who once visited this plane and left their seed. They can be detected by'—he squinted at me sharply—'by a natural aptitude for occult pursuits. They carry in their minds learning undreamable by mortals. Now, Brother Kazam, if we could only find a Kaidar ...'

"'Don't carry yourself away,' I said. 'What good would that be to us?'

"Silently he produced what I'll swear was actually an ancient sacred book. And I wouldn't be surprised if he'd just discovered it, moreover. It was the psalter of a small, very ancient sect of Edomites who had migrated beyond the Euphrates and died out. When I'd got around the rock-Hebrew it was written in I was very greatly impressed. They had some noble religious poems, one simply blistering exorcism and anathema, a lot of tedious genealogy in verse form. And they had a didactic poem on the Kaidar, based on one who had turned up in their tribe.

"They had treated him horribly—chained him to a cave wall and used him for a sort of male Sybil. They found out that the best way to get him to prophesy was to show him a diamond. Then, one sad day, they let him touch it. Blam! He vanished, taking two of the rabbis with him. The rabbis came back later; appeared in broad daylight raving about visions of Paradise they had seen.

"I quite forgot about the whole affair. At that time I was obsessed with the idea that I would become the Rockefeller of occultism—get disciples, train them carefully and spread my cult. If Mohammed could do it, why not I? To this day I don't know the answer.

"While I was occupying myself with grandiose daydreams, Runi was busily picking over my mind. To a natural cunning and a fantastic ability to concentrate he added what I unconsciously knew, finally achieving adequate control of many factors.

"Then he stole a diamond, I don't know where, and vanished. One presumes he wanted to have that Paradise that the rabbis told of for his very own. Since then he has been trying to destroy me, sending out messages, dominating other minds on the Earthly plane—if you will excuse the jargon—to that end. He reached you, Fitzgerald, through a letter he got someone else to write and post, then when you were located and itemized he could work on you directly.

"You failed him, and he, fearing I would use you, tried to destroy you by heightening your sense of hearing and sending you visions nightly of this plane. It would destroy any common man; we are very fortunate that you are extraordinarily tough in your psychological fibre.

"Since then I have been dodging Runi Sarif, trying to get a diamond big enough to send me here through all the barriers he has prepared against my coming. You helped me very greatly." Again Kazam cast an apprehensive look at the horizon.

The detective looked around slowly. "Is this a paradise?" he asked. "If so I've been seriously misled by my Sunday School teachers." He tried weakly to smile.

"That is one of the things I don't understand—yet," said the Persian. "And this is another unpleasantness which approaches."

Fitzgerald stared in horror at the little spills of fog which were upending themselves from the sand. He had the ghastly, futile dream sensation again.

"Don't try to get away from them," snapped Kazam. "Walk *at* the things." He strode directly and pugnaciously at one of the little puffs, and it gave way before him and they were out of the circle.

"That was easy," said the detective weakly.

Suddenly before them loomed the stone tower. The winged skulls were nowhere to be seen.

Sheer into the sky reared the shaft, solid and horribly hewn from grey granite, rough-finished on the outside. The top was shingled to a shallow cone, and embrasures were black slots in the wall.

Then, Fitzgerald never knew how, they were inside the tower, in the great round room at its top. The winged skulls were perched on little straggling legs along a golden rail. Aside from the flat blackness of their wings all was crimson and gold in that room. There was a sickly feeling of decay and corruption about it, a thing that sickened the detective.

Hectic blotches of purple marked the tapestries that hung upon that circular wall, blotches that seemed like the high spots in rotten meat. The tapestries themselves the detective could not look at again after one glance. The thing he saw, sprawling over a horde of men and women, drooling flame on them, a naked figure still between its jaws, colossal, slimy paws on a little heap of human beings, was not a pretty sight.

Light came from flambeaux in the wall, and the torches cast a sickly, reddish-orange light over the scene. Thin curls of smoke from the sockets indicated an incense.

And lastly there was to be seen a sort of divan, heaped with cushions in fantastic shapes. Reclining easily on them was the most grotesque, abominable figure Fitzgerald had ever seen. It was a man, had been once. But incredible incontinence had made the creature gross and bloated with what must have been four hundred pounds of fat. Fat swelled out the cummerbund that spanned the enormous belly, fat welted out the cheeks so that the ears of the creature could not be seen beneath the embroidered turban, gouts of fat rolled in a blubbery mass about the neck like the wattles of a dead cockerel.

"Ah," hissed Joseph Kazam. "Runi Sarif ..." He drew from his shirt a little sword or big knife from whose triangular blade glinted the light of the flambeaux.

The suety monster quivered as though maggots were beneath his skin. In a voice that was like the sound a butcher makes when he tears the fat belly from a hog's carcass, Runi Sarif said: "Go—go back. Go back—where you came from—" There was no beginning or ending to the speech. It came out between short, grunting gasps for breath.

Kazam advanced, running a thumb down the knife-blade. The monster on the divan lifted a hand that was like a bunch of sausages. The nails were a full half-inch below the level of the skin. Afterwards Fitzgerald assured himself that the hand was the most repellent aspect of the entire affair.

With creaking, flapping wingstrokes the skulls launched themselves at the Persian, their jaws clicking stonily. Kazam and the detective were in the middle of a cloud of flying jaws that were going for their throats.

Insanely Fitzgerald beat at the things, his eyes shut. When he looked they were lying on the floor. He was surprised to see that there were just four of them. He would have sworn to a dozen at least. And they all four bore the same skillfully delivered slash mark of Kazam's knife.

There was a low, choking noise from the monster on the divan. As the detective stared Kazam stepped up the first of the three shallow steps leading to it.

What followed detective Fitzgerald could never disentangle. The lights went out, yet he could plainly see. He saw that the monstrous Runi Sarif had turned into a creature such as he had seen on the tapestry, and he saw that so had Kazam, save that the thing which was the Persian carried in one paw a blade.

They were no longer in the tower room, it seemed, nor were they on the white desert below. They were hovering in a roaring squalling tumult, in a confusion of spheres which gently collided and caromed off each other without noise.

As the detective watched, the Runi monster changed into one of the spheres and so, promptly, did Kazam. On the side of the Kazam sphere was the image of the knife. Tearing at a furious rate through the jostling confusion and blackness Fitzgerald followed, and he never knew how.

The Kazam sphere caught the other and spun dizzily around it, with a screaming noise which rose higher and higher. As it passed the top threshold of hearing, both spheres softened and spread into black, crawling clouds. Suspended in the middle of one was the knife.

The other cloud knotted itself into a furious, tight lump and charged the one which carried the blade. It hurtled into and through it, impaling itself.

Fitzgerald shook his head dizzily. They were in the tower room, and Runi Sarif lay on the divan with a cut throat. The Persian had dropped the knife, and was staring with grim satisfaction at the bleeding figure.

"Where were we?" stuttered the detective. "Where—?" At the look in Kazam's eyes he broke off and did not ask again.

The Persian said: "He stole my rights. It is fitting that I should recover them, even thus. In one plane—there is no room for two in contest."

Jovially he clapped the detective on the shoulder. "I'll send you back now. From this moment I shall be a card in your Bureau of Missing Persons. Tell whatever you wish—it won't be believed."

"It was supposed to be a paradise," said the detective.

"It is," said Kazam. "Look."

They were no longer in the tower, but on a mossy bank above a river whose water ran a gamut of pastels, changing hues without end. It tinkled out something like a Mozart sonata and was fragrant with a score of scents.

The detective looked at one of the flowers on the bank. It was swaying of itself and talking quietly in a very small voice, like a child.

"They aren't clever," said Kazam, "but they're lovely."

Fitzgerald drew in his breath sharply as a flight of butterfly things passed above. "Send me away," he gasped. "Send me away now or I'll never be able to go. I'd kill you to stay here in another minute."

Kazam laughed. "Folly," he said. "Just as the dreary world of sand and a tower that—a certain unhappy person—created was his and him so this paradise is me and mine. My bones are its rock, my flesh is its earth, my blood is its waters, my mind is its living things."

As an unimaginably glowing drift of crystalline, chiming creatures loped across the whispering grass of the bank Kazam waved one hand in a gesture of farewell.

Fitzgerald felt himself receding with incredible velocity, and for a brief moment saw an entire panorama of the world that was Kazam. Three suns were rising from three points of the horizon, and their slanting rays lit a paradise whose only inglorious speck was a stringy, brown man on a riverbank. Then the man vanished as though he had been absorbed into the ground.

The Last Man Left in the Bar

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You know him, Joe—or Sam, Mike, Tony, Ben, whatever your deceitful, cheaply genial name may be. And do not lie to yourself, Gentle Reader; you know him too.

A loner, he was.

You did not notice him when he slipped in; you only knew by his aggrieved air when he (finally) caught your eye and self-consciously said "Shot of Red Top and a beer" that he'd ruffle your working day. (Six at night until two in the morning is a day? But ah, the horrible alternative is to work for a living.)

Shot of Red Top and a beer at 8:35.

And unbeknownst to him, Gentle Reader, in the garage up the street the two contrivers of his dilemma conspired; the breaths of tall dark stooped cadaverous Galardo and the mouse-eyed lassie mingled.

"Hyü shall be a religion-isst," he instructed her.

"I know the role," she squeaked and quoted: "Woe to the day on which I was born into the world! Woe to the womb which bare me! Woe to the bowels which admitted me! Woe to the breasts which suckled me! Woe to the feet upon which I sat and rested! Woe to the hands which carried me and reared me until I grew! Woe to my tongue and my lips which have brought forth and spoken vanity, detraction, falsehood, ignorance, derision, idle tales, craft and hypocrisy! Woe to mine eyes which have looked upon scandalous things! Woe to mine ears which have delighted in the words of slanderers! Woe to my hands which have seized what did not of right belong to them! Woe to my belly and my bowels which have lusted after food unlawful to be eaten! Woe to my throat which like a fire has consumed all that it found!"

He sobbed with the beauty of it and nodded at last, tears hanging in his eyes: "Yess, that religion. It iss one of my fave-orrirts."

She was carried away. "I can do others. Oh, I can do others. I can do Mithras, and Isis, and Marduk, and Eddyism and Billsword and Pealing and Uranium, both orthodox and reformed."

"Mithras, Isis and Marduk are long gone and the resst are sss-till tü come. Listen tü your master, dü not chat-ter, and we shall an artwork make of which there will be talk under the green sky until all food is eaten."

Meanwhile, Gentle Reader, the loner listened. To his left strong silent sinewy men in fellowship, the builders, the doers, the darers: "So I told the foreman where he should put his Bullard. I told him I run a Warner and Swasey, I run a Warner and Swasey good, I never even *seen* a Bullard up close in my life, and where he should put it. I know how to run a Warner and Swasey and why should he take me off a Warner and Swasey I know how to run and put me on a Bullard and where he should put it ain't I right?"

"Absolutely."

To his right the clear-eyed virtuous matrons, the steadfast, the true-seeing, the loving-kind: "Oh, I don't know what I want, what do you want? I'm a Scotch drinker really but I don't feel like Scotch but if I come home with muscatel on my breath Eddie calls me a wino and laughs his head off. I don't know what I want. What do you want?"

In the box above the bar the rollicking raster raced.

VIDEO

Gampa smashes bottle over the head of *Bibby*.

Bibby spits out water.

Gampa picks up sugar bowl and smashes it over *Bibby's* head. *Bibby* licks sugar from face.

AUDIO

Gampa: Young whippersnapper!

Bibby: Next time put some flavoring in it, Gramps!

Bibby: My, that's better!

But what of Naughty Roger and his attempted kidnapping of Sis to extort the secret of the Q-Bomb?

cut to
Limbo Shot of Reel-Rye bottle.

Announcer: Yes, kiddies! What of Roger?
But first a word from the makers of Reel-Rye, that happy syrup that
gives your milk grown up flavor! YES! Grown up flavor!

Shot of Red Top and a beer. At 8:50.

In his own un-secret heart: Steady, boy. You've got to think this out. Nothing impossible about it, no reason to settle for a stalemate; just a little time to think it out. Galardo said the Black Chapter would accept a token submission, let me return the Seal, and that would be that. But I mustn't count on that as a datum; he lied to me about the Serpentists. Token submission *sounds* right; they go in big for symbolism. Maybe because they're so stone-broke, like the Japs. Drinking a cup of tea, they gussie it all up until it's a religion; that's the way you squeeze nourishment out of poverty—

Skip the Japs. Think. He lied to me about the Serpentists. The big thing to remember is, I have the Chapter Seal and they need it back, or think they do. All you need's a little time to think things through, place where he won't dare jump you and grab the Seal. And this is it.

"Joe. Sam, Mike, Tony, Ben, whoever you are. Hit me again."

Joe—Sam, Mike, Tony, Ben?—tilts the amber bottle quietly; the liquid's level rises and crowns the little glass with a convex meniscus. He turns off the stream with an easy roll of the wrist. The suntan line of neon tubing at the bar back twinkles off the curve of surface tension, the placid whiskey, the frothy beer. At 9:05.

To his left: "So Finkelstein finally meets Goldberg in the garment center and he grabs him like this by the lapel, and he yells, 'You louse, you rat, you no-good, what's this about you running around with my wife? I ought to—I ought to—say, you call *this* a *buttonhole*?'"

Restrained and apprehensive laughter; Catholic, Protestant, Jew (choice of one), what's the difference I always say.

Did they have a Jewish Question still, or was all smoothed and troweled and interfaithed and brotherhoodooed—

Wait. Your formulation implies that they're in the future, and you have no proof of that. Think straighter; you don't know *where* they are, or *when* they are, or *who* they are. You *do* know that you walked into Big Maggie's resonance chamber to change the target, experimental iridium for old reliable zinc

and

"Bartender," in a controlled and formal voice. Shot of Red Top and a beer at 9:09, the hand vibrating with remembrance of a dirty-green el Greco sky which *might* be Brookhaven's heavens a million years either way from now, or one second sideways, or (bow to Method and formally exhaust the possibilities) a hallucination. The Seal snatched from the greenlit rock altar could be a blank washer, a wheel from a toy truck, or the screw top from a jar of shaving cream but for the fact that it wasn't. It was the Seal.

So: they began seeping through after that. The Chapter wanted it back. The Serpentists wanted it, period. Galardo had started by bargaining and wound up by threatening, but how could you do anything but laugh at his best offer, a rusty five-pound spur gear with a worn keyway and three teeth missing? His threats were richer than his bribes; they culminated with The Century of Flame. "Faith, father, it doesn't scare me at all, at all; sure, no man could stand it." Subjective-objective (How you used to sling *them* around!), and Master Newton's billiard-table similes dissolve into sense-impressions of pointer-readings as you learn your trade, but Galardo had scared hell out of you, or into you, with The Century of Flame.

But you had the Seal of the Chapter and you had time to think, while on the screen above the bar:

VIDEO

Long shot down steep, cobblestoned French village street. *Pierre* darts out of alley in middle distance, looks wildly around and runs toward camera, pistol in *Paul*: Stop, you fool! hand. *Annette* and *Paul* appear from same alley and dash after him.

AUDIO

Cut to *Cu* of *Pierre's* face; beard stubble and sweat. *Pierre*: A fool, am I?

Cut to long shot; *Pierre* aims and fires; *Paul* grabs his left shoulder and falls. *Annette*: Darling!

Cut to two-shot, *Annette* and *Paul*.

Paul: Don't mind me. Take my gun—after him. He's a mad dog, I tell you!

Dolly back.
Annette takes his pistol.

Annette: This, my dear, is as good a time as any to drop my little masquerade. Are you American agents really so stupid that you never thought I might be—a plant, as you call it?

Annette stands; we see her aim down at *Paul*, out of the picture. Then we dolly in to a *Cu* of her head; she is smiling triumphantly.

Sound: click of cocking pistol.

A hand holding a pistol enters the *Cu*; the pistol muzzle touches *Annette's* neck.

Harkrider: Drop it, Madame Golkov.

Dolly back to middle shot *Harkrider* stands behind *Annette* as *Paul* gets up briskly and takes the pistol from her hand.

Paul: No, Madame Golkov; we American agents were not really so stupid. Wish I could say the same for—your people. *Pierre Tournour* was a plant, I am glad to say; otherwise he would not have missed me. He is one of the best pistol shots in Counterintelligence.

Cut to long shot of street, *Harkrider* and *Paul* walk away from the camera, *Annette* between them.
Fadeout.

Harkrider: Come along, madame Golkov.

Music: theme up and out.

Them and their neatly packaged problems, them and their neatly packaged shows with beginning middle and end. The rite of the low-budget shot-in-Europe spy series, the rite of pugilism, the rite of the dog-walk after dinner and the beer at the bar with co-celebrant worshippers at the high altar of Nothing.

9:30. Shot of Red Top and a beer, positively the last one until you get this figured out; you're beginning to buzz like a transformer.

Do they have transformers? Do they have vitamins? Do they have anything but that glaring green sky, and the rock altar and treasures like the Seal and the rusty gear with three broken teeth? "All smelling of iodoform. And all quite bald." But Galardo looked as if he were dying of tuberculosis, and the letter from the Serpentists was in a sick and straggling hand. Relics of mediaeval barbarism.

To his left—

"*Galardo!*" he screamed.

The bartender scurried over—Joe, Sam, Mike, Tony, Ben?—scowling. "What's the matter, mister?"

"I'm sorry. I got a stitch in my side. A cramp."

Bullyboy scowled competently and turned. "What'll you have, mister?"

Galardo said cadaverously: "Wodeffer my vriend hyere iss havfing."

"Shot of Red Top and a beer, right?"

"*What are you doing here?*"

"Drink-ing beferachiss ... havf hyü de-site-it hwat tü dü?"

The bartender rapped down the shot glass and tilted the bottle over it, looking at Galardo. Some of the whiskey slopped over. The bartender started, went to the tap and carefully drew a glass of beer, slicing the collar twice.

"My vriend hyere will pay."

He got out a half dollar, fumbling, and put it on the wet wood. The bartender, old-fashioned, rapped it twice on the bar to

show he wasn't stealing it even though you weren't watching; he rang it up double virtuous on the cash register, the absent owner's fishy eye.

"What are you doing here?" again, in a low, reasonable, almost amused voice to show him you have the whip hand.

"Drink-ing beferachiss ... it iss so cle-an hyere." Galardo's sunken face, unbelievably, looked wistful as he surveyed the barroom, his head swiveling slowly from extreme left to extreme right.

"Clean. Well. Isn't it clean there?"

"Sheh, not!" Galardo said mournfully. "Sheh, not! Hyere it iss so cle-an ... hwai did yü outreach tü us? Hag-rid us, wretch-it, hag-rid us?" There were tears hanging in his eyes. "Haff yü de-site-it hwat tü dü?"

Expansively: "I don't pretend to understand the situation *fully*, Galardo. But you know and I know that I've got something you people [think you] need. Now there doesn't seem to be any body of law covering artifacts that appear [*plink!*] in a magnetron on accidental overload, and I just have your word that it's yours."

"Ah, that iss how yü re-member it now," said sorrowful Galardo.

"Well, it's the way it [but wasn't something green? I think of spired Toledo and three angled crosses toppling] happened. I don't want anything silly, like a million dollars in small unmarked bills, and I don't want to be bullied, to be bullied, no, I mean not by you, not by anybody. Just, just tell me who you are, what all this is about. This is nonsense, you see, and we can't have nonsense. I'm afraid I'm not expressing myself very well—"

And a confident smile and turn away from him, which shows that you aren't afraid, you can turn your back and dare him to make something of it. In public, in the bar? It is laughable; you have him in the palm of your hand. "Shot of Red Top and a beer, please, Sam." At 9:48.

The bartender draws the beer and pours the whiskey. He pauses before he picks up the dollar bill fished from the pants pocket, pauses almost timidly and works his face into a friend's grimace. But you can read him; he is making amends for his suspicion that you were going to start a drunken brawl when Galardo merely surprised you a bit. You can read him because your mind is tensed to concert pitch tonight, ready for Galardo, ready for the Serpentists, ready to crack this thing wide open; strange!

But you weren't ready for the words he spoke from his fake apologetic friend's grimace as you delicately raised the heavy amber-filled glass to your lips: "Where'd your friend go?"

You sipped the whiskey as you turned and looked.

Galardo gone.

You smiled and shrugged; he comes and goes as he pleases, you know. Irresponsible, no manners at all—but *loyal*. A prince among men when you get to know him, a prince, I tell you. All this in your smile and shrug—why, you could have been an actor! The worry, the faint neurotic worry, didn't show at all, and indeed there is no reason why it should. You have the whip hand; you have the Seal; Galardo will come crawling back and explain everything. As for example:

"You may wonder why I've asked all of you to assemble in the libr'reh."

or

"For goodness' sake, Gracie, I wasn't going to go to Cuba! When you heard me on the extension phone I was just ordering a dozen Havana *cigars!*"

or

"In your notation, we are from 19,276 AD. Our basic mathematic is a quite comprehensible subsumption of your contemporary statistical analysis and topology which I shall now proceed to explain to you."

And that was all.

With sorrow, Gentle Reader, you will have noticed that the marble did not remark: "I am chiseled," the lumber "I am

sawn," the paint "I am applied to canvas," the tea leaf "I am whisked about in an exquisite Korean bowl to brew while the celebrants of *cha no yu* squeeze this nourishment out of their poverty." Vain victim, relax and play your hunches; subconscious integration does it. Stick with your lit-tle old subconscious integration and all will go *swimmingly*, if only it weren't so damned noisy in here. But it was dark on the street and conceivably things could happen there; stick with crowds and stick with witnesses, but if only it weren't so ...

To his left they were settling down; it was the hour of confidences, and man to man they told the secret of their success: "In the needle trade, I'm in the needle trade, I don't sell anybody a crooked needle, my father told me that. Albert, he said to me, don't never sell nobody nothing but a straight needle. And today I have four shops."

To his right they were settling down; freed of the cares of the day they invited their souls, explored the spiritual realm, theologized with exquisite distinctions: "Now *wait* a minute, I didn't say I was a *good* Mormon, I said I was a Mormon and that's what I am, a Mormon. I *never* said I was a *good* Mormon, I just said I was a Mormon, my mother was a Mormon and my father was a Mormon, and that makes me a Mormon but I *never* said I was a *good* Mormon——"

Distinguo, rolled the canonical thunder; *distinguo*.

Demurely a bonneted lassie shook her small-change tambourine beneath his chin and whispered, snarling: "Galardo lied."

Admit it; you were startled. But what need for the bartender to come running with raised hand, what need for needle-trader to your left to shrink away, the L.D.S. to cower?

"Mister, that's twice you let out a yell, we run a quiet place, if you can't be good, begone."

Begob.

"I ash-assure you, bartender, it was—unintenable."

Greed vies with hate; greed wins; greed always wins: "Just keep it quiet, mister, this ain't the Bowery, this is a family place." Then, relenting: "The same?"

"Yes, please." At 10:15 the patient lassie jingled silver on the parchment palm outstretched. He placed a quarter on the tambourine and asked politely: "Did you say something to me before, Miss?"

"God bless you, sir. Yes, sir, I did say something. I said Galardo lied; the Seal is holy to the Serpent, sir, and to his humble emissaries. If you'll only hand it over, sir, the Serpent will somewhat mitigate the fearsome torments which are rightly yours for snatching the Seal from the Altar, sir."

[Snatchings from Altars? *Ma foi*, the wench is mad!]

"Listen, lady. That's only talk. What annoys me about you people is, you won't talk sense. I want to know who you are, what this is about, maybe just a little hint about your mathematics, and I'll do the rest and you can have the blooming Seal. I'm a passable physicist even if I'm only a technician. I bet there's something you didn't know. I bet you didn't know the tech shortage is tighter than the scientist shortage. You get a guy can tune a magnetron, he writes his own ticket. So I'm weak on quantum mechanics, the theory side, I'm still a good all-around man and *be-lieve* me, the Ph.D.'s would kiss my ever-loving *feet* if I told them I got an offer from Argonne——

"So listen, you Janissary emissary. I'm happy right here in this necessary commissary and here I *stay*."

But she was looking at him with bright frightened mouse's eyes and slipped on down the line when he paused for breath, putting out the parchment palm to others but not ceasing to watch him.

Coins tapped the tambour. "God bless you. God bless you. God bless you."

The raving-maniacal ghost of G. Washington Hill descended then into a girdled sibyl; she screamed from the screen: "It's *Hit Pa-rade!*"

"I like them production numbers."

"I like that Pigalle Mackintosh."

"I like them production numbers. Lotsa pretty girls, pretty clothes, something to take your mind off your troubles."

"I like that Pigalle Mackintosh. She don't just sing, mind you, she plays the saxophone. Talent."

"I like them production numbers. They show you just what the song is all about. Like last week they did *Sadist Calypso* with this mad scientist cutting up the girls, and then Pigalle comes in and whips him to death at the last verse, you see just what the song's all about, something to take your mind off your troubles."

"I like that Pigalle Mackintosh. She don't just sing, mind you, she plays the saxophone and cracks a blacksnake whip, like last week in *Sadist Calypso*——"

"Yeah. Something to take your mind off your troubles."

Irritably he felt in his pocket for the Seal and moved, stumbling a little, to one of the tables against the knotty pine wall. His head slipped forward on the polished wood and he sank into the sea of myth.

Galardo came to him in his dream and spoke under a storm-green sky: "Take your mind off your troubles, Edward. It was stolen like the first penny, like the quiz answers, like the pity for your bereavement." His hand, a tambourine, was out.

"Never shall I yield," he declaimed to the miserable wretch. "By the *honneur* of a Gascon. I stole it fair and square; 'tis mine, knave! *En garde!*"

Galardo quailed and ran, melting into the sky, the altar, the tambourine.

A ham-hand manhandled him. "Light-up time," said Sam. "I let you sleep because you got it here, but I got to close up now."

"Sam," he says uncertainly.

"One for the road, mister. On the house, *Up-sy-daisy!*" meaty hooks under his armpits heaving him to the bar.

The lights are out behind the bar, the jolly neons, glittering off how many gems of amber rye and the tan crystals of beer? A meager bulb above the register is the oasis in the desert of inky night.

"Sam," groggily, "you don't understand. I mean I never explained it——"

"Drink up, mister," a pale free drink, soda bubbles lightly tinged with tawny rye. A small sip to gain time.

"Sam, there are some people after me——"

"You'll feel better in the morning, mister. Drink up, I got to close up, hurry up."

"These people, Sam [it's cold in here and scary as a noise in the attic; the bottles stand accusingly, the chrome globes that top them eye you] these people, they've got a thing, The Century of——"

"Sure, mister, I let you sleep because you got it here, but we close up now, drink up your drink."

"Sam, let me go home with you, will you? It isn't anything like that, don't misunderstand, I just can't be alone. These people—look, I've got money——"

He spreads out what he dug from his pocket.

"Sure, mister, you got lots of money, two dollars and thirty-eight cents. Now you take your money and get out of the store because I got to lock up and clean out the register——"

"Listen, bartender, I'm not drunk, maybe I don't have much money on me but I'm an important man! Important! They couldn't run Big Maggie at Brookhaven without me, I may not have a degree but what I get from these people if you'll only let me stay here——"

The bartender takes the pale one on the house you only sipped and dumps it in the sink; his hands are iron on you and you float while he chants:

*"Decent man. Decent place.
Hold their liquor. Got it here.
Try be nice. Drunken bum.
Don't—come—back."*

The crash of your coccyx on the concrete and the slam of the door are one.

Run!

Down the black street stumbling over cans, cats, orts, to the pool of light in the night, safe corner where a standard sprouts and sprays radiance.

The tall black figure that steps between is Galardo.

The short one has a tamborine.

"Take it!" He thrust out the Seal on his shaking palm. "If you won't tell me anything, you won't. Take it and go away!"

Galardo inspects it and sadly says: "Thiss appearss to be a blank wash-er."

"Mistake," he slobbers. "Minute." He claws in his pockets, ripping. "Here! Here!"

The lassie squeaks: "The wheel of a toy truck. It will not do at all, sir." Her glittereyes.

"Then this! This is it! This must be it!"

Their heads shake slowly. Unable to look his fingers feel the rim and rolled threading of the jar cap.

They nod together, sad and glitter-eyed, and The Century of Flame begins.

The Adventurer

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President Folsom XXIV said petulantly to his Secretary of the Treasury: "Blow me to hell, Bannister, if I understood a single word of that. *Why* can't I buy the Nicolaides Collection? And don't start with the rediscount and the Series W business again. Just tell me *why*."

The Secretary of the Treasury said with an air of apprehension and thread-like feeling across his throat: "It boils down to—no money, Mr. President."

The President was too engrossed in thoughts of the marvelous collection to fly into a rage. "It's *such* a bargain," he said mournfully. "An archaic Henry Moore figure—really too big to finger, but I'm no culture-snob, thank God—and fifteen early Morrisons and I can't begin to tell you what else." He looked hopefully at the Secretary of Public Opinion: "Mightn't I seize it for the public good or something?"

The Secretary of Public Opinion shook his head. His pose was gruffly professional. "Not a chance, Mr. President. We'd never get away with it. The art-lovers would scream to high Heaven."

"I suppose so ... *Why* isn't there any money?" He had swiveled dangerously on the Secretary of the Treasury again.

"Sir, purchases of the new Series W bond issue have lagged badly because potential buyers have been attracted to—"

"Stop it, stop it, *stop* it! You know I can't make head or tail of that stuff. Where's the money *going*?"

The Director of the Budget said cautiously: "Mr. President, during the biennium just ending, the Department of Defense accounted for 78 per cent of expenditures—"

The Secretary of Defense growled: "Now wait a minute, Felder! We were voted—"

The President interrupted, raging weakly: "Oh, you rascals! My father would have known what to do with you! But don't think I can't handle it. *Don't* think you can hoodwink me." He punched a button ferociously; his silly face was contorted with rage and there was a certain tension on all the faces around the Cabinet table.

Panels slid down abruptly in the walls, revealing grim-faced Secret Servicemen. Each Cabinet officer was covered by at least two automatic rifles.

"Take that—that traitor away!" the President yelled. His finger pointed at the Secretary of Defense, who slumped over the table, sobbing. Two Secret Servicemen half-carried him from the room.

President Folsom XXIV leaned back, thrusting out his lower lip. He told the Secretary of the Treasury: "*Get* me the money for the Nicolaides Collection. Do you understand? I don't care how you do it. *Get* it." He glared at the Secretary of Public Opinion. "Have you any comments?"

"No, Mr. President"

"All right, then." The President unbent and said plaintively: "I don't see why you can't all be more reasonable. I'm a very reasonable man. I don't see why I can't have a few pleasures along with my responsibilities. Really I don't. And I'm sensitive. I don't *like* these scenes. Very well. That's all. The Cabinet meeting is adjourned."

They rose and left silently in the order of their seniority. The President noticed that the panels were still down and pushed the button that raised them again and hid the granite-faced Secret Servicemen. He took out of his pocket a late Morrison fingering-piece and turned it over in his hand, a smile of relaxation and bliss spreading over his face. *Such* amusing textural contrast! *Such* unexpected variations on the classic sequences!

The Cabinet, less the Secretary of Defense, was holding a rump meeting in an untapped corner of the White House gymnasium.

"God," the Secretary of State said, white-faced. "Poor old Willy!"

The professionally gruff Secretary of Public Opinion said: "We should murder the bastard. I don't care what happens—"

The Director of the Budget said dryly: "We all know what would happen. President Folsom XXV would take office. No; we've got to keep plugging as before. Nothing short of the invincible can topple the Republic ..."

"What about a war?" the Secretary of Commerce demanded fiercely. "We've no proof that our program will work. What about a war?"

State said wearily: "Not while there's a balance of power, my dear man. The Io-Callisto Question proved that. The Republic and the Soviet fell all over themselves trying to patch things up as soon as it seemed that there would be real shooting. Folsom XXIV and his excellency Premier Yersinsky know at least that much."

The Secretary of the Treasury said: "What would you all think of Steiner for Defense?"

The Director of the Budget was astonished. "Would he take it?"

Treasury cleared his throat. "As a matter of fact, I've asked him to stop by right about now." He hurled a medicine ball into the budgetary gut.

"Oof!" said the Director. "You bastard. Steiner would be perfect. He runs Standards like a watch." He treacherously fired the medicine ball at the Secretary of Raw Materials, who blandly caught it and slammed it back.

"Here he comes," said the Secretary of Raw Materials. "Steiner! Come and sweat some oleo off!"

Steiner ambled over, a squat man in his fifties, and said: "I don't mind if I do. Where's Willy?"

State said: "The President unmasked him as a traitor. He's probably been executed by now."

Steiner looked grim, and grimmer yet when the Secretary of the Treasury said, dead-pan: "We want to propose you for Defense."

"I'm happy in Standards," Steiner said. "Safer, too. The Man's father took an interest in science, but The Man never comes around. Things are very quiet. Why don't you invite Winch, from the National Art Commission? It wouldn't be much of a change for the worse for him."

"No brains," the Secretary for Raw Materials said briefly. "Heads up!"

Steiner caught the ball and slugged it back at him. "What good are brains?" he asked quietly.

"Close the ranks, gentlemen," State said. "These long shots are too hard on my arms."

The ranks closed and the Cabinet told Steiner what good were brains. He ended by accepting.

The Moon is all Republic. Mars is all Soviet. Titan is all Republic. Ganymede is all Soviet. But Io and Callisto, by the Treaty of Greenwich, are half-and-half Republic and Soviet.

Down the main street of the principal settlement on Io runs an invisible line. On one side of the line, the principal settlement is known as New Pittsburgh. On the other side it is known as Nizhni-Magnitogorsk.

Into a miner's home in New Pittsburgh one day an eight-year-old boy named Grayson staggered, bleeding from the head. His eyes were swollen almost shut.

His father lurched to his feet, knocking over a bottle. He looked stupidly at the bottle, set it upright too late to save much of the alcohol, and then stared fixedly at the boy. "See what you made me do, you little bastard?" he growled, and fetched the boy a clout on his bleeding head that sent him spinning against the wall of the hut. The boy got up slowly and silently—there seemed to be something wrong with his left arm—and glowered at his father.

He said nothing.

"Fighting again," the father said, in a would-be fierce voice. His eyes fell under the peculiar fire in the boy's stare. "Damn fool—"

A woman came in from the kitchen. She was tall and thin. In a flat voice she said to the man: "Get out of here." The man hiccupped and said: "Your brat spilled my bottle. Gimme a dollar."

In the same flat voice: "I have to buy food."

"*I said gimme a dollar!*" The man slapped her face—it did not change—and wrenched a small purse from the string that suspended it around her neck. The boy suddenly was a demon, flying at his father with fists and teeth. It lasted only a second or two. The father kicked him into a corner where he lay, still glaring, wordless and dry-eyed. The mother had not moved; her husband's handmark was still red on her face when he hulked out, clutching the money bag.

Mrs. Grayson at last crouched in the corner with the eight-year-old boy. "Little Tommy," she said softly. "My little Tommy! Did you cross the line again?"

He was blubbing in her arms, hysterically, as she caressed him. At last he was able to say: "I didn't cross the line, Mom. Not this time. It was in school. They said our name was really Krasinsky. God-damn him!" the boy shrieked. "They said his grandfather was named Krasinsky and he moved over the line and changed his name to Grayson! God-damn him! Doing that to us!"

"Now darling," his mother said, caressing him. "Now, darling." His trembling began to ebb. She said: "Let's get out the spools, Tommy. You mustn't fall behind in school. You owe that to me, don't you, darling?"

"Yes, Mom," he said. He threw his spindly arms around her and kissed her. "Get out the spools. We'll show him. I mean them."

President Folsom XXIV lay on his death-bed, feeling no pain, mostly because his personal physician had pumped him full of morphine. Dr. Barnes sat by the bed holding the presidential wrist and waiting, occasionally nodding off and recovering with a belligerent stare around the room. The four wire-service men didn't care whether he fell asleep or not; they were worriedly discussing the nature and habits of the President's first-born, who would shortly succeed to the highest office in the Republic.

"A firebrand, they tell me," the A.P. man said unhappily.

"Firebrands I don't mind," the U.P. man said. "He can send out all the inflammatory notes he wants just as long as he isn't a fiend for exercise. I'm not as young as I once was. You boys wouldn't remember the *old* President, Folsom XXII. He used to do point-to-point hiking. He worshipped old F.D.R."

The I.N.S. man said, lowering his voice: "Then he was worshipping the wrong Roosevelt. Teddy was the athlete."

Dr. Barnes started, dropped the presidential wrist and held a mirror to the mouth for a moment "Gentlemen," he said, "the President is dead."

"O.K.," the A.P. man said. "Let's go, boys. I'll send in the flash. U.P., you go cover the College of Electors. I.N.S., get onto the President Elect Trib, collect some interviews and background—"

The door opened abruptly; a colonel of infantry was standing there, breathing hard, with an automatic rifle at port. "Is he dead?" he asked.

"Yes," the A.P. man said. "If you'll let me past—"

"Nobody leaves the room," the colonel said grimly. "I represent General Slocum, Acting President of the Republic. The College of Electors is acting now to ratify—"

A burst of gunfire caught the colonel in the back; he spun and fell, with a single hoarse cry. More gunfire sounded through the White House. A Secret Serviceman ducked his head through the door: "President's dead? You boys stay put. We'll have this thing cleaned up in an hour—" He vanished.

The doctor sputtered his alarm and the newsmen ignored him with professional poise. The A.P. man asked: "Now who's

Slocum? Defense Command?"

I.N.S. said: "I remember him. Three stars. He headed up the Tactical Airborne Force out in Kansas four-five years ago. I think he was retired since then."

A phosphorus grenade crashed through the window and exploded with a globe of yellow flame the size of a basketball; dense clouds of phosphorus pentoxide gushed from it and the sprinkler system switched on, drenching the room.

"Come on!" hacked the A.P. man, and they scrambled from the room and slammed the door. The doctor's coat was burning in two or three places, and he was retching feebly on the corridor floor. They tore his coat off and flung it back into the room.

The U.P. man, swearing horribly, dug a sizzling bit of phosphorus from the back of his hand with a pen-knife and collapsed, sweating, when it was out. The I.N.S. man passed him a flask and he gurgled down half a pint of liquor. "Who flang that brick?" he asked faintly.

"Nobody," the A.P. man said gloomily. "That's the hell of it. None of this is happening. Just the way Taft the Pretender never happened in '03. Just the way the Pentagon Mutiny never happened in '67."

"'68," the U.P. man said faintly. "It didn't happen in '68, not '67."

The A.P. man smashed a fist into the palm of his hand and swore. "*God-damn*," he said. "Some day I'd like to—" He broke off and was bitterly silent.

The U.P. man must have been a little dislocated with shock and quite drunk to talk the way he did. "Me too," he said. "Like to tell the story. Maybe it was '67 not '68. I'm not sure now. Can't write it down so the details get lost and then after a while it didn't happen at all. Revolution'd be good deal. But it takes people t' make revolution. *People*. With eyes 'n ears. 'N memories. We make things not-happen an' we make people not-see an' not-hear ..." He slumped back against the corridor wall, nursing his burned hand. The others were watching him, very scared.

Then the A.P. man caught sight of the Secretary of Defense striding down the corridor, flanked by Secret Servicemen. "Mr. Steiner!" he called. "What's the picture?"

Steiner stopped, breathing heavily, and said: "Slocum's barricaded in the Oval Study. They don't want to smash in. He's about the only one left. There were only fifty or so. The Acting President's taken charge at the Study. You want to come along?"

They did, and even hauled the U.P. man after them.

The Acting President, who would be President Folsom XXV as soon as the Electoral College got around to it, had his father's face—the petulant lip, the soft jowl—on a hard young body. He also had an auto-rifle ready to fire from the hip. Most of the Cabinet was present. When the Secretary of Defense arrived, he turned on him. "Steiner," he said nastily, "can you explain why there should be a rebellion against the Republic in your department?"

"Mr. President," Steiner said, "Slocum was retired on my recommendation two years ago. It seems to me that my responsibility ended there and Security should have taken over."

The President Elect's finger left the trigger of the auto-rifle and his lip drew in a little. "Quite so," he said curtly, and turned to the door. "Slocum!" he shouted. "Come out of there. We can use gas if we want."

The door opened unexpectedly and a tired-looking man with three stars on each shoulder stood there, bare-handed. "All right," he said drearily. "I was fool enough to think something could be done about the regime. But you fat-faced imbeciles are going to go on and on and—"

The stutter of the auto-rifle cut him off. The President Elect's knuckles were white as he clutched the piece's forearm and grip; the torrent of slugs continued to hack and plow the general's body until the magazine was empty. "Burn that," he said curtly, turning his back on it. "Dr. Barnes, come here. I want to know about my father's passing."

The doctor, hoarse and red-eyed from the whiff of phosphorus smoke, spoke with him. The U.P. man had sagged drunkenly into a chair, but the other newsmen noted that Dr. Barnes glanced at them as he spoke, in a confidential

murmur.

"Thank you, doctor," the President Elect said at last, decisively. He gestured to a Secret Serviceman. "Take those traitors away." They went, numbly.

The Secretary of State cleared his throat. "Mr. President," he said, "I take this opportunity to submit the resignations of myself and fellow Cabinet members according to custom."

"That's all right," the President Elect said. "You may as well stay on. I intend to run things myself anyway." He hefted the auto-rifle. "You," he said to the Secretary of Public Opinion. "You have some work to do. Have the memory of my father's—artistic—preoccupations obliterated as soon as possible. I wish the Republic to assume a warlike posture—yes; what is it?"

A trembling messenger said: "Mr. President, I have the honor to inform you that the College of Electors has elected you President of the Republic—unanimously."

Cadet Fourth Classman Thomas Grayson lay on his bunk and sobbed in an agony of loneliness. The letter from his mother was crumpled in his hand: "—prouder than words can tell of your appointment to the Academy. Darling, I hardly knew my grandfather but I know that you will serve as brilliantly as he did, to the eternal credit of the Republic. You must be brave and strong for my sake—"

He would have given everything he had or ever could hope to have to be back with her, and away from the bullying, sneering fellow-cadets of the Corps. He kissed the letter—and then hastily shoved it under his mattress as he heard footsteps.

He popped to a brace, but it was only his roommate Ferguson. Ferguson was from Earth, and rejoiced in the lighter Lunar gravity which was punishment to Grayson's Io-bred muscles.

"Rest, mister," Ferguson grinned.

"Thought it was night inspection."

"Any minute now. They're down the hall. Lemme tighten your bunk or you'll be in trouble—" Tightening the bunk he pulled out the letter and said, calfishly: "Ah-hah! Who is she?—" and opened it.

When the cadet officers reached the room they found Ferguson on the floor being strangled black in the face by spidery little Grayson. It took all three of them to pull him off. Ferguson went to the infirmary and Grayson went to the Commandant's office.

The Commandant glared at the cadet from under the most spectacular pair of eyebrows in the Service. "Cadet Grayson," he said, "explain what occurred."

"Sir, Cadet Ferguson began to read a letter from my mother without my permission."

"That is not accepted by the Corps as grounds for mayhem. Do you have anything further to say?"

"Sir, I lost my temper. All I thought of was that it was an act of disrespect to my mother and somehow to the Corps and the Republic too—that Cadet Ferguson was dishonoring the Corps."

Bushwah, the Commandant thought. *A snow job and a crude one*. He studied the youngster. He had never seen such a brace from an Io-bred fourth-classman. It must be torture to muscles not yet toughened up to even Lunar gravity. Five minutes more and the boy would have to give way, and serve him right for showing off.

He studied Grayson's folder. It was too early to tell about academic work, but the fourth-classman was a bear—or a fool—for extra duty. He had gone out for half a dozen teams and applied for membership in the exacting Math Club *and* Writing Club. The Commandant glanced up; Grayson was still in his extreme brace. The Commandant suddenly had the queer idea that Grayson could hold it until it killed him.

"One hundred hours of pack-drill," he barked, "to be completed before quarter-term. Cadet Grayson, if you succeed in walking off your tours, remember that there is a tradition of fellowship in the Corps which its members are expected to observe. Dismiss."

After Grayson's steel-sharp salute and exit the Commandant dug deeper into the folder. Apparently there was something wrong with the boy's left arm, but it had been passed by the examining team that visited Io. Most unusual. Most irregular. But nothing could be done about it now.

The President, softer now in body than on his election day, and infinitely more cautious, snapped: "It's all very well to create an incident. But where's the money to come from? Who wants the rest of Io anyway? And what will happen if there's war?"

Treasury said: "The hoarders will supply the money, Mr. President. A system of percentage-bounties for persons who report currency-hoarders, and then enforced purchase of a bond issue."

Raw materials said: "We need that iron, Mr. President. We need it desperately."

State said: "All our evaluations indicate that the Soviet Premier would consider nothing less than armed invasion of his continental borders as occasion for all-out war. The consumer-goods party in the Soviet has gained immensely during the past five years and of course their armaments have suffered. Your shrewd directive to put the Republic in a warlike posture has borne fruit, Mr. President ..."

President Folsom XXV studied them narrowly. To him the need for a border incident culminating in a forced purchase of Soviet Io did not seem as pressing as they thought, but they were, after all, specialists. And there was no conceivable way they could benefit from it personally. The only alternative was that they were offering their professional advice and that it would be best to heed it. Still, there was a vague, nagging something ...

Nonsense, he decided. The spy dossiers on his Cabinet showed nothing but the usual. One had been blackmailed by an actress after an affair and railroaded her off the Earth. Another had a habit of taking bribes to advance favorite sons in civil and military service. And so on. The Republic could not suffer at their hands; the Republic and the dynasty were impregnable. You simply spied on everybody—including the spies—and ordered summary executions often enough to show that you meant it, and kept the public ignorant: deaf-dumb-blind ignorant. The spy system was simplicity itself; you had only to let things get as tangled and confused as possible until *nobody* knew who was who. The executions were literally no problem, for guilt or innocence made no matter. And mind-control when there were four newspapers, six magazines and three radio and television stations was a job for a handful of clerks.

No; the Cabinet couldn't be getting away with anything. The system was unbeatable.

President Folsom XXV said: "Very well. Have it done."

Mrs. Grayson, widow, of New Pittsburgh, Io, disappeared one night. It was in all the papers and on all the broadcasts. Some time later she was found dragging herself back across the line between Nizhni-Magnitogorsk and New Pittsburgh in sorry shape. She had a terrible tale to tell about what she had suffered at the hands and so forth of the Nizhni-Magnitogorskkniks. A diplomatic note from the Republic to the Soviet was answered by another note which was answered by the dispatch of the Republic's First Fleet to Io which was answered by the dispatch of the Soviet's First and Fifth Fleets to Io.

The Republic's First Fleet blew up the customary deserted target hulk, fulminated over a sneak sabotage attack and moved in its destroyers. Battle was joined.

Ensign Thomas Grayson took over the command of his destroyer when its captain was killed on his bridge. An electrified crew saw the strange, brooding youngster perform prodigies of skill and courage, and responded to them. In

one week of desultory action the battered destroyer had accounted for seven Soviet destroyers and a cruiser.

As soon as this penetrated to the flagship Grayson was decorated and given a flotilla. His weird magnetism extended to every officer and man aboard the seven craft. They struck like phantoms, cutting out cruisers and battlewagons in wild unorthodox actions that couldn't have succeeded but did—every time. Grayson was badly wounded twice, but his driving nervous energy carried him through.

He was decorated again and given the battlewagon of an ailing four-striper.

Without orders he touched down on the Soviet side of Io, led out a landing party of marines and bluejackets, cut through two regiments of Soviet infantry, and returned to his battlewagon with prisoners: the top civil and military administrators of Soviet Io.

They discussed him nervously aboard the flagship.

"He had a mystical quality, Admiral. His men would follow him into an atomic furnace. And—and I almost believe he could bring them through safely if he wanted to." The laugh was nervous.

"He doesn't look like much. But when he turns on the charm—watch out!"

"He's—he's a *winner*. Now I wonder what I mean by that?"

"I know what you mean. They turn up every so often. People who can't be stopped. People who have everything. Napoleons. Alexanders. Stalins. Up from nowhere."

"Suleiman. Hitler. Folsom I. Jenghiz Khan."

"Well, let's get it over with."

They tugged at their gold-braided jackets and signalled the honor guard.

Grayson was piped aboard, received another decoration and another speech. This time he made a speech in return.

President Folsom XXV, not knowing what else to do, had summoned his Cabinet. "Well?" he rasped at the Secretary of Defense.

Steiner said with a faint shrug: "Mr. President, there is nothing to be done. He has the fleet, he has the broadcasting facilities, he has the people."

"People!" snarled the President. His finger stabbed at a button and the wall panels snapped down to show the Secret Servicemen standing in their niches. The finger shot tremulously out at Steiner. "Kill that traitor!" he raved.

The chief of the detail said uneasily: "Mr. President, we were listening to Grayson before we came on duty. He says he's *de facto* President now—"

"Kill him! Kill him!"

The chief went doggedly on: "—and we liked what he had to say about the Republic and he said citizens of the Republic shouldn't take orders from you and he'd relieve you—"

The President fell back.

Grayson walked in, wearing his plain ensign's uniform and smiling faintly. Admirals and four-stripers flanked him.

The chief of the detail said: "Mr. Grayson! Are you taking over?"

The man in the ensign's uniform said gravely: "Yes. And just call me 'Grayson,' please. The titles come later. You can go now."

The chief gave a pleased grin and collected his detail. The rather slight, youngish man who had something wrong with one arm was in charge—*complete* charge.

Grayson said: "Mr. Folsom, you are relieved of the presidency. Captain, take him out and—" He finished with a whimsical shrug. A portly four-striper took Folsom by one arm. Like a drugged man the deposed president let himself be led out.

Grayson looked around the table. "Who are you gentlemen?"

They felt his magnetism, like the hum when you pass a power station.

Steiner was the spokeman. "Grayson," he said soberly, "we were Folsom's Cabinet. However, there is more that we have to tell you. Alone, if you will allow it."

"Very well, gentlemen." Admirals and captains backed out, looking concerned.

Steiner said: "Grayson, the story goes back many years. My predecessor, William Malvern, determined to overthrow the regime, holding that it was an affront to the human spirit. There have been many such attempts. All have broken up on the rocks of espionage, terrorism and opinion-control—the three weapons which the regime holds firmly in its hands.

"Malvern tried another approach than espionage versus espionage, terrorism versus terrorism and opinion-control versus opinion-control. He determined to use the basic fact that certain men make history: that there are men born to be mould-breakers. They are the Philips of Macedon, the Napoleons, Stalins and Hitlers, the Suleimans—the adventurers. Again and again they flash across history, bringing down an ancient empire, turning ordinary soldiers of the line into unkillable demons of battle, uprooting cultures, breathing new life into moribund peoples.

"There are common denominators among all the adventurers. Intelligence, of course. Other things are more mysterious but are always present. They are foreigners. Napoleon the Corsican. Hitler the Austrian. Stalin the Georgian. Philip the Macedonian. Always there is an Oedipus complex. Always there is physical deficiency. Napoleon's stature. Stalin's withered arm—and yours. Always there is a minority disability, real or fancied.

"This is a shock to you, Grayson, but you must face it. *You were manufactured.*

"Malvern packed the Cabinet with the slyest double-dealers he could find and they went to work. Eighty-six infants were planted on the outposts of the Republic in simulated family environments. Your mother was not your mother but one of the most brilliant actresses ever to drop out of sight on Earth. Your intelligence-heredity was so good that we couldn't turn you down for lack of a physical deficiency. We withered your arm with gamma radiation. I hope you will forgive us. There was no other way.

"Of the eighty-six you are the one that worked. Somehow the combination for you was minutely different from all the other combinations, genetically or environmentally, and it worked. That is all we were after. The mould has been broken, you know now what you are. Let come whatever chaos is to come; the dead hand of the past no longer lies on—"

Grayson went to the door and beckoned; two captains came in. Steiner broke off his speech as Grayson said to them: "These men deny my godhood. Take them out and—" he finished with a whimsical shrug.

"Yes, your divinity," said the captains, without a trace of humor in their voices.

The Words of Guru

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Yesterday, when I was going to meet Guru in the woods a man stopped me and said: "Child, what are you doing out at one in the morning? Does your mother know where you are? How old are you, walking around this late?"

I looked at him, and saw that he was white-haired, so I laughed. Old men never see; in fact men hardly see at all. Sometimes young women see part, but men rarely ever see at all. "I'm twelve on my next birthday," I said. And then, because I would not let him live to tell people, I said, "and I'm out this late to see Guru."

"Guru?" he asked. "Who is Guru? Some foreigner, I suppose? Bad business mixing with foreigners, young fellow. Who is Guru?"

So I told him who Guru was, and just as he began talking about cheap magazines and fairy-tales I said one of the words that Guru taught me and he stopped talking. Because he was an old man and his joints were stiff he didn't crumple up but fell in one piece, hitting his head on the stone. Then I went on.

Even though I'm going to be only twelve on my next birthday I know many things that old people don't. And I remember things that other boys can't. I remember being born out of darkness, and I remember the noises that people made about me. Then when I was two months old I began to understand that the noises meant things like the things that were going on inside my head. I found out that I could make the noises too, and everybody was very much surprised. "Talking!" they said, again and again. "And so very young! Clara, what do you make of it?" Clara was my mother.

And Clara would say: "I'm sure I don't know. There never was any genius in my family, and I'm sure there was none in Joe's." Joe was my father.

Once Clara showed me a man I had never seen before, and told me that he was a reporter—that he wrote things in newspapers. The reporter tried to talk to me as if I were an ordinary baby, I didn't even answer him, but just kept looking at him until his eyes fell and he went away. Later Clara scolded me and read me a little piece in the reporter's newspaper that was supposed to be funny—about the reporter asking me very complicated questions and me answering with baby-noises. It was not true, of course. I didn't say a word to the reporter, and he didn't ask me even one of the questions.

I heard her read the little piece, but while I listened I was watching the slug crawling on the wall. When Clara was finished I asked her: "What is that grey thing?"

She looked where I pointed, but couldn't see it. "What grey thing, Peter?" she asked. I had her call me by my whole name, Peter, instead of anything silly like Petey. "What grey thing?"

"It's as big as your hand, Clara, but soft. I don't think it has any bones at all. It's crawling up, but I don't see any face on the topwards side. And there aren't any legs."

I think she was worried, but she tried to baby me by putting her hand on the wall and trying to find out where it was. I called out whether she was right or left of the thing. Finally she put her hand right through the slug. And then I realized that she really couldn't see it, and didn't believe it was there. I stopped talking about it then and only asked her a few days later: "Clara, what do you call a thing which one person can see and another person can't?"

"An illusion, Peter," she said. "If that's what you mean." I said nothing, but let her put me to bed as usual, but when she turned out the light and went away I waited a little while and then called out softly. "Illusion! Illusion!"

At once Guru came for the first time. He bowed, the way he always has since, and said: "I have been waiting."

"I didn't know that was the way to call you," I said.

"Whenever you want me I will be ready. I will teach you, Peter—if you want to learn. Do you know what I will teach you?"

"If you will teach me about the grey thing on the wall," I said, "I will listen. And if you will teach me about real things

and unreal things I will listen."

"These things," he said thoughtfully, "very few wish to learn. And there are some things that nobody ever wished to learn. And there are some things that I will not teach."

Then I said: "The things nobody has ever wished to learn I will learn. And I will even learn the things you do not wish to teach."

He smiled mockingly. "A master has come," he said, half-laughing. "A master of Guru."

That was how I learned his name. And that night he taught me a word which would do little things, like spoiling food.

From that day, to the time I saw him last night he has not changed at all, though now I am as tall as he is. His skin is still as dry and shiny as ever it was, and his face is still bony, crowned by a head of very coarse, black hair.

When I was ten years old I went to bed one night only long enough to make Joe and Clara suppose I was fast asleep. I left in my place something which appears when you say one of the words of Guru and went down the drainpipe outside my window. It always was easy to climb down and up, ever since I was eight years old.

I met Guru in Inwood Hill Park. "You're late," he said.

"Not too late," I answered. "I know it's never too late for one of these things."

"How do you know?" he asked sharply. "This is your first."

"And maybe my last," I replied. "I don't like the idea of it. If I have nothing more to learn from my second than my first I shan't go to another."

"You don't know," he said. "You don't know what it's like—the voices, and the bodies slick with unguent, leaping flames; mind-filling ritual! You can have no idea at all until you've taken part."

"We'll see," I said. "Can we leave from here?"

"Yes," he said. Then he taught me the word I would need to know, and we both said it together.

The place we were in next was lit with red lights, and I think that the walls were of rock. Though of course there was no real seeing there, and so the lights only seemed to be red, and it was not real rock.

As we were going to the fire one of them stopped us. "Who's with you?" she asked, calling Guru by another name. I did not know that he was also the person bearing that name, for it was a very powerful one.

He cast a hasty, sidewise glance at me and then said: "This is Peter of whom I have often told you."

She looked at me then and smiled, stretching out her oily arms. "Ah," she said, softly, like the cats when they talk at night to me. "Ah, this is Peter. Will you come to me when I call you, Peter? And sometimes call for me—in the dark—when you are alone?"

"Don't do that!" said Guru, angrily pushing past her. "He's very young—you might spoil him for his work."

She screeched at our backs: "Guru and his pupil—fine pair! Boy, he's no more real than I am—you're the only real thing here!"

"Don't listen to her," said Guru. "She's wild and raving. They're always tight-strung when this time comes around."

We came near the fires then, and sat down on rocks. They were killing animals and birds and doing things with their bodies. The blood was being collected in a basin of stone, which passed through the crowd. The one to my left handed it to me. "Drink," she said, grinning to show me her fine, white teeth. I swallowed twice from it and passed it to Guru.

When the bowl had passed all around we took off our clothes. Some, like Guru, did not wear them, but many did. The

one to my left sat closer to me, breathing heavily at my face. I moved away. "Tell her to stop, Guru," I said. "This isn't part of it, I know."

Guru spoke to her sharply in their own language, and she changed her seat, snarling.

Then we all began to chant, clapping our hands and beating our thighs. One of them rose slowly and circled about the fires in a slow pace, her eyes rolling wildly. She worked her jaws and flung her arms about so sharply that I could hear the elbows crack. Still shuffling her feet against the rock floor she bent her body backwards down to her feet. Her belly-muscles were bands nearly standing out from her skin, and the oil rolled down her body and legs. As the palms of her hands touched the ground, she collapsed in a twitching heap and began to set up a thin wailing noise against the steady chant and hand beat that the rest of us were keeping up. Another of them did the same as the first, and we chanted louder for her and still louder for the third. Then, while we still beat our hands and thighs, one of them took up the third, laid her across the altar and made her ready with a stone knife. The fire's light gleamed off the chipped edge of obsidian. As her blood drained down the groove, cut as a gutter into the rock of the altar, we stopped our chant and the fires were snuffed out.

But still we could see what was going on, for these things were, of course, not happening at all—only seeming to happen, really, just as all the people and things there only seemed to be what they were. Only I was real. That must be why they desired me so.

As the last of the fires died Guru excitedly whispered: "The Presence!" He was very deeply moved.

From the pool of blood from the third dancer's body there issued the Presence. It was the tallest one there, and when it spoke its voice was deeper, and when it commanded its commands were obeyed.

"Let blood!" it commanded, and we gashed ourselves with flints. It smiled and showed teeth bigger and sharper and whiter than any of the others.

"Make water!" it commanded, and we all spat on each other. It flapped its wings and rolled its eyes, which were bigger and redder than any of the others.

"Pass flame!" it commanded, and we breathed smoke and fire on our limbs. It stamped its feet, let blue flames roar from its mouth, and they were bigger and wilder than any of the others.

Then it returned to the pool of blood and we lit the fires again. Guru was staring straight before him; I tugged his arm. He bowed as though we were meeting for the first time that night.

"What are you thinking of?" I asked. "We shall go now."

"Yes," he said heavily. "Now we shall go." Then we said the word that had brought us there.

The first man I killed was Brother Paul, at the school where I went to learn the things that Guru did not teach me.

It was less than a year ago, but it seems like a very long time. I have killed so many times since then.

"You're a very bright boy, Peter," said the brother.

"Thank you, brother."

"But there are things about you that I don't understand. Normally I'd ask your parents but—I feel that they don't understand either. You were an infant prodigy, weren't you?"

"Yes, brother."

"There's nothing very unusual about that—glands, I'm told. You know what glands are?"

Then I was alarmed. I had heard of them, but I was not certain whether they were the short, thick green men who wear only metal or the things with many legs with whom I talked in the woods.

"How did you find out?" I asked him.

"But Peter! You look positively frightened, lad! I don't know a thing about them myself, but Father Frederick does. He has whole books about them, though I sometimes doubt whether he believes them himself."

"They aren't good books, brother," I said. "They ought to be burned."

"That's a savage thought, my son. But to return to your own problem—"

I could not let him go any further knowing what he did about me. I said one of the words Guru taught me and he looked at first very surprised and then seemed to be in great pain. He dropped across his desk and I felt his wrist to make sure, for I had not used that word before. But he was dead.

There was a heavy step outside and I made myself invisible. Stout Father Frederick entered, and I nearly killed him too with the word, but I knew that that would be very curious. I decided to wait, and went through the door as Father Frederick bent over the dead monk. He thought he was asleep.

I went down the corridor to the book-lined office of the stout priest and, working quickly, piled all his books in the center of the room and lit them with my breath. Then I went down to the schoolyard and made myself visible again when there was nobody looking. It was very easy. I killed a man I passed on the street the next day.

There was a girl named Mary who lived near us. She was fourteen then, and I desired her as those in the Cavern out of Time and Space had desired me.

So when I saw Guru and he had bowed, I told him of it, and he looked at me in great surprise. "You are growing older, Peter," he said.

"I am, Guru. And there will come a time when your words will not be strong enough for me."

He laughed. "Come, Peter," he said. "Follow me if you wish. There is something that is going to be done—" He licked his thin, purple lips and said: "I have told you what it will be like."

"I shall come," I said. "Teach me the word." So he taught me the word and we said it together.

The place we were in next was not like any of the other places I had been to before with Guru. It was No-place. Always before there had been the seeming passage of time and matter, but here there was not even that. Here Guru and the others cast off their forms and were what they were, and No-place was the only place where they could do this.

It was not like the Cavern, for the Cavern had been out of Time and Space, and this place was not enough of a place even for that. It was No-place.

What happened there does not bear telling, but I was made known to certain ones who never departed from there. All came to them as they existed. They had not color or the seeming of color, or any seeming of shape.

There I learned that eventually I would join with them; that I had been selected as the one of my planet who was to dwell without being forever in that No-place.

Guru and I left, having said the word.

"Well?" demanded Guru, staring me in the eye.

"I am willing," I said. "But teach me one word now—"

"Ah," he said grinning. "The girl?"

"Yes," I said. "The word that will mean much to her."

Still grinning, he taught me the word.

Mary, who had been fourteen, is now fifteen and what they call incurably mad.

Last night I saw Guru again and for the last time. He bowed as I approached him. "Peter," he said warmly.

"Teach me the word," said I.

"It is not too late."

"Teach me the word."

"You can withdraw—with what you master you can master also this world. Gold without reckoning; sardonyx and gems, Peter! Rich crushed velvet—stiff, scraping, embroidered tapestries!"

"Teach me the word."

"Think, Peter, of the house you could build. It could be of white marble, and every slab centered by a winking ruby. Its gate could be of beaten gold within and without and it could be built about one slender tower of carven ivory, rising mile after mile into the turquoise sky. You could see the clouds float underneath your eyes."

"Teach me the word."

"Your tongue could crush the grapes that taste like melted silver. You could hear always the song of the bulbul and the lark that sounds like the dawnstar made musical. Spikenard that will bloom a thousand thousand years could be ever in your nostrils. Your hands could feel the down of purple Himalayan swans that is softer than a sunset cloud."

"Teach me the word."

"You could have women whose skin would be from the black of ebony to the white of snow. You could have women who would be as hard as flints or as soft as a sunset cloud."

"Teach me the word."

Guru grinned and said the word.

Now, I do not know whether I will say that word, which was the last that Guru taught me, today or tomorrow or until a year has passed.

It is a word that will explode this planet like a stick of dynamite in a rotten apple.

Shark Ship

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It was the spring swarming of the plankton; every man and woman and most of the children aboard Grenville's Convoy had a job to do. As the seventy-five gigantic sailing ships ploughed their two degrees of the South Atlantic, the fluid that foamed beneath their cutwaters seethed also with life. In the few weeks of the swarming, in the few meters of surface water where sunlight penetrated in sufficient strength to trigger photosynthesis, microscopic spores burst into microscopic plants, were devoured by minute animals which in turn were swept into the maws of barely visible sea monsters almost a tenth of an inch from head to tail; these in turn were fiercely pursued and gobbled in shoals by the fierce little brit, the tiny herring and shrimp that could turn a hundred miles of green water to molten silver before your eyes.

Through the silver ocean of the swarming the Convoy scudded and tacked in great controlled zigs and zags, reaping the silver of the sea in the endlessly reeling bronze nets each ship payed out behind.

The Commodore in *Grenville* did not sleep during the swarming; he and his staff dispatched cutters to scout the swarms, hung on the meteorologists' words, digested the endless reports from the scout vessels and toiled through the night to prepare the dawn signal. The mainmast flags might tell the captains "Convoy course five degrees right," or "Two degrees left," or only "Convoy course: no change." On those dawn signals depended the life for the next six months of the million and a quarter souls of the Convoy. It had not happened often, but it had happened that a succession of blunders reduced a Convoy's harvest below the minimum necessary to sustain life. Derelicts were sometimes sighted and salvaged from such convoys; strong-stomached men and women were needed for the first boarding and clearing away of human debris. Cannibalism occurred, an obscene thing one had nightmares about.

The seventy-five captains had their own particular purgatory to endure throughout the harvest, the Sail-Seine Equation. It was their job to balance the push on the sails and the drag of the ballooning seines so that push exceeded drag by just the number of pounds that would keep the ship on course and in station, given every conceivable variation of wind force and direction, temperature of water, consistency of brit, and smoothness of hull. Once the catch was salted down it was customary for the captains to converge on *Grenville* for a roaring feast by way of letdown.

Rank had its privileges. There was no such relief for the captains' Net Officers or their underlings in Operations and Maintenance, or for their Food Officers under whom served the Processing and Stowage people. They merely worked, streaming the nets twenty-four hours a day, keeping them bellied out with lines from mast and outriding gigs, keeping them spooling over the great drum amidships, tending the blades that had to scrape the brit from the nets without damaging the nets, repairing the damage when it did occur; and without interruption of the harvest, flash-cooking the part of the harvest to be cooked, drying the part to be dried, pressing oil from the harvest as required, and stowing what was cooked and dried and pressed where it would not spoil, where it would not alter the trim of the ship, where it would not be pilfered by children. This went on for weeks after the silver had gone thin and patchy against the green, and after the silver had altogether vanished.

The routines of many were not changed at all by the swarming season. The blacksmiths, the sailmakers, the carpenters, the watertenders, to a degree the storekeepers, functioned as before, tending to the fabric of the ship, renewing, replacing, reworking. The ships were things of brass, bronze and unrusting steel. Phosphor-bronze strands were woven into net, lines, and cables; cordage, masts and hull were metal; all were inspected daily by the First Officer and his men and women for the smallest pinhead of corrosion. The smallest pinhead of corrosion could spread; it could send a ship to the bottom before it had done spreading, as the chaplains were fond of reminding worshippers when the ships rigged for church on Sundays. To keep the hellish red of iron rust and the sinister blue of copper rust from invading, the squads of oilers were always on the move, with oil distilled from the catch. The sails and the clothes alone could not be preserved; they wore out. It was for this that the felting machines down below chopped wornout sails and clothing into new fibers and twisted and rolled them with kelp and with glue from the catch into new felt for new sails and clothing.

While the plankton continued to swarm twice a year, Grenville's Convoy could continue to sail the South Atlantic, from ten-mile limit to ten-mile limit. Not one of the seventy-five ships in the Convoy had an anchor.

The Captain's Party that followed the end of Swarming 283 was slow getting under way. McBee, whose ship was Port

Squadron 19, said to Salter of Starboard Squadron 30: "To be frank, I'm too damned exhausted to care whether I ever go to another party, but I didn't want to disappoint the Old Man."

The Commodore, trim and bronzed, not showing his eighty years, was across the great cabin from them greeting new arrivals.

Salter said: "You'll feel differently after a good sleep. It was a great harvest, wasn't it? Enough weather to make it tricky and interesting. Remember 276? *That* was the one that wore me out. A grind, going by the book. But this time, on the fifteenth day my foretopsail was going to go about noon, big rip in her, but I needed her for my S-S balance. What to do? I broke out a balloon spinnaker—now wait a minute, let me tell it first before you throw the book at me—and pumped my fore trim tank out. Presto! No trouble; foretopsail replaced in fifteen minutes."

McBee was horrified. "You could have lost your net!"

"My weatherman absolutely ruled out any sudden squalls."

"Weatherman. You could have lost your net!"

Salter studied him. "Saying that once was thoughtless, McBee. Saying it twice is insulting. Do you think I'd gamble with twenty thousand lives?"

McBee passed his hands over his tired face. "I'm sorry," he said. "I told you I was exhausted. Of course under special circumstances it can be a safe maneuver." He walked to a porthole for a glance at his own ship, the nineteenth in the long echelon behind *Grenville*. Salter stared after him. "Losing one's net" was a phrase that occurred in several proverbs; it stood for abysmal folly. In actuality a ship that lost its phosphor-bronze wire mesh was doomed, and quickly. One could improvise with sails or try to juryrig a net out of the remaining rigging, but not well enough to feed twenty thousand hands, and no fewer than that were needed for maintenance. *Grenville's* Convoy had met a derelict which lost its net Back before 240; children still told horror stories about it, how the remnants of port and starboard watches, mad to a man, were at war, a war of vicious night forays with knives and clubs.

Salter went to the bar and accepted from the Commodore's steward his first drink of the evening, a steel tumbler of colorless fluid distilled from a fermented mash of sargassum weed. It was about forty per cent alcohol and tasted pleasantly of iodides.

He looked up from his sip and his eyes widened. There was a man in captain's uniform talking with the Commodore and he did not recognize his face. But there had been no promotions lately!

The Commodore saw him looking and beckoned him over. He saluted and then accepted the old man's hand-clasp. "Captain Salter," the Commodore said, "my youngest and rashest, and my best harvester. Salter, this is Captain Degerand of the White Fleet."

Salter frankly gawked. He knew perfectly well that *Grenville's* Convoy was far from sailing alone upon the seas. On watch he had beheld distant sails from time to time. He was aware that cruising the two-degree belt north of theirs was another convoy and that in the belt south of theirs was still another, in fact that the seaborne population of the world was a constant one billion, eighty million. But never had he expected to meet face to face any of them except the one and a quarter million who sailed under *Grenville's* flag.

Degerand was younger than he, all deeply tanned skin and flashing pointed teeth. His uniform was perfectly ordinary and very queer. He understood Salter's puzzled look. "It's woven cloth," he said. "The White Fleet was launched several decades after *Grenville's*. By then they had machinery to reconstitute fibers suitable for spinning and they equipped us with it. It's six of one and half a dozen of the other. I think our sails may last longer than yours, but the looms require a lot of skilled labor when they break down."

The Commodore had left them.

"Are we very different from you?" Salter asked.

Degerand said: "Our differences are nothing. Against the dirt men we are brothers—blood brothers."

The term "dirt men" was discomforting; the juxtaposition with "blood" more so. Apparently he was referring to whoever

it was that lived on the continents and islands—a shocking breach of manners, of honor, of faith. The words of the Charter circled through Salter's head. "... return for the sea and its bounty ... renounce and abjure the land from which we ..." Salter had been ten years old before he knew that there *were* continents and islands. His dismay must have shown on his face.

"They have doomed us," the foreign captain said. "We cannot refit. They have sent us out, each upon our two degrees of ocean in larger or smaller convoys as the richness of the brit dictated, and they have cut us off. To each of us will come the catastrophic storm, the bad harvest, the lost net, and death."

It was Salter's impression that Degerand had said the same words many times before, usually to large audiences.

The Commodore's talker boomed out: "Now hear this!" His huge voice filled the stateroom easily; his usual job was to roar through a megaphone across a league of ocean, supplementing flag and lamp signals. "Now hear this!" he boomed. "There's tuna on the table—big fish for big sailors!"

A grinning steward whisked a felt from the sideboard, and there by Heaven it lay! A great baked fish as long as your leg, smoking hot and trimmed with kelp! A hungry roar greeted it; the captains made for the stack of trays and began to file past the steward, busy with knife and steel.

Salter marvelled to Degerand: "I didn't dream there were any left that size. When you think of the tons of brit that old-timer must have gobbled!"

The foreigner said darkly: "We slew the whales, the sharks, the perch, the cod, the herring—everything that used the sea but us. They fed on brit and one another and concentrated it in firm savory flesh like that, but we were jealous of the energy squandered in the long food chain; we decreed that the chain would stop with the link brit-to-man."

Salter by then had filled a tray. "Brit's more reliable," he said. "A Convoy can't take chances on fisherman's luck." He happily bolted a steaming mouthful.

"Safety is not everything," Degerand said. He ate, more slowly than Salter. "Your Commodore said you were a rash seaman."

"He was joking. If he believed that, he would have to remove me from command."

The Commodore walked up to them, patting his mouth with a handkerchief and beaming. "Surprised, eh?" he demanded. "Glasgow's lookout spotted that big fellow yesterday half a kilometer away. He signalled me and I told him to lower and row for him. The boat crew sneaked up while he was browsing and gaffed him clean. Very virtuous of us. By killing him we economize on brit and provide a fitting celebration for my captains. Eat hearty! It may be the last we'll ever see."

Degerand rudely contradicted his senior officer. "They can't be wiped out clean, Commodore, not exterminated. The sea is deep. Its genetic potential cannot be destroyed. We merely make temporary alterations of the feeding balance."

"Seen any sperm whale lately?" the Commodore asked, raising his white eyebrows. "Go get yourself another helping, captain, before it's gone." It was a dismissal; the foreigner bowed and went to the buffet.

The Commodore asked: "What do you think of him?"

"He has some extreme ideas," Salter said.

"The White Fleet appears to have gone bad," the old man said. "That fellow showed up on a cutter last week in the middle of harvest wanting my immediate, personal attention. He's on the staff of the White Fleet Commodore. I gather they're all like him. They've got slack; maybe rust has got ahead of them, maybe they're overbreeding. A ship lost its net and they didn't let it go. They cannibalized rigging from the whole fleet to make a net for it."

"But—"

"But—but—but. Of course it was the wrong thing and now they're all suffering. Now they haven't the stomach to draw lots and cut their losses." He lowered his voice. "Their idea is some sort of raid on the Western Continent, that America thing, for steel and bronze and whatever else they find not welded to the deck. It's nonsense, of course, spawned by a few silly-clever people on the staff. The crews will never go along with it. Degerand was sent to invite us in!"

Salter said nothing for a while and then: "I certainly hope we'll have nothing to do with it."

"I'm sending him back at dawn with my compliments, and a negative, and my sincere advice to his Commodore that he drop the whole thing before his own crew hears of it and has him bowspritted." The Commodore gave him a wintry smile. "Such a reply is easy to make, of course, just after concluding an excellent harvest. It might be more difficult to signal a negative if we had a couple of ships unnetted and only enough catch in salt to feed sixty per cent of the hands. Do you think you could give the hard answer under those circumstances?"

"I think so, sir."

The Commodore walked away, his face enigmatic. Salter thought he knew what was going on. He had been given one small foretaste of top command. Perhaps he was being groomed for Commodore—not to succeed the old man, surely, but his successor.

McBee approached, full of big fish and drink. "Foolish thing I said," he stammered. "Let's have drink, forget about it, eh?"

He was glad to.

"Damn fine seaman!" McBee yelled after a couple more drinks. "Best little captain in the Convoy! Not a scared old crock like poor old McBee, 'fraid of every puff of wind!"

And then he had to cheer up McBee until the party began to thin out. McBee fell asleep at last and Salter saw him to his gig before boarding his own for the long row to the bobbing masthead lights of his ship.

Starboard Squadron Thirty was at rest in the night. Only the slowly-moving oil lamps of the women on their ceaseless rust patrol were alive. The brit catch, dried, came to some seven thousand tons. It was a comfortable margin over the 5,670 tons needed for six months' full rations before the autumnal swarming and harvest. The trim tanks along the keel had been pumped almost dry by the ship's current prison population as the cooked and dried and salted cubes were stored in the glass-lined warehouse tier; the gigantic vessel rode easily on a swelling sea before a Force One westerly breeze.

Salter was exhausted. He thought briefly of having his cox'n whistle for a bosun's chair so that he might be hauled at his ease up the fifty-yard cliff that was the hull before them, and dismissed the idea with regret. Rank hath its privileges and also its obligations. He stood up in the gig, jumped for the ladder and began the long climb. As he passed the portholes of the cabin tiers he virtuously kept eyes front, on the bronze plates of the hull inches from his nose. Many couples in the privacy of their double cabins would be celebrating the end of the back-breaking, night-and-day toil. One valued privacy aboard the ship; one's own 648 cubic feet of cabin, one's own porthole, acquired an almost religious meaning, particularly after the weeks of swarming cooperative labor.

Taking care not to pant, he finished the climb with a flourish, springing onto the flush deck. There was no audience. Feeling a little ridiculous and forsaken, he walked aft in the dark with only the wind and the creak of the rigging in his ears. The five great basket masts strained silently behind their breeze-filled sails; he paused a moment beside Wednesday mast, huge as a redwood, and put his hands on it to feel the power that vibrated in its steel lattice-work.

Six intent women went past, their hand lamps sweeping the deck; he jumped, though they never noticed him. They were in something like a trance state while on their tour of duty. Normal courtesies were suspended for them; with their work began the job of survival. One thousand women, five per cent of the ship's company, inspected night and day for corrosion. Sea water is a vicious solvent and the ship had to live in it; fanaticism was the answer.

His stateroom above the rudder waited; the hatchway to it glowed a hundred feet down the deck with the light of a wasteful lantern. After harvest, when the tanks brimmed with oil, one type acted as though the tanks would brim forever. The captain wearily walked around and over a dozen stay-ropes to the hatchway and blew out the lamp. Before descending he took a mechanical look around the deck; all was well—

Except for a patch of paleness at the fantail.

"Will this day never end?" he asked the darkened lantern and went to the fantail. The patch was a little girl in a night dress wandering aimlessly over the deck, her thumb in her mouth. She seemed to be about two years old, and was more

than half asleep. She could have gone over the railing in a moment; a small wail, a small splash—

He picked her up like a feather. "Who's your daddy, princess?" he asked.

"Dunno," she grinned. The devil she didn't! It was too dark to read her ID necklace and he was too tired to light the lantern. He trudged down the deck to the crew of inspectors. He said to their chief: "One of you get this child back to her parents' cabin," and held her out.

The chief was indignant. "Sir, we are on watch!"

"File a grievance with the Commodore if you wish. Take the child."

One of the rounder women did, and made cooing noises while her chief glared. "Bye-bye, princess," the captain said. "You ought to be keel-hauled for this, but I'll give you another chance."

"Bye-bye," the little girl said, waving, and the captain went yawning down the hatchway to bed.

His stateroom was luxurious by the austere standards of the ship. It was equal to six of the standard nine-by-nine cabins in volume, or to three of the double cabins for couples. These however had something he did not. Officers above the rank of lieutenant were celibate. Experience had shown that this was the only answer to nepotism, and nepotism was a luxury which no convoy could afford. It meant, sooner or later, inefficient command. Inefficient command meant, sooner or later, death.

Because he thought he would not sleep, he did not.

Marriage. Parenthood. What a strange business it must be! To share a bed with a wife, a cabin with two children decently behind their screen for sixteen years ... what did one talk about in bed? His last mistress had hardly talked at all, except with her eyes. When these showed signs that she was falling in love with him, Heaven knew why, he broke with her as quietly as possible and since then irritably rejected the thought of acquiring a successor. That had been two years ago when he was 38, and already beginning to feel like a cabin-crawler fit only to be dropped over the fantail into the wake. An old lecher, a roué, a *user* of women. Of course she had talked a little; what did they have in common to talk about? With a wife ripening beside him, with children to share, it would have been different. That pale, tall quiet girl deserved better than he could give; he hoped she was decently married now in a double cabin, perhaps already heavy with the first of her two children.

A whistle squeaked above his head; somebody was blowing into one of the dozen speaking tubes clustered against the bulkhead. Then a push-wire popped open the steel lid of Tube Seven, Signals. He resignedly picked up the flexible reply tube and said into it: "This is the captain. Go ahead."

"*Grenville* signals Force Three squall approaching from astern, sir."

"Force Three squall from astern. Turn out the fore-starboard watch. Have them reef sail to Condition Charlie."

"Fore-Starboard watch, reef sail to Condition Charlie, aye-aye."

"Execute."

"Aye-aye, sir." The lid of Tube Seven, Signals, popped shut. At once, he heard the distant, penetrating shrill of the pipe, the faint vibration as one sixth of the deck crew began to stir in their cabins, awaken, hit the deck bleary-eyed, begin to trample through the corridors and up the hatchways to the deck. He got up himself and pulled on clothes, yawning. Reefing from Condition Fox to Condition Charlie was no serious matter, not even in the dark, and Walters on watch was a good officer. But he'd better have a look.

Being flush-decked, the ship offered him no bridge. He conned her from the "first top" of Friday mast, the rearmost of her five. The "first top" was a glorified crow's nest fifty feet up the steel basketwork of that great tower; it afforded him a view of all masts and spars in one glance.

He climbed to his command post too far gone for fatigue. A full moon now lit the scene, good. That much less chance of a green topman stepping on a ratline that would prove to be a shadow and hurtling two hundred feet to the deck. That much more snap in the reefing; that much sooner it would be over. Suddenly he was sure he would be able to sleep if he

ever got back to bed again.

He turned for a look at the bronze, moonlit heaps of the great net on the fantail. Within a week it would be cleaned and oiled; within two weeks stowed below in the cable tier, safe from wind and weather.

The regiments of the fore-starboard watch swarmed up the masts from Monday to Friday, swarmed out along the spars as bosun's whistles squealed out the drill—

The squall struck.

Wind screamed and tore at him; the captain flung his arms around a stanchion. Rain pounded down upon his head and the ship reeled in a vast, slow curtsey, port to starboard. Behind him there was a metal sound as the bronze net shifted inches sideways, back.

The sudden clouds had blotted out the moon; he could not see the men who swarmed along the yards but with sudden terrible clarity he felt through the soles of his feet what they were doing. They were clawing their way through the sail-reefing drill, blinded and deafened by sleety rain and wind. They were out of phase by now; they were no longer trying to shorten sail equally on each mast; they were trying to get the thing done and descend. The wind screamed in his face as he turned and clung. Now they were ahead of the job on Monday and Tuesday masts, behind the job on Thursday and Friday masts.

So the ship was going to pitch. The wind would catch it unequally and it would kneel in prayer, the cutwater plunging with a great, deep stately obeisance down into the fathoms of ocean, the stern soaring slowly, ponderously, into the air until the topmost rudder-trunnion streamed a hundred-foot cascade into the boiling froth of the wake.

That was half the pitch. It happened, and the captain clung, groaning aloud. He heard above the screaming wind loose gear rattling on the deck, clashing forward in an avalanche. He heard a heavy clink at the stern and bit his lower lip until it ran with blood that the tearing cold rain flooded from his chin.

The pitch reached its maximum and the second half began, after interminable moments when she seemed frozen at a five-degree angle forever. The cutwater rose, rose, rose, the bowsprit blocked out horizon stars, the loose gear counter-charged astern in a crushing tide of bales, windlass cranks, water-breakers, stilling coils, steel sun reflectors, lashing tails of bronze rigging—

Into the heaped piles of the net, straining at its retainers on the two great bollards that took root in the keel itself four hundred feet below. The energy of the pitch hurled the belly of the net open crashing, into the sea. The bollards held for a moment.

A retainer cable screamed and snapped like a man's back, and then the second cable broke. The roaring slither of the bronze links thundering over the fantail shook the ship.

The squall ended as it had come; the clouds scudded on and the moon bared itself, to shine on a deck scrubbed clean. The net was lost.

Captain Salter looked down the fifty feet from the rim of the crow's nest and thought: I should jump. It would be quicker that way.

But he did not. He slowly began to climb down the ladder to the bare deck.

Having no electrical equipment, the ship was necessarily a representative republic rather than a democracy. Twenty thousand people can discuss and decide only with the aid of microphones, loud-speakers and rapid calculators to balance the ayes and noes. With lungpower the only means of communication and an abacus in a clerk's hands the only tallying device, certainly no more than fifty people can talk together and make sense, and there are pessimists who say the number is closer to five than fifty. The Ship's Council that met at dawn on the fantail numbered fifty.

It was a beautiful dawn; it lifted the heart to see salmon sky, iridescent sea, spread white sails of the Convoy ranged in a

great slanting line across sixty miles of oceanic blue.

It was the kind of dawn for which one lived—a full catch salted down, the water-butts filled, the evaporators trickling from their thousand tubes nine gallons each sunrise to sunset, wind enough for easy steerageway and a pretty spread of sail. These were the rewards. One hundred and forty-one years ago Grenville's Convoy had been launched at Newport News, Virginia, to claim them.

Oh, the high adventure of the launching! The men and women who had gone aboard thought themselves heroes, conquerors of nature, self-sacrificers for the glory of NEMET! But NEMET meant only Northeastern Metropolitan Area, one dense warren that stretched from Boston to Newport, built up and dug down, sprawling westward, gulping Pittsburgh without a pause, beginning to peter out past Cincinnati.

The first generation asea clung and sighed for the culture of NEMET, consoled itself with its patriotic sacrifice; any relief was better than none at all, and Grenville's Convoy had drained one and a quarter million population from the huddle. They were immigrants into the sea; like all immigrants they longed for the Old Country. Then the second generation. Like all second generations they had no patience with the old people or their tales. *This* was real, this sea, this gale, this rope! Then the third generation. Like all third generations it felt a sudden desperate hollowness and lack of identity. What was real? Who are we? What is NEMET which we have lost? But by then grandfather and grandmother could only mumble vaguely; the cultural heritage was gone, squandered in three generations, spent forever. As always, the fourth generation did not care.

And those who sat in counsel on the fantail were members of the fifth and sixth generations. They knew all there was to know about life. Life was the hull and masts, the sail and rigging, the net and the evaporators. Nothing more. *Nothing less*. Without masts there was no life. Nor was there life without the net.

The Ship's Council did not command; command was reserved to the captain and his officers. The Council governed, and on occasion tried criminal cases. During the black Winter Without Harvest eighty years before it had decreed euthanasia for all persons over sixty-three years of age and for one out of twenty of the other adults aboard. It had rendered bloody judgment on the ringleaders of Peale's Mutiny. It had sent them into the wake and Peale himself had been bowspritted, given the maritime equivalent of crucifixion. Since then no megalomaniacs had decided to make life interesting for their shipmates, so Peale's long agony had served its purpose.

The fifty of them represented every department of the ship and every age-group. If there was wisdom aboard, it was concentrated there on the fantail. But there was little to say.

The eldest of them, Retired Sailmaker Hodgins, presided. Venerably bearded, still strong of voice, he told them:

"Shipmates, our accident has come. We are dead men. Decency demands that we do not spin out the struggle and sink into—unlawful eatings. Reason tells us that we cannot survive. What I propose is an honorable voluntary death for us all, and the legacy of our ship's fabric to be divided among the remainder of the Convoy at the discretion of the Commodore."

He had little hope of his old man's viewpoint prevailing. The Chief Inspector rose at once. She had only three words to say: "*Not my children*."

Women's heads nodded grimly, and men's with resignation. Decency and duty and common sense were all very well until you ran up against that steel bulkhead. *Not my children*.

A brilliant young chaplain asked: "Has the question ever been raised as to whether a collection among the fleet might not provide cordage enough to improvise a net?"

Captain Salter should have answered that, but he, murderer of the twenty thousand souls in his care, could not speak. He nodded jerkily at his signals officer.

Lieutenant Zwingli temporized by taking out his signals slate and pretending to refresh his memory. He said: "At 0035 today a lamp signal was made to *Grenville* advising that our net was lost. *Grenville* replied as follows: 'Effective now, your ship no longer part of Convoy. Have no recommendations. Personal sympathy and regrets. Signed, Commodore.'"

Captain Salter found his voice. "I've sent a couple of other messages to *Grenville* and to our neighboring vessels. They

do not reply. This is as it should be. We are no longer part of the Convoy. Through our own lamps—we have become a drag on the Convoy.—We cannot look to it for help. I have no word of condemnation for anybody. This is how life is."

And then a council member spoke whom Captain Salter knew in another role. It was Jewel Flyte, the tall, pale girl who had been his mistress two years ago. She must be serving as an alternate, he thought, looking at her with new eyes. He did not know she was even that; he had avoided her since then. And no, she was not married; she wore no ring. And neither was her hair drawn back in the semi-official style of the semi-official voluntary celibates, the super-patriots (or simply sex-shy people, or dislikers of children) who surrendered their right to reproduce for the good of the ship (or their own convenience). She was simply a girl in the uniform of a—a what? He had to think hard before he could match the badge over her breast to a department. She was Ship's Archivist with her crossed key and quill, an obscure clerk and shelf-duster under—far under!—the Chief of Yeomen Writers. She must have been elected alternate by the Yeomen in a spasm of sympathy for her blind-alley career.

"My job," she said in her calm steady voice, "is chiefly to search for precedents in the Log when unusual events must be recorded and nobody recollects offhand the form in which they should be recorded. It is one of those provoking jobs which must be done by someone but which cannot absorb the full time of a person. I have therefore had many free hours of actual working time. I have also remained unmarried and am not inclined to sports or games. I tell you this so you may believe me when I say that during the past two years I have read the Ship's Log in its entirety."

There was a little buzz. Truly an astonishing, and an astonishingly pointless, thing to do! Wind and weather, storms and calms, messages and meetings and censuses, crimes, trials and punishments of a hundred and forty-one years; what a bore!

"Something I read," she went on, "may have some bearing on our dilemma." She took a slate from her pocket and read: "Extract from the Log dated June 30th, Convoy Year 72. 'The Shakespeare-Joyce-Melville Party returned after dark in the gig. They had not accomplished any part of their mission. Six were dead of wounds; all bodies were recovered. The remaining six were mentally shaken but responded to our last ataractics. They spoke of a new religion ashore and its consequences on population. I am persuaded that we seaborne can no longer relate to the continentals. The clandestine shore trips will cease.' The entry is signed 'Scolley, Captain!'"

A man named Scolley smiled for a brief proud moment. His ancestor! And then like the others he waited for the extract to make sense. Like the others he found that it would not do so.

Captain Salter wanted to speak, and wondered how to address her. She had been "Jewel" and they all knew it; could he call her "Yeoman Flyte" without looking like, being, a fool? Well, if he was fool enough to lose his net he was fool enough to be formal with an ex-mistress. "Yeoman Flyte," he said, "where does the extract leave us?"

In her calm voice she told them all: "Penetrating the few obscure words, it appears to mean that until Convoy Year 72 the Charter was regularly violated, with the connivance of successive captains. I suggest that we consider violating it once more, to survive."

The Charter. It was a sort of ground-swell of their ethical life, learned early, paid homage every Sunday when they were rigged for church. It was inscribed in phosphor-bronze plates on Monday mast of every ship at sea, and the wording was always the same.

IN RETURN FOR THE SEA AND ITS BOUNTY WE RENOUNCE AND ABJURE FOR OURSELVES AND OUR DESCENDANTS THE LAND FROM WHICH WE SPRUNG: FOR THE COMMON GOOD OF MAN WE SET SAIL FOREVER.

At least half of them were unconsciously murmuring the words.

Retired Sailmaker Hodgins rose, shaking. "Blasphemy!" he said. "The woman should be bowsprited!"

The chaplain said thoughtfully: "I know a little more about what constitutes blasphemy than Sailmaker Hodgins, I believe, and assure you that he is mistaken. It is a superstitious error to believe that there is any religious sanction for the Charter. It is no ordinance of God but a contract between men."

"It is a Revelation!" Hodgins shouted. "A Revelation! It is the newest testament! It is God's finger pointing the way to the

clean hard life at sea, away from the grubbing and filth, from the overbreeding and the sickness!"

That was a common view.

"*What about my children?*" demanded the Chief Inspector. "Does God want them to starve or be—be—" She could not finish the question, but the last unspoken word of it rang in all their minds.

Eaten.

Aboard some ships with an accidental preponderance of the elderly, aboard other ships where some blazing personality generations back had raised the Charter to a powerful cult, suicide might have been voted. Aboard other ships where nothing extraordinary had happened in six generations, where things had been easy and the knack and tradition of hard decision-making had been lost, there might have been confusion and inaction and the inevitable degeneration into savagery. Aboard Salter's ship the Council voted to send a small party ashore to investigate. They used every imaginable euphemism to describe the action, took six hours to make up their minds, and sat at last on the fantail cringing a little, as if waiting for a thunderbolt.

The shore party would consist of Salter, Captain; Flyte, Archivist; Pemberton, Junior Chaplain; Graves, Chief Inspector.

Salter climbed to his coming top on Friday mast, consulted a chart from the archives, and gave the order through speaking tube to the tiller gang: "Change course red four degrees."

The repeat came back incredulously.

"Execute," he said. The ship creaked as eighty men heaved the tiller; imperceptibly at first the wake began to curve behind them.

Ship Starboard 30 departed from its ancient station; across a mile of sea the bosun's whistles could be heard from Starboard 31 as she put on sail to close the gap.

"They might have signalled something," Salter thought, dropping his glasses at last on his chest. But the masthead of Starboard 31 remained bare of all but its commission pennant.

He whistled up his signals officer and pointed to their own pennant. "Take that thing down," he said hoarsely, and went below to his cabin.

The new course would find them at last riding off a place the map described as New York City.

Salter issued what he expected would be his last commands to Lieutenant Zwingli; the whaleboat was waiting in its davits; the other three were in it.

"You'll keep your station here as well as you're able," said the captain. "If we live, we'll be back in a couple of months. Should we not return, that would be a potent argument against beaching the ship and attempting to live off the continent—but it will be your problem then and not mine."

They exchanged salutes. Salter sprang into the whaleboat, signalled the deck hands standing by at the ropes and the long creaking descent began.

Salter, Captain; age 40; unmarried *ex officio*; parents Clayton Salter, master instrument maintenanceman, and Eva Romano, chief dietician; selected from dame school age 10 for A Track training; seamanship school certificate at age 16, navigation certificate at age 20, First Lieutenants School age 24, commissioned ensign age 24; lieutenant at 30, commander at 32; commissioned captain and succeeded to command of Ship Starboard 30 the same year.

Flyte, Archivist, age 25; unmarried; parents Joseph Flyte, entertainer, and Jessie Waggoner, entertainer; completed dame school age 14, B Track training, Yeoman's School certificate at age 16, Advanced Yeoman's School certificate at age 18, Efficiency rating, 3.5.

Pemberton, Chaplain, age 30; married to Riva Shields, nurse; no children by choice; parents Will Pemberton, master distiller-watertender, and Agnes Hunt, felter-machinist's mate; completed dame school age 12, B Track training, Divinity School Certificate at age 20; mid-starboard watch curate, later fore-starboard chaplain.

Graves, chief inspector, age 34, married to George Omany, blacksmith third class; two children; completed dame school age 15, Inspectors School Certificate at age 16; inspector third class, second class, first class, master inspector, then chief. Efficiency rating, 4.0; three commendations.

Versus the Continent of North America.

They all rowed for an hour; then a shoreward breeze came up and Salter stepped the mast. "Ship your oars," he said, and then wished he dared countermand the order. Now they would have time to think of what they were doing.

The very water they sailed was different in color from the deep water they knew, and different in its way of moving. The life in it—

"Great God!" Mrs. Graves cried, pointing astern.

It was a huge fish, half the size of their boat. It surfaced lazily and slipped beneath the water in an uninterrupted arc. They had seen steel-grey skin, not scales, and a great slit of a mouth.

Salter said, shaken: "Unbelievable. Still, I suppose in the unfished offshore waters a few of the large forms survive. And the intermediate sizes to feed them—" And foot-long smaller sizes to feed *them*, and—

Was it mere arrogant presumption that Man had permanently changed the life of the sea?

The afternoon sun slanted down and the tip of Monday mast sank below the horizon's curve astern; the breeze that filled their sail bowled them towards a mist which wrapped vague concretions they feared to study too closely. A shadowed figure huge as a mast with one arm upraised; behind it blocks and blocks of something solid.

"This is the end of the sea," said the captain.

Mrs. Graves said what she would have said if a silly under-inspector had reported to her blue rust on steel: "Nonsense!" Then, stammering: "I beg your pardon, captain. Of course you are correct."

"But it sounded strange," Chaplain Pemberton said helpfully. "I wonder where they all are?"

Jewel Flyte said in her quiet way: "We should have passed over the discharge from waste tubes before now. They used to pump their waste through tubes under the sea and discharge it several miles out. It colored the water and it stank. During the first voyaging years the captains knew it was time to tack away from land by the color and the bad smell."

"They must have improved their disposal system by now," Salter said, "It's been centuries."

His last word hung in the air.

The chaplain studied the mist from the bow. It was impossible to deny it; the huge thing was an Idol. Rising from the bay of a great city, an Idol, and a female one—the worst kind! "I thought they had them only in High Places," he muttered, discouraged.

Jewel Flyte understood. "I think it has no religious significance," she said. "It's a sort of—huge piece of scrimshaw."

Mrs. Graves studied the vast thing and saw in her mind the glyphic arts as practiced at sea: compacted kelp shaved and whittled into little heirloom boxes, miniature portrait busts of children. She decided that Yeoman Flyte had a dangerously wild imagination. Scrimshaw! Tall as a mast!

There should be some commerce, thought the captain. Boats going to and fro. The Place ahead was plainly an island, plainly inhabited; goods and people should be going to it and coming from it. Gigs and cutters and whaleboats should be plying this bay and those two rivers; at that narrow bit they should be lined up impatiently waiting, tacking and riding

under sea anchors and furled sails. There was nothing but a few white birds that shrilled nervously at their solitary boat.

The blocky concretions were emerging from the haze; they were sunset-red cubes with regular black eyes dotting them; they were huge dice laid down side by side by side, each as large as a ship, each therefore capable of holding twenty thousand persons.

Where were they all?

The breeze and the tide drove them swiftly through the neck of water where a hundred boats should be waiting. "Furl the sail," said Salter. "Out oars."

With no sounds but the whisper of the oarlocks, the cries of the white birds and the slapping of the wavelets they rowed under the shadow of the great red dice to a dock, one of a hundred teeth projecting from the island's rim.

"Easy the starboard oars," said Salter; "handsomely the port oars. Up oars. Chaplain, the boat hook." He had brought them to a steel ladder; Mrs. Graves gasped at the red rust thick on it. Salter tied the painter to a corroded brass ring. "Come along," he said, and began to climb.

When the four of them stood on the iron-plated dock Pemberton, naturally, prayed. Mrs. Graves followed the prayer with half her attention or less; the rest she could not divert from the shocking slovenliness of the prospect—rust, dust, litter, neglect. What went on in the mind of Jewel Flyte her calm face did not betray. And the captain scanned those black windows a hundred yards inboard—no; inland!—and waited and wondered.

They began to walk to them at last, Salter leading. The sensation underfoot was strange and dead, tiring to the arches and the thighs.

The huge red dice were not as insane close-up as they had appeared from a distance. They were thousand-foot cubes of brick, the stuff that lined ovens. They were set back within squares of green, cracked surfacing which Jewel Flyte named "cement" or "concrete" from some queer corner of her erudition.

There was an entrance, and written over it: THE HERBERT BROWNELL JR. MEMORIAL HOUSES. A bronze plaque shot a pang of guilt through them all as they thought of The Compact, but its words were different and ignoble.

NOTICE TO ALL TENANTS

A project Apartment is a Privilege and not a Right. Daily Inspection is the Cornerstone of the Project. Attendance at Least Once a Week at the Church or Synagogue of your Choice is Required for Families wishing to remain in Good Standing; Proof of Attendance must be presented on Demand. Possession of Tobacco or Alcohol will be considered Prima Facie Evidence of Undesirability. Excessive Water Use, Excessive Energy Use and Food Waste will be Grounds for Desirability Review. The speaking of Languages other than American by persons over the Age of Six will be considered Prima Facie Evidence of Nonassimilability, though this shall not be construed to prohibit Religious Ritual in Languages other than American.

Below it stood another plaque in paler bronze, an afterthought:

None of the foregoing shall be construed to condone the Practice of Depravity under the Guise of Religion by Whatever Name, and all Tenants are warned that any Failure to report the Practice of Depravity will result in summary Eviction and Denunciation.

Around this later plaque some hand had painted with crude strokes of a tar brush a sort of anatomical frame at which they stared in wondering disgust.

At last Pemberton said: "They were a devout people." Nobody noticed the past tense, it sounded so right.

"Very sensible," said Mrs. Graves. "No nonsense about them."

Captain Salter privately disagreed. A ship run with such dour coercion would founder in a month; could land people be that much different?

Jewel Flyte said nothing, but her eyes were wet. Perhaps she was thinking of scared little human rats dodging and twisting through the inhuman maze of great fears and minute rewards.

"After all," said Mrs. Graves, "it's nothing but a Cabin Tier. We have cabins and so had they. Captain, might we have a look?"

"This *is* a reconnaissance," Salter shrugged. They went into a littered lobby and easily recognized an elevator which had long ago ceased to operate; there were many hand-run dumbwaiters at sea.

A gust of air flapped a sheet of printed paper across the chaplain's ankles; he stooped to pick it up with a kind of instinctive outrage—leaving paper unsecured, perhaps to blow overboard and be lost forever to the ship's economy! Then he flushed at his silliness. "So much to unlearn," he said, and spread the paper to look at it. A moment later he crumpled it in a ball and hurled it from him as hard and as far as he could, and wiped his hands with loathing on his jacket. His face was utterly shocked.

The others stared. It was Mrs. Graves who went for the paper.

"Don't look at it," said the chaplain.

"I think she'd better," Salter said.

The maintenancewoman spread the paper, studied it and said: "Just some nonsense. Captain, what do you make of it?"

It was a large page torn from a book, and on it were simple polychrome drawing and some lines of verse in the style of a child's first reader. Salter repressed a shocked guffaw. The picture was of a little boy and a little girl quaintly dressed locked in murderous combat, using teeth and nails. "*Jack and Jill went up the hill,*" said the text, "*to fetch a pail of water. She threw Jack down and broke his crown; it was a lovely slaughter.*"

Jewel Flyte took the page from his hands. All she said was, after a long pause: "I suppose they couldn't start them too young." She dropped the page and she too wiped her hands.

"Come along," the captain said. "We'll try the stairs."

The stairs were dust, rat-dung, cobwebs and two human skeletons. Murderous knuckledusters fitted loosely the bones of the two right hands. Salter hardened himself to pick up one of the weapons, but could not bring himself to try it on. Jewel Flyte said apologetically: "Please be careful, captain. It might be poisoned. That seems to be the way they were."

Salter froze. By God, but the girl was right! Delicately, handling the spiked steel thing by its edges, he held it up. Yes; stains—it *would* be stained, and perhaps with poison also. He dropped it into the thoracic cage of one skeleton and said: "Come on." They climbed in quest of a dusty light from above; it was a doorway onto a corridor of many doors. There was evidence of fire and violence. A barricade of queer pudgy chairs and divans had been built to block the corridor, and had been breached. Behind it were sprawled three more heaps of bones.

"They have no heads," the chaplain said hoarsely. "Captain Salter, this is not a place for human beings. We must go back to the ship, even if it means honorable death. This is not a place for human beings."

"Thank you, chaplain," said Salter. "You've cast your vote. Is anybody with you?"

"Kill your own children, chaplain," said Mrs. Graves. "Not mine."

Jewel Flyte gave the chaplain a sympathetic shrug and said: "No."

One door stood open, its lock shattered by blows of a fire axe. Salter said: "We'll try that one." They entered into the home of an ordinary middle-class death-worshipping family as it had been a century ago, in the one hundred and thirty-first year of Merdeka the Chosen.

Merdeka the Chosen, the All-Foreigner, the Ur-Alien, had never intended any of it. He began as a retail mail-order vendor of movie and television stills, eight-by-ten glossies for the fan trade. It was a hard doller; you had to keep an immense stock to cater to a tottery Mae Bush admirer, to the pony-tailed screamer over Rip Torn, and to everybody in between. He would have no truck with pinups. "Dirty, lascivious pictures!" he snarled when broadly-hinting letters

arrived. "Filth! Men and women kissing, ogling, pawing each other! Orgies! Bah!" Merdeka kept a neutered dog, a spayed cat, and a crumpled uncomplaining housekeeper who was technically his wife. He was poor; he was very poor. Yet he never neglected his charitable duties, contributing every year to the Planned Parenthood Federation and the Midtown Hysterectomy Clinic.

They knew him in the Third Avenue saloons where he talked every night, arguing with Irishmen, sometimes getting asked outside to be knocked down. He let them knock him down, and sneered from the pavement. Was *this* their argument? *He* could argue. He spewed facts and figures and clichés in unanswerable profusion. Hell, man, the Russians'll have a bomb base on the moon in two years and in two years the Army and the Air Force will still be beating each other over the head with pigs' bladders. Just a minute, let me tell you: the goddammycin's making idiots of us all; do you know of any children born in the past two years that're healthy? And: 'flu be go to hell; it's our own germ warfare from Camp Crowder right outside Baltimore that got out of hand, and it happened the week of the 24th. And: the human animal's obsolete; they've proved at M.I.T., Steinwitz and Kohlmann *proved* that the human animal cannot survive the current radiation levels. And: enjoy your lung cancer, friend; for every automobile and its stinking exhaust there will be two-point-seven-oh-three cases of lung cancer, and we've got to have our automobiles, don't we? And: delinquency my foot; they're insane and it's got to the point where the economy cannot support mass insanity; they've got to be castrated; it's the only way. And: they should dig up the body of Metchnikoff and throw it to the dogs; he's the degenerate who invented venereal prophylaxis and since then vice without punishment has run hogwild through the world; what we need on the streets is a few of those old-time locomotor ataxia cases limping and drooling to show the kids where vice leads.

He didn't know where he came from. The delicate New York way of establishing origins is to ask: "Merdeka, hah? What kind of a name is that now?" And to this he would reply that he wasn't a lying Englishman or a loudmouthed Irishman or a perverted Frenchman or a chiseling Jew or a barbarian Russian or a toadying German or a thickheaded Scandihoovian, and if his listener didn't like it, what did he have to say in reply?

He was from an orphanage, and the legend at the orphanage was that a policeman had found him, two hours old, in a garbage can coincident with the death by hemorrhage on a trolley car of a luetic young woman whose name appeared to be Merdeka and who had certainly been recently delivered of a child. No other facts were established, but for generation after generation of orphanage inmates there was great solace in having one of their number who indisputably had got off to a worse start than they.

A watershed of his career occurred when he noticed that he was, for the seventh time that year, re-ordering prints of scenes from Mr. Howard Hughes' production *The Outlaw*. These were not the off-the-bust stills of Miss Jane Russell, surprisingly, but were group scenes of Miss Russell suspended by her wrists and about to be whipped. Merdeka studied the scene, growled "Give it to the bitch!" and doubled the order. It sold out. He canvassed his files for other whipping and torture stills from *Desert Song*-type movies, made up a special assortment, and it sold out within a week. Then he knew.

The man and the opportunity had come together, for perhaps the fiftieth time in history. He hired a model and took the first specially posed pictures himself. They showed her cringing from a whip, tied to a chair with a clothesline, and herself brandishing the whip.

Within two months Merdeka had cleared six thousand dollars and he put every cent of it back into more photographs and direct-mail advertising. Within a year he was big enough to attract the postoffice obscenity people. He went to Washington and screamed in their faces: "My stuff isn't obscene and I'll sue you if you bother me, you stinking bureaucrats! You show me one breast, you show me one behind, you show me one human being touching another in my pictures! You can't and you know you can't! I don't believe in sex and I don't push sex, so you leave me the hell alone! Life is pain and suffering and being scared so people like to look at my pictures; my pictures are about *them*, the scared little jerks! You're just a bunch of goddam perverts if you think there's anything dirty about my pictures!"

He had them there; Merdeka's girls always wore at least full panties, bras and stockings; he had them there. The postoffice obscenity people were vaguely positive that there was *something* wrong with pictures of beautiful women tied down to be whipped or burned with hot irons, but what?

The next year they tried to get him on his income tax; those deductions for the Planned Parenthood Federation and the Midtown Hysterectomy Clinic were preposterous, but he proved them with canceled checks to the last nickel. "In fact," he indignantly told them, "I spend a lot of time at the Clinic and sometimes they let me watch the operations. *That's* how

highly they think of me at the Clinic."

The next year he started *DEATH: the Weekly Picture Magazine* with the aid of a half-dozen bright young grads from the new Harvard School of Communicationeering. As *DEATH's* Communicator in Chief (only yesterday he would have been its Publisher, and only fifty years before he would have been its Editor) he slumped biliously in a pigskin-panelled office, peering suspiciously at the closed-circuit TV screen which had a hundred wired eyes throughout *DEATH's* offices, sometimes growling over the voice circuit:

"You! What's your name? Boland? You're through, Boland. Pick up your time at the paymaster." For any reason; for no reason. He was a living legend in his narrow-lapel charcoal flannel suit and stringy bullfighter neckties; the bright young men in their Victorian Revival frock coats and pearl-pinned cravats wondered at his—not "obstinacy"; not when there might be a mike even in the corner saloon; say, his "timelessness."

The bright young men became bright young-old men, and the magazine which had been conceived as a vehicle for deadheading house ads of the mail order picture business went into the black. On the cover of every issue of *DEATH* was a pictured execution-of-the-week, and no price for one was ever too high. A fifty-thousand-dollar donation to a mosque had purchased the right to secretly snap the Bread Ordeal by which perished a Yemenite suspected of tapping an oil pipeline. An interminable illustrated History of Flagellation was a staple of the reading matter, and the Medical Section (in color) was tremendously popular. So too was the weekly Traffic Report.

When the last of the Compact Ships was launched into the Pacific the event made *DEATH* because of the several fatal accidents which accompanied the launching; otherwise Merdeka ignored the ships. It was strange that he who had unorthodoxies about everything had no opinion at all about the Compact Ships and their crews. Perhaps it was that he really knew he was the greatest manslayer who ever lived, and even so could not face commanding total extinction, including that of the seaborne leaven. The more articulate Sokei-an, who in the name of Rinzei Zen Buddhism was at that time depopulating the immense area dominated by China, made no bones about it: "Even I in my Hate may err; let the celestial vessels be." The opinions of Dr. Spät, European member of the trio, are forever beyond recovery due to his advocacy of the "one-generation" plan.

With advancing years Merdeka's wits cooled and gelled. There came a time when he needed a theory and was forced to stab the button of the intercom for his young-old Managing Communicator and growl at him: "Give me a theory!" And the M.C. reeled out: "The structural intermesh of *DEATH: The Weekly Picture Magazine* with Western culture is no random point-event but a rising world-line. Predecessor attitudes such as the Hollywood dogma 'No breasts—blood!' and the tabloid press' exploitation of violence were floundering and empirical. It was Merdeka who sigma-ized the convergent traits of our times and asymptotically congruentizes with them publication-wise. Wrestling and the roller-derby as blood sports, the routinization of femicide in the detective tale, the standardization at one million per year of traffic fatalities, the wholesome interest of our youth in gang rumbles, all point toward the Age of Hate and Death. The ethic of Love and Life is obsolescent, and who is to say that Man is the loser thereby? Life and Death compete in the marketplace of ideas for the Mind of Man—"

Merdeka growled something and snapped off the set. Merdeka leaned back. Two billion circulation this week, and the auto ads were beginning to Tip. Last year only the suggestion of a dropped shopping basket as the Dynajetic 16 roared across the page, this year a hand, limp on the pictured pavement. Next year, blood. In February the Sylphella Salon chain ads had Tipped, with a crash. "—and the free optional judo course for slenderized Madame or Mademoiselle: learn how to kill a man with your lovely bare hands, with or without mess as desired." Applications had risen 28 per cent. By *God* there was a structural intermesh for you!

It was too slow; it was still too slow. He picked up a direct-line phone and screamed into it: "Too slow! What am I paying you people for? The world is wallowing in filth! Movies are dirtier than ever! Kissing! Pawing! Ogling! Men and women together—obscene! Clean up the magazine covers! Clean up the ads!"

The person at the other end of the direct line was Executive Secretary of the Society for Purity in Communications; Merdeka had no need to announce himself to him, for Merdeka was S.P.C.'s principal underwriter. He began to rattle off at once: "We've got the Mothers' March on Washington this week, sir, and a mass dummy pornographic mailing addressed to every Middle Atlantic State female between the ages of six and twelve next week, sir; I believe this one-two punch will put the Federal Censorship Commission over the goal line before recess—"

Merdeka hung up. "Lewd communications," he snarled. "Breeding, breeding, breeding, like maggots in a garbage can. Burning and breeding. But we will make them clean."

He did not need a Theory to tell him that he could not take away Love without providing a substitute.

He walked down Sixth Avenue that night, for the first time in years. In this saloon he had argued; outside that saloon he had been punched in the nose. Well, he was winning the argument, all the arguments. A mother and daughter walked past uneasily, eyes on the shadows. The mother was dressed Square; she wore a sheath dress that showed her neck and clavicles at the top and her legs from mid-shin at the bottom. In some parts of town she'd be spat on, but the daughter, never. The girl was Hip; she was covered from neck to ankles by a loose, unbelted sack-culotte. Her mother's hair floated; hers was hidden by a cloche. Nevertheless the both of them were abruptly yanked into one of those shadows they prudently had eyed, for they had not watched the well-lit sidewalk for waiting nooses.

The familiar sounds of a Working Over came from the shadows as Merdeka strolled on. "I mean cool!" an ecstatic young voice—boy's, girl's, what did it matter?—breathed between crunching blows.

That year the Federal Censorship Commission was created, and the next year the old Internment Camps in the southwest were filled to capacity by violators, and the next year the First Church of Merdeka was founded in Chicago. Merdeka died of an aortal aneurism five years after that, but his soul went marching on.

"The Family that Prays together Slays together," was the wall-motto in the apartment, but there was no evidence that the implied injunction had been observed. The bedrooms of the mother and the father were secured by steel doors and terrific locks, but Junior had got them all the same; somehow he had burned through the steel.

"Thermite?" Jewel Flyte asked herself softly, trying to remember. First he had got the father, quickly and quietly with a wire garotte as he lay sleeping, so as not to alarm his mother. To her he had taken her own spiked knobkerry and got in a mortal stroke, but not before she reached under her pillow for a pistol. Junior's teenage bones testified by their arrangement to the violence of that leaden blow.

Incredulously they looked at the family library of comic books, published in a series called "The Merdekan Five-Foot Shelf of Classics". Jewel Flyte leafed slowly through one called *Moby Dick* and found that it consisted of a near-braining in a bedroom, agonizingly-depicted deaths at sea, and for a climax the eating alive of one Ahab by a monster. "Surely there must have been more," she whispered.

Chaplain Pendleton put down *Hamlet* quickly and held onto a wall. He was quite sure that he felt his sanity slipping palpably away, that he would gibber in a moment. He prayed and after a while felt better; he rigorously kept his eyes away from the Classics after that.

Mrs. Graves snorted at the waste of it all, at the picture of the ugly, pop-eyed, busted-nose man labeled MERDEKA THE CHOSEN, THE PURE, THE PURIFIER. There were two tables, which was a folly. Who needed two tables? Then she looked closer, saw that one of them was really a bloodstained flogging bench and felt slightly ill. Its name-plate said *Correctional Furniture Corp. Size 6, Ages 10-14*. She had, God knew, slapped her children more than once when they deviated from her standard of perfection, but when she saw those stains she felt a stirring of warmth for the parricidal bones in the next room.

Captain Salter said: "Let's get organized. Does anybody think there are any of them left?"

"I think not," said Mrs. Graves. "People like that can't survive. The world must have been swept clean. They, ah, killed one another but that's not the important point. This couple had one child, age ten to fourteen. This cabin of theirs seems to be built for one child. We should look at a few more cabins to learn whether a one-child family is—was—normal. If we find out that it was, we can suspect that they are—gone. Or nearly so." She coined a happy phrase: "By race suicide."

"The arithmetic of it is quite plausible," Salter said. "If no factors work except the single-child factor, in one century of five generations a population of two billion will have bred itself down to 125 million. In another century, the population is just under four million. In another, 122 thousand ... by the thirty-second generation the last couple descended from the

original two billion will breed one child, and that's the end. And there are the other factors. Besides those who do not breed by choice"—his eyes avoided Jewel Flyte—"there are the things we have seen on the stairs, and in the corridor, and in these compartments."

"Then there's our answer," said Mrs. Graves. She smacked the obscene table with her hand, forgetting what it was. "We beach the ship and march the ship's company onto dry land. We clean up, we learn what we have to get along—" Her words trailed off. She shook her head. "Sorry," she said gloomily. "I'm talking nonsense."

The chaplain understood her, but he said: "The land is merely another of the many mansions. Surely they could learn!"

"It's not politically feasible," Salter said. "Not in its present form." He thought of presenting the proposal to the Ship's Council in the shadow of the mast that bore the Compact, and twitched his head in an involuntary negative.

"There is a formula possible," Jewel Flyte said.

The Brownells burst in on them then, all eighteen of the Brownells. They had been stalking the shore party since its landing. Nine sack-culotted women in clothes and nine men in penitential black, they streamed through the gaping door and surrounded the sea people with a ring of spears. Other factors had indeed operated, but this was not yet the thirty-second generation of extinction.

The leader of the Brownells, a male, said with satisfaction: "Just when we needed—new blood." Salter understood that he was not speaking in genetic terms.

The females, more verbal types, said critically: "Evil-doers, obviously. Displaying their limbs without shame, brazenly flaunting the rotted pillars of the temple of lust. Come from the accursed sea itself, abode of infamy, to seduce us from our decent and regular lives."

"We know what to do with the women," said the male leader. The rest took up the antiphon.

"We'll knock them down."

"And roll them on their backs."

"And pull one arm out and tie it fast."

"And pull the other arm out and tie it fast."

"And pull one limb out and tie it fast."

"And pull the other limb out and tie it fast."

"And then—"

"We'll beat them to death and Merdeka will smile."

Chaplain Pemberton stared incredulously. "You must look into your hearts," he told them in a reasonable voice. "You must look deeper than you have, and you will find that you have been deluded. This is not the way for human beings to act. Somebody has misled you dreadfully. Let me explain—"

"Blasphemy," the leader of the females said, and put her spear expertly into the chaplain's intestines. The shock of the broad, cold blade pulsed through him and felled him. Jewel Flyte knelt beside him instantly, checking heart beat and breathing. He was alive.

"Get up," the male leader said. "Displaying and offering yourself to such as we is useless. We are pure in heart."

A male child ran to the door. "Wagners!" he screamed. "Twenty Wagners coming up the stairs!"

His father roared at him: "Stand straight and don't mumble!" and slashed out with the butt of his spear, catching him hard in the ribs. The child grinned, but only after the pure-hearted eighteen had run to the stairs.

Then he blasted a whistle down the corridor while the sea-people stared with what attention they could divert from the bleeding chaplain. Six doors popped open at the whistle and men and women emerged from them to launch spears into

the backs of the Brownells clustered to defend the stairs. "Thanks, pop!" the boy kept screaming while the pure-hearted Wagners swarmed over the remnants of the pure-hearted Brownells; at last his screaming bothered one of the Wagners and the boy was himself speared.

Jewel Flyte said: "I've had enough of this. Captain, please pick the chaplain up and come along."

"They'll kill us."

"You'll have the chaplain," said Mrs. Graves. "One moment." She darted into a bedroom and came back hefting the spiked knobkerry.

"Well, perhaps," the girl said. She began undoing the long row of buttons down the front of her coveralls and shrugged out of the garment, then unfastened and stepped out of her underwear. With the clothes over her arm she walked into the corridor and to the stairs, the stupefied captain and inspector following.

To the pure-hearted Merdekans she was not Phryne winning her case; she was Evil incarnate. They screamed, broke and ran wildly, dropping their weapons. That a human being could do such a thing was beyond their comprehension; Merdeka alone knew what kind of monster this was that drew them strangely and horribly, in violation of all sanity. They ran as she had hoped they would; the other side of the coin was spearing even more swift and thorough than would have been accorded to her fully clothed. But they ran, gibbering with fright and covering their eyes, into apartments and corners of the corridor, their backs turned on the awful thing.

The sea-people picked their way over the shambles at the stairway and went unopposed down the stairs and to the dock. It was a troublesome piece of work for Salter to pass the chaplain down to Mrs. Graves in the boat, but in ten minutes they had cast off, rowed out a little and set sail to catch the land breeze generated by the differential twilight cooling of water and brick. After playing her part in stepping the mast, Jewel Flyte dressed.

"It won't always be that easy," she said when the last button was fastened. Mrs. Graves had been thinking the same thing, but had not said it to avoid the appearance of envying that superb young body.

Salter was checking the chaplain as well as he knew how. "I think he'll be all right," he said. "Surgical repair and a long rest. He hasn't lost much blood. This is a strange story we'll have to tell the Ship's Council."

Mrs. Graves said: "They've no choice. We've lost our net and the land is there waiting for us. A few maniacs oppose us—what of it?"

Again a huge fish lazily surfaced; Salter regarded it thoughtfully. He said: "They'll propose scavenging bronze ashore and fashioning another net and going on just as if nothing had happened. And really, we could do that, you know."

Jewel Flyte said: "No. Not forever. This time it was the net, at the end of harvest. What if it were three masts in midwinter, in mid-Atlantic?"

"Or," said the captain, "the rudder—any time. Anywhere. But can you imagine telling the Council they've got to walk off the ship onto land, take up quarters in those brick cabins, change *everything*? And fight maniacs, and learn to *farm*?"

"There must be a way," said Jewel Flyte. "Just as Merdeka, whatever it was, was a way. There were too many people, and Merdeka was the answer to too many people. There's always an answer. Man is a land mammal in spite of brief excursions at sea. We were seed stock put aside, waiting for the land to be cleared so we could return. Just as these offshore fish are waiting very patiently for us to stop harvesting twice a year so they can return to deep water and multiply. What's the way, captain?"

He thought hard. "We could," he said slowly, "begin by simply sailing in close and fishing the offshore waters for big stuff. Then tie up and build a sort of bridge from the ship to the shore. We'd continue to live aboard the ship but we'd go out during daylight to try farming."

"It sounds right."

"And keep improving the bridge, making it more and more solid, until before they notice it it's really a solid part of the ship and a solid part of the shore. It might take ... mmm ... ten years?"

"Time enough for the old shellbacks to make up their minds," Mrs. Graves unexpectedly snorted.

"And we'd relax the one-to-one reproduction rule, and some young adults will simply be crowded over the bridge to live on the land—" His face suddenly fell. "And then the whole damned farce starts all over again, I suppose. I pointed out that it takes thirty-two generations bearing one child apiece to run a population of two billion into zero. Well, I should have mentioned that it takes thirty-two generations bearing four children apiece to run a population of two into two billion. Oh, what's the use, Jewel?"

She chuckled. "There was an answer last time," she said. "There will be an answer the next time."

"It won't be the same answer as Merdeka," he vowed. "We grew up a little at sea. This time we can do it with brains and not with nightmares and superstition."

"I don't know," she said. "Our ship will be the first, and then the other ships will have their accidents one by one and come and tie up and build their bridges hating every minute of it for the first two generations and then not hating it, just living it ... and who will be the greatest man who ever lived?"

The captain looked horrified.

"Yes, you! Salter, the Builder of the Bridge; Tommy, do you know an old word for 'bridge-builder'? *Pontifex*."

"Oh, my God!" Tommy Salter said in despair.

A flicker of consciousness was passing through the wounded chaplain; he heard the words and was pleased that somebody aboard was praying.

THE END

"Eaten alive by bugs!" screamed the headlines—and the terror-stricken panic began.

BUGGED!

by Donald F. Glut

Truth exploded in Barks' mind as he realized that the beetles were turning him into a bloody pulp and that more of them kept attacking and consuming him.

The river, he thought. If I can get to the river.

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

The following change was made to the original text:

Page 164 changed: said the test ==> said the text

[The end of *A Mile Beyond the Moon* by Cyril M. Kornbluth]