

By WILLIAM W. STUART Illustrated by WALKER

You could say Jonesey and/or I were not all there, but I don't see it that way.

How much of Stanley was or wasn't there?

HAVE you ever been clear down there on skid row? Oh, sure, every city has one and no doubt you have given it one of those look-away-quick side glances. That isn't what I mean.

What I mean is, have you ever Probably not. And, if you haven't, I could make a suggestion. Been really down there? Don't go.

Skid row is a far, remote way and there are all kinds of horrors down there, the seen and the unseen. To each his own, as they say, and everyone there has his own personal collection. All right. General opinion is to let them be there and the hell with them, people and horrors too, if there is a distinction. Unfortunate, but what can you do? Noth-

ing. Look the other way. That's all right with me. I don't know anything better to do about the horrors that are, or that may be on skid row than to hope they will stay there where they belong—and let me forget them.

That's why I'm writing this. I want to do the story of what I saw, and what I think I saw or felt, and what I didn't see, to get it off my mind. Then I am going to do my damnedest not to think of the whole thing.

Me, I know about skid row because I was there. That's my personal problem and another story, before this one, and the hell with that, too. I once had a wife and a couple of kids. I had a lot of problems and then no wife and no kids and I made it to skid row. It was easy. For

THE LITTLE MAN WHO WASN'T QUITE

a while I was there, all the way down, where the gutter was something I could look up to. Well, turned out I had friends who wouldn't quit. By their efforts plus, as they say, the grace of God, I came off it; most of the way off it, at least. No credit to me, but not too many ever manage to make a round trip of it.

Who are the misfits and derelicts on skid row? Anybody; nobody. Individuals, if they are individuals, come and go. The group, with few exceptions, is always the same. It is built of the world's rejects — lost souls, bad dreams; shadowy, indistinct shapes, not a part of life nor yet quite altogether out of it, either.

I was down there. I left. But I kept passing by every once in a while to pay a little visit. For that I had two reasons. One, I could sometimes pick up a lead on something for a Sunday feature for my paper. The other — just taking another look now and then at where and what I had been was a sort of insurance for me.

SO, from time to time I would stop by The Yard for an evening. I would spring for a jug. I was welcome. Those in the regular group knew me and they held me in no more than the same contempt they had for each other and themselves. Being no

stranger — or, perhaps, not too much less strange — I fitted well enough with the misfits of that half-world where the individual rarely stands out enough to be noticeable.

Wino Jones, though, and his friend Stanley were, each in his own way, quite noticeable.

I first ran across Wino Jones and Stanley one early spring evening. It was a Thursday. I was beat. It had been a tough week — a political scandal, a couple of fires and a big "Missing Kid-Fiend" scare. Turned out the kid had skipped school to catch a triple-feature horror show and was scared to go home when she came out late, so she went to hide out at Grandma's. The suspect fiend was a cockfight sportsman from the Caribbean colony smuggling home his loser under his leather jacket.

But it had been a rough week with a lot of chasing around and getting no place that left me in one of those hell-with-it moods. Like, maybe, I ought to take a week or so off and — and the hell with that. It was time for me to pay a little remembrance-of-things-not-so-far-past visit down on the row.

I left the city room, tired, dirty, needing a shave. Where I was headed, this would put me ahead of the fashion parade, but it would serve. I stopped for a

bowl of chili at Mad Miguel's and then wandered down to those four blocks on South River Street, known as Bug Alley, that make up the hard-core skid-row section of our city.

Across from St. Vincent's in Scott Square, called the Yard, by the old wall, there was a group of six or eight passing the time and a nearly dead jug. I shambled over and squatted down. Got a hard, bloodshot look or two, but not because the jug in the public park was against the law. Even if I was the law, so what? These, they made the jail now and then, if there were too many complaints, if they made a disturbance. But not even the jail wanted them. The hard looks wondered only if the jug should be passed to me or by me.

I lit a cigarette, took a couple of drags and handed it on. Bootnose Bailey, big, old, bald, with the cast-iron stomach and leather liver, settled the jug question by handing it to me. I lifted it, letting only the smallest trickle of the sticky sweet cheap wine past. It is not for me; no more. It is sickening stuff. But, as always, the effort of holding back left me shaking. All right; with shaking, I had plenty of company. The next man looked pleased at the two gulps left in the bottle and drained it.

"Ed?" Bootnose asked in his hoarse canned-heat whisper. "You gonna spring for a jug?"

I squatted a minute or so and then stood and started fumbling around through all my pockets. This is local protocol. Coin by coin, I spread a dollar and a half in silver out on the flat collection stone in front of me. A huge, powerful-looking colored man, new to me, hunkered down against the wall, smiled gently and added a quarter. Bootnose scooped it up and went to make the run for the jug.

I WAS, I guess, stretching the ground rules a little by the way I stared at the big fellow. But he surprised me mildly. For one thing, he looked in good shape; strong, no shakes, no fevered ghosts back of the blood-shot curtain of the eyes. And, apart from that, you don't find very many Negroes on skid row, at least in our area. I don't know why.

"Jones," he said, softly, politely, "Wino Jones. You're Ed? Ed, this here is my friend Stanley." He waved a big hand at a wispy little man beside him.

Funny I hadn't seen Stanley before, but there he was. That I want to make clear. Stanley was there; no question about it. Only he was such a totally remote, insignificant, unobtrusive little

man, it is hard for me to remember him even now. Hard to remember what he was like, that is. He wasn't colored. He was small. His eyes, his hair, I don't know. He must have had some or I would have noticed. And he had a sort of sour, distant, hurt bitterness about him, I recall, and that is about all I can recall ever seeing in Stanley. Except for the last time I saw him — he looked mean then.

This time, I smiled and nodded. "Wino Jones, Stanley, welcome to our city, our little garden spot."

"There now, Stanley," Jones beamed, "he can see you well enough. You're doing fine, Stanley, getting better all the time. You do see him plain, don't you, Ed?"

"Huh? Yeah, sure I see him. Why not? Does he think he's invi — "

Jones interrupted me, "Look, there comes Mr. Bailey back already."

Well, it was a little odd. But then, down there the odd is normal, the normal odd. I didn't think anything of it.

I sat a couple of hours. One jug went and then another. It did seem to me that Wino Jones missed by a lot on proving out his nickname. At least he didn't love up the passing bottle as though it might be the last one

in the world — which, as every skid-row pro desperately fears, it might very well turn out to be. • Stanley's drinking? I didn't notice.

After a while I wandered off. My appreciation of the fact that I was able to wander off was shored up again and I was glad enough to get back to work the next day without thinking anything much more about it.

I didn't think about Wino Jones or Stanley again till the first of the next week. Then I was on early shift at the paper, due in at six A.M. At quarter to, I yawned my way out of Mad Miguel's after coffee, an egg and hotcakes. Mig's hotcakes were hot, too; made them with chili. Hard on the stomach, but they popped the old eyelids open in the morning. As I stood a minute in the doorway, my watering eyes spotted Wino Jones coming out of the alley that led around to Mig's kitchen side. He saw me but, thoughtfully, didn't crack till I gave him a, considering the time, reasonably bright hello.

"How's it, Ed? You going on early, uh?"

"Yeah, Wino — ah — Jonesy. Mind if I call you Jonesy?" He didn't. "What's with you? Been washing a dish for the Mig?"

He nodded. Some of the upper-level boys from the row

worked off and on at odd jobs like that. It didn't make Jones unique, but it made him stand out a little.

"Me and Stanley, we like a little change in our pockets. Right, Stanley?"

He looked down and a little to one side, just as though he were asking agreement from someone. Only there wasn't anyone there. There wasn't anyone in sight on the block but Jones and me.

BUT Jones smiled and nodded warmly at the short vacancy beside him and then looked back at me. "Stanley here, he come by to meet me after work. Mr. Mig, he let me fix us a bite of breakfast when I finish up the night."

I looked again at where Stanley was supposed to be standing and then, blankly, back at Jones. He shrugged almost unnoticeably and, I thought, barely shook his head.

"Well-I — " he said, "I expect me and Stanley better drift back on down to the Yard before some fuzz comes along and fans us down."

"Yeah?" I said. "Yeah. So long, Jonesy — Stanley."

I don't know why I added the "Stanley" but, obscurely, it seemed to please Jones. He gave me a big smile and then walked off down the street, chatting

companionsably to — no one. I didn't get it. Well, Stanley present or absent rated very low on the list of the problems I was going to worry about. I went to work.

I ran into Jones every morning during the week I was on early; Jones, coming off work, with Stanley — who wasn't there. Odd, sure. But if Jones was stringing a way-out gag or playing with a mild hallucination, still it was nothing to me.

I did mention it to Mig, who only said, "Si, these one big hombre eat big. He like two plate eat for breakfast, plate he wash, bueno, what for I complain?"

So that was all. Nothing.

Toward the end of the next week, I wandered down to the Yard again and joined the little group of exponents of gracious almost-living by the wall. Jones wasn't there. But as I was settling down I glanced over at the Broad Street side of the square and I saw him strolling along toward us. He was smiling, talking, gesturing. He was alone. I looked twice. There was no one with Jones.

I settled down, took a drag or two on a smoke and passed it along. Lifted a jug. Got back the old lost, gone, miserable feel of the thing again. I looked up then at Jones who was just coming

around the mangy clump of bushes by the path. With him was a sour, wispy, scarcely noticeable little man. Stanley.

"Evening, Jonesy," I said, "and Stanley. Good to see you again." I meant it even though, come to think, it didn't really clear anything up. Jones gave me his smile and Stanley nodded suspiciously.

They moved in and joined the group. Somebody made a run; a couple. The talk staggered around as usual. Topics: booze; money, yesterday's and tomorrow's; booze; women — only occasionally and with mild, decayed interest; booze.

Jones put in a soft word or two from time to time until he finally stood up, stretched and said he was going up to Mig's. Stanley stayed. I know he did. I watched him. Afterward, I tried to remember if he said anything, but that I couldn't recall.

I went on home myself a while after Jones left. Stanley was still there, though, when I glanced back from Broad Street, I couldn't pick him out in the dim moon and street light.

Still nothing much, eh?

THE NEXT week I came on work at ten and I didn't see Jones — or not see Stanley — all week. Friday, I was back

down at the Yard. That was out of my pattern. Usually one visit in a month or so was plenty. But now, for whatever reason, I was getting kind of interested in Jones — and Stanley.

This time Jones was there hunkered down against the wall when I wandered up. Coaster Joe squatted on one side of him. On the other side, no one. I looked; I looked close. There was no one there. Still, when I nodded around, I nodded at the empty space. Noticed that Boot-nose Bailey was missing. A mild surprise. Bootnose and a bottle were nearly as much Yard fixtures as Gen. Scott in bronze and pigeons. I settled in. A little time and a jug went by. I still didn't see Stanley.

My curiosity finally insisted on a remark. "Jonesy, I — haven't seen Stanley tonight."

Jones smiled, not quite as easy and relaxed as usual. "Stanley isn't around tonight. He went someplace."

"Oh? Well, that's good." It seemed a safe statement. If Stanley had been in jail, Jones would have said so. Any other place was bound to be better. I was being unjustifiably nosy, but curiosity wouldn't let me drop it. "Where did he go?"

Jones shrugged. Then, seriously, "To tell the truth, Ed, I don't rightly know. Fact is, I

been a mite worried about old Stanley lately."

No one else was paying any attention to us. "So? How's that?"

"Well — " He shrugged again and then made a decision. "You know, Ed, it's a sort of a odd thing about Stanley. If you have a little time . . . ?"

"Time is what I have."

Jones sighed. "It might turn out to be a problem, I think. Bothers me some. It would be a kindness if you would let me talk to you about it."

I stood up. Jones, making a gesture that clearly set him apart, put a quarter on the flat collection stone as he got up to join me. We strolled off through the dusk in the park, quietly. Jones, even in a state of some unease, was a comfortable presence. Over on the Broad Street side of the Yard, we sat down on a bench.

"Don't rightly know how to begin," Jones said, scratching his head with a fielder's-mitt-sized hand, "but — Ed, I expect you noticed something funny about Stanley? Or maybe about me?"

"I noticed that sometimes I see Stanley and sometimes I don't. And that sometimes you act as though you see him when he positively is not there."

"Um, yes. Makes you kind of unusual too, Ed. Because with

Stanley it is mostly like this — when he is around, I mean. There are people who see him; a few. But most people, they can't see Stanley at all. With you, seems like it changes. Uptown you can't see him; down here you can."

"What?"

"Now me, I see him most all the time. All the time when he's around, that is; when he hasn't gone off someplace, like tonight. But most people, what you might call really normal people — no offense, Ed — they can't ever see Stanley."

IT SOUNDED silly. But Jones said it with a calm conviction that carried weight. If I couldn't believe it exactly, I didn't disbelieve him either. You hear plenty of queer stories on skid row — dreams, nightmares, nonsense. There used to be one crummy, rummy old bum around called Gov'nor who used to claim he really had been a governor. He drank down some office duplicator fluid and died. Police routine checked. He was an ex-governor. Probabilities eliminate no remote possibilities; if you flip a coin long enough, someday it will stand on edge.

"How do you figure that?" I asked Jones.

"I don't want to sound like I think I am a brain," Jones said.

"I only read some. But these men down here — you might say, couldn't you, that they are maybe men who don't have much of a hold on the world any more?"

"True."

"And the world holds them mighty lightly. They are nothing. Nobody pays them attention. They are outside of everything. They are pretty much outside the world, even. Now you, Ed — you are mostly a part of the normal world. But one time you were all the way on down here, right? So you — "

"I have a feeling for it? Something like that?"

"Something like that. And so down here you are like the others; you can see Stanley. Uptown, you couldn't see him."

"Sounds nuts. But how? Why?"

"That goes back, way back. Stanley and me, we were kids together. Stanley, his people were what down there they call 'trash.' Fourteen, fifteen kids. Who was whose pa, who would know? Or care? And Stanley, he was kind of the runt of the whole litter. Nobody paid him any mind. He never talked much 'cause nobody listened. Got to be a real dopy, dreamy, moody kid. Not ever sick, but sickly. He was more like nothing than any kid I ever did see.

"Me, I lived down the road a piece from Stanley. I don't know why, but he took to following me around. Mostly because everyone else ran him off, I expect. I don't guess I was real good to poor Stanley, but I let him tag along. You would hardly know he was there; no trouble. And he struck me so sort of lost and pitiful, you know? I never had the heart to chase him. After a while, it got to where he even took to trailing along after me to school.

"Now that was a funny thing; kind of got me to wondering. There was a white kid down in that part of the country, running along after a colored boy to a colored school. You would expect that to attract a good deal of attention, wouldn't you? Maybe stir up a big storm in the county. But nobody ever hardly seemed to notice Stanley at all. There wasn't anything ever said about it.

"Well, you know, Ed, any kid, even Stanley, he wants some attention, some affection from someone. Stanley, all he ever had was me and I never more than about put up with him when we were kids. And any kid likes to feel kind of important sometime. Be noticed. Be king of the hill at recess. Win a spelling bee. Whup somebody, or even be the kid that gets made to stay

after school the most. He wants to feel like he is somebody. Only Stanley, he never could. Seemed like the more he wanted to push out into things, the more he would get shy and not able to, and he would pull away back inside even more. He never could talk much hardly, even to me. Got so I would scarcely know he was around myself."

"**H**E LOST touch with the world?" I put in. "Well, that happens. There are oddballs all over, you know."

"Oh, sure — sure there are, Ed," said Jones. "But Stanley wasn't like that, not exactly; or only. Seemed like it was as much the world lost touch with Stanley as it was the other way. He always did feel a resentment about it, too, and I believe it turned him pretty bitter way down someplace. 'Course he never did say much, but I could tell. I got the feeling."

"So? How did you come here?"

"Well, my mammy, she passed on and there wasn't anything to hold me back there around home, so I left. Stanley, he tagged right along after me. Like a shadow. You might say he was a sort of a shadow's shadow, huh? We bummed around. I worked here and there. Then I found out — we found out —

that most people couldn't even see Stanley at all any more."

"He got so far out he was really gone?"

"Only it was kind of pitiful the way it made Stanley mad. Me, I got vagged a few times. Only Stanley, he could be right beside me and spit in the sheriff's face and they wouldn't touch him. They wouldn't even know he was there. When I was locked up, he could walk in and out to visit me. Nobody ever stopped him. Nobody saw him — except, we found out then, that some of the prisoners could see Stanley plain enough."

"Oh?" I said.

"Yes. And that's the way it has been. Seems like the only people who can see Stanley are people like, well, like the ones down here around the Yard. The ones who are — how would you say it? — in the world but not of it, huh? I read that somewhere. People who are far enough out can see Stanley; only he is farther out than any of them."

"Hm-m. Well, the world being what it is, maybe Stanley is lucky."

"Ed, you don't really mean that."

He was right, of course. This world positively was not built according to any specifications of mine, but still it is my world

and I guess I am pretty fond of it at that. Couldn't ever have managed to leave skid row if I weren't.

"So," Jones said, "poor Stanley, he always has been mighty dependent on me; more, maybe, since we been moving around. Until just lately."

"Kind of a damn nuisance, huh?"

"It never bothered me too much. Of course it keeps me down around this part of every town we make and maybe this isn't the kind of life I would have picked for myself. But Stanley has made me feel sort of responsible. And some kind of responsibility is good for a man, wouldn't you say?"

I couldn't argue with it; not me. Anyway, it proved what I had felt from the start—Wino Jones wasn't a real or a natural skid-row type; he was forcing himself.

"Well, Ed, Stanley has been trailing me around all the years — only somehow I don't believe Stanley ever did really like me much. He followed me because he couldn't do anything else, but he never took to me. I guess maybe I couldn't ever quite look up to him the way he wanted. So I suppose he has always been looking for something else. Well, before we came here, we were stopping in a mission one eve-

ning and I looked around when I finished my soup and I couldn't see Stanley. It gave me a turn. But after a little while, there he was again. I asked him where he went. He couldn't or wouldn't ever tell me much, only that there was someplace he was trying to get to and friends he wanted to meet.

"I can almost get there," Stanley told me. "There's the border and over there on the other side, they want me. I can feel they want me. They understand that I am important to them. They want me to come. If I could just find the way across to—"

"He never told me who it was wanted him, or where, or what for. But ever since then, every once in a while I would look around and Stanley would be gone. First part of this last week he was gone again — and when he came back, he was changed. He was kind of superior-acting. Not pleasant. Wherever he was trying to get, he had got there. 'Now,' he told me, 'I have friends who know I am somebody.' He was real set up over it. Tonight he went back again."

"Where?" I wanted to know.

JONES SHOOK his head. "I told him, 'Stanley, we been together a long time. You got friends besides me, I'm glad

Only, you know, I kind of feel responsible. Maybe I ought to meet your friends, huh? Why don't you take me to meet them?"

"'No,' says Stanley. 'Oh, no.' He wouldn't hear of it. I got to stay here and wait for him, he tells me."

"Well, sure," I told Jones. "How could you go with a man into his dream?"

"Yeah — only Stanley did take old Mr. Bootnose Bailey with him."

"*What?*" I exclaimed.

"Uh-huh. Stanley said he was going to prove it to me. He said he would take somebody along with him to this place and then he would bring one of his friends back here to visit. He said that would show me, would show everybody. And you know, Ed, I don't believe I much liked the way poor Stanley looked when he said that. He looked kind of mean."

"But they went? Both of them? And that's why old Bootnose isn't around?"

Jones nodded. "Yeah. Stanley promised Mr. Bootnose something would give him a real boot. They went. Stanley, last thing he said before I watched the two of them just sort of fade out, he said he would be back tomorrow evening. He wanted me to be sure to wait for him in the Yard. And fact is, Ed, I'm kind

of uneasy about it all," he added.

There it was, Jonesy's story. A nonsense story? Sure. But it left me feeling a little uneasy too. We talked it back and forth a while longer, Jones and me, and the more we talked the more uneasy I got. Foolish or not, Jones himself believed it. He wasn't trying to con me into anything. There was no other point to it. And — well, maybe it was simply the fact that Jones was a good deal of man. What he said had a real conviction to it. Even if the story was hard to believe, still there was what I had seen — and not seen — of Stanley. And even if there was nothing that seemed particularly threatening about the business, it made the two of us uneasy.

There was nothing for us to do about it, though. I went on home to my apartment after I promised Jones I would be around the next night when Stanley, alone or with company, was due back. I don't know what Jones expected. I don't know what I expected. But Stanley's friend, no; we didn't expect that.

The next day I was filling in on the desk, but my mind must have been fumbling around with Stanley's other world. I fumbled all day and finished by crossing up a couple of headlines. So I left the office with the managing editor's curses ringing in my

ears, even though he had to admit that the "Present Stench — Future Disaster" line from the sewer gas story did fit very nicely over the item on the mayoralty campaign.

I was down at the Yard a little after five. Jones came along a few minutes later. The group was there. It always is, except when there is a city clean-up. Then it moves over behind the church. Today there was a tension. Jones was smiling, gentle and friendly as always, but there were nerves back of it. Probably the others were mostly just suffering dry nerves. But I was rattled enough so I fumbled a five out and put it on the rock. That, naturally, meant that Coaster Joe and Feeny, who moved the quickest, went to make a run and didn't come back. With the right change for the jug, the wino never skips; with change to bring back, always.

WELL, some more silver was painfully dredged up, mostly by Jones, and somebody else went. The wine went around and I admit that this time I took a swallow or two on my turn. I noticed Jones did too. Not much; a little. We were cold sober. Too cold, actually. I needed the little wine I had in me and a lot more.

That bottle and another went around. So did the talk. I was leaning on the wall next to Jones. Neither of us had much to say. Finally, it was just coming on dusk, I asked him, "You're sure he'll come here? Are you sure he'll show at all?"

"He'll be here. Most any time now, Ed. I can feel it. Can't you?"

I could feel something, but it was only a contagion of tension, I told myself.

Then Jones said, "Look there," and pointed.

I followed the line of his big, pink-nailed, black finger off along the path through the park from Broad Street, a little hazy in the summer evening. There was nothing. Then there was a darker spot in the haze and then, not more than about twenty feet away, just about to pass back of the row of bushes along the path, I saw Stanley. Tonight he seemed, somehow, a more positive presence, even at that distance. There was a cocky bounce in his walk and a tilt to his chin that announced "Here is someone to reckon with." Other eyes in our little circle turned his way as he passed behind the bushes. A couple of seconds more and he came around the near side and moved in to join us.

"Hello there, Wino," he said

ALL NIGHT
MISSION
NO. 16

CLEAN TOWEL TO
EVERY CUSTOMER

TATTOO
SHAVE
25¢

34C

RESTA
34



to Jones and there was condescension in it. "Fellows, I want" — proudly — "you should meet a friend of mine."

Around the bushes came a shape, a dark shape; Stanley's friend, from some other place or world. In our group, Saint Betty, a retired queen, choked on the jug and handed it to me. I shoved it along to Jones. The paralyzing effect of Stanley's friend can be measured in the fact that the jug went three times around that thirsty circle — and no one even lifted it to his lips till it fell in the dust at my feet.

Stanley's friend was there all right; really there. What did I say he was like? A dark shape? Yes. But that dark shape and the detail of that shape came through as clear as a hot blue flame to me.

You weren't ever down that way, right? Not to stay, at least. Well, one thing people there have in common is the horrors. Not just the ordinary day-to-day horrors of a hard life but the big horrors. The D.T.s. How do they go? The detail varies. With everyone, there is something that really panics him, gives him that sense of unreasoning, helpless, screaming fear. With a lot of people it is snakes. That's the traditional. With others, it can be heights, or closed rooms; rats,

maybe. With me, it has always been spiders, ugly, hairy-legged, bloat-bellied.

The horrors. The height man, when he gets them, will have the sensation of falling, helplessly, endlessly. Once I had spiders. There were hordes, millions of great, stickily scrabbling, poisonous spiders crawling, crawling all over me, over everything — until I woke wrapped up like an iced tamale in the cold wet sheet that is called "calming restraint" in psycho wards.

Stanley's friend? Well, it's an ugly thought, but consider those spiders of mine. And consider people. People, mostly, have religion. "God made man in his image," they say, except God, of course, is the infinitely greater. Now suppose that spiders had a god. A spider god. "God made spiders in his image," the spiders might say, right? So such a spider god, that almighty apotheosis of spiderdom — *that* was Stanley's friend as I saw him.

I DON'T KNOW how I could see a thing like that. Maybe I didn't see it, exactly. But absolutely, in some way, by whatever means, the positive perception of such a thing burned itself into my eyes and mind.

The other fellows? No one screamed aloud, although my mind was screaming. Horrors

were not less horrible to us, only less unfamiliar than to other people. One by one, the others quivered to shaky feet and they stumbled off through the evening. The jug, three-quarters full yet, stayed there in the dust of the Yard, forgotten.

How long it was, I don't know. Not long — and then only Jones and I were left with Stanley and Stanley's friend. The rest of the park was empty. Across Bug Alley in front of the church an old woman carrying a sack of rubbish was impelled to look our way. She screeched in a high, disappearing pitch and crumpled to the walk. The church was dark and silent.

Jones stood there, big, powerful, leaning against the wall. He smiled at Stanley, but it was a weak, sick smile. How he managed that much, I'll never know. Weak, trembling, stomach churning, I dragged myself up.

"Uh — well," I mumbled, "you fellows will excuse me — guess I better be moving along."

Stanley's lip curled. He was irritated. I couldn't help that.

"You see?" It wasn't speech, but the thought came plainly from Stanley's friend, out of a churning of black, hungry thoughts, "You see how it is? Even now, not even such as these will welcome us as friends and equals."

"Yes," snapped Stanley, "I see. I should have known. All right then, we'll do it your way. We will show them all."

I stumbled a step or two toward the path.

"Wino," said Stanley, "Wino Jones. We are going over to the other side now. But we will be back, you hear me? You just wait."

"Sure, Stanley," said Jones, still gentle, kind. "Only, Stanley, are you sure?"

"I'm sure," said Stanley. He turned to his friend. "Come on. Let's go."

They moved together toward the bushes.

Stanley looked back over his shoulder at Jones. "We'll be back," he said, "we'll be back, Wino. You be looking for us."

Then they were gone. Thank the good Lord, they were gone.

"Well," I quavered at Jones, "you did say you were kind of uneasy about him, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Jones, "that's right. You going on home now, Ed?"

"You bet!"

"I don't like to impose, but would you mind if I kind of tagged along? I don't feel too good — after that thing with Stanley, built of all those thousands of hissing, wiggling snakes."

With Jones, it had been snakes, not spiders. The others

— to each his own? Somehow that made it seem even worse. Jones wanted to come along with me? I was glad and grateful. I don't know that I could have stood being alone that night.

UP IN MY apartment, we turned on all the lights. Had a couple of nightcaps. Sat up all night in my luxurious eight-by-ten living-dining-kitchen area for modern living. We talked a little, but not about Stanley and his friend. It was too fresh and we were too shaken. It seemed safer not to mention it.

I suppose we must have dozed off and on. In the morning, I woke up. I still had the shakes. No hangover, but the shakes.

"Jonesy," I said. "Jonesy, I guess maybe I ought to be getting along to work. What are you going to do?"

He woke up, full awake, like that. "I'm not going back," he said. "You know?"

"Yeah."

"I got a feeling. I got kind of a feeling that maybe I am sort of Stanley's doorway or gate back here, if you know what I mean. He was always nearer to me than anyone. You notice he kept telling me to wait for him? I think maybe he needs to feel around and find me to make his way back across from wherever

he went. So, if I'm not there, if he can't locate me, could be he won't be able to make his way back — with his friends. I think I better stay as far away from down there as I can get. You reckon there might be some kind of job I could do on that paper you work for?"

"Sure," I said. I knew they needed some men in the circulation department. "That isn't so very far away, though, is it?" I had a sense that he was right about Stanley.

"Not miles. Distance, like that, I don't think it makes much difference where Stanley is. It's the Yard and all that, huh? Seems to be like if I get a steady job, get to be a real, steady, normal citizen, that's what would make me hard for Stanley to find."

"Yes," I said, "I see. The more you are a full part of this world, the farther away you will be from that other one — and Stanley."

"That's it."

"I hope so. Lord, I hope so. You come along down with me this morning. We'll get you a job if we have to kill someone to make a vacancy . . . Jonesy, that — that thing, spiders, snakes — you are sure it was real? It was actually here, I mean? And might come back if Stanley can make the way — in force?"

"Yes, Ed. You didn't really have to ask, did you?"

"No," I said.

And that's it and that's all.,

SINCE THEN — well, Jones is working for the paper. He got to be assistant circulation manager in less than a year. He is as respectable and non-skid-row a citizen as there is in town. Has a girl; getting married next month.

Me? I'm the same, maybe a little better. I go every other week to visit my kids and Jennie, my ex, has taken to staying around now. We even talk a little bit and, last time, I took her some flowers and she blushed like a bride. Something

might even come of it — given enough time.

I have checked back on the Yard a few times but so far, at least, nothing more than the standard rack-up of ordinary horrors. I am not going to check any more. What for? Such a thing as Stanley's friend, you couldn't fight, and I wouldn't know what direction to run. If those things ever find a way over here, where would they be coming from? I don't know. From inside, maybe, Jones says. How do you run from that?

Best, I think, forget it. I intend to try. And, so help me, I am through with skid row. Who wouldn't be?

— WILLIAM W. STUART

★ ★ ★ ★ **FORECAST**

We begin the new year for Galaxy with the end of an old tradition. The first time the Frederik Pohl-C.M. Kornbluth byline appeared it was in *Galaxy*, on the famous *Gravy Planet* (which as *The Space Merchants* has been republished in one form or another every year since, somewhere in the world — this year in Brazil, Japan and Czechoslovakia.) The last time will be in our next issue, with a complete novella called *Critical Mass*. Since Kornbluth's untimely death a few years ago, Pohl has completed several projects then unfinished; this is the last of them.

Naturally we'll also have Poul Anderson, completing his *The Day After Doomsday* which begins so brilliantly this month. There will be at least one novelette, shorts to fit . . . and another item worth mentioning. It is called *The Martian Star-Gazers* — not a story but an article — and it will be the subject of our February cover.