

When the task of gathering data becomes a bit more than our limited time allows (e are also handicapped by having lost four of our six arms in a motor-car accident many years ago), we generally call upon the services of our ace agent, Mr. Pettifogle. We quote from a recent report:

"Contributor small a stroke three three point five [Pettifogle speaking] capital N. William F. Nolan, 34, single. Free-lancer, full time. Four hardcover books (G.P. Putnam's Sons, N.Y.), the latest—Barney Oldfield—first bio of this famous old racing driver. Short story (THE RAGGED EDGE) included in high-school text ADVENTURES FOR AMERICANS (Harcourt-Brace, N.Y., /62). Anthology appearances include THIRD PLAYBOY ANTHOLOGY and HITCHCOCK'S MYSTERY SAMPLER. Mostly writes in automotive field (ROAD AND TRACK, CAR AND DRIVER, & c.), but has sold fiction to mystery and men's magazines, as well as Stf. (THE SHIP, in collab. with Charles Fritch, F&SF, June /56). Has written TV and (in collab. with F&SF regular Rich'd Matheson) the all-cartoon pic ALI BABA AND THE SEVEN MARVELS OF THE WORLD. Is rated as one of 'top twelve' writers in auto field. Has been Stf. fan for many years (RAY BRADBURY REVIEW, /52). For crysake don't omit the 'F' from his name, on acc't there is another Bill Nolan in the writing game." [Pettifogle also submitted a tab for a box of Marsh Wheeling stogies and three pitchers of steam beer, which our comptroller disallowed.] And now you will wish to move on to this literary seven-layer cake about a musical butterfly, an infantophile cat, a camel with bad teeth, a were-seal, and a shaggy, shaggy dog.

ONE OF THOSE DAYS

by William F. Nolan

I KNEW IT WAS GOING TO BE one of those days when I heard a blue-and-yellow butterfly humming Si, mi chiamano Mimi, my favorite aria from *La Boheme*. I was weeding the garden when the

papery insect fluttered by, humming beautifully.

I got up, put aside my garden tools and went into the house to dress. I would see my psychoanalyst at once.

Neglecting my cane and spats, I snapped an old homburg on my head and aimed for Dr. Mellowthin's office in downtown Los Angeles.

Several disturbing things happened to me on the way . . .

First of all, a large stippled Tomcat darted out of an alley directly after I'd stepped from the bus. The cat was on its hind legs and carried a bundle of frothy pink blanketing in its front paws. It looked desperate.

"Gangway!" shouted the cat. "Baby! Live baby here! Clear back. BACK for the baby!"

Then it was gone, having dipped cat-quick across the street, losing itself in heavy traffic. Upon drawing in a deep lungful of air, smog-laden but steadying, I resumed my brisk pace toward Dr. Mellowthin's office.

As I passed a familiar apartment house a third-storey window opened and Wally Jenks popped his head over the sill and called down to me. "Hi," yelled Wally. "C'mon up for a little drinkie."

I shaded my eyes to get a clearer look at him. "Hi, Jenks!" I yelled back, and we both grinned foolishly at the old play on words. "On my way to Mellowthin's."

"Appointment?" he queried.

"Spur of the moment," I replied.

"Then time's no problem. Up you come, old dads, or I shan't forgive you."

I sighed and entered the building. Jenks was in 3G, and I decided to use the stairs. Elevators trap you. As I reached the second-floor landing I obeyed an irresistible urge to bend down and place my ear close to the base of the wall near the floor.

"Are you mice still *in* there?" I shouted.

To which a thousand tiny musical Disney-voices shot back: "Damned *right* we are!"

I shrugged, adjusted my homburg, and continued my upward climb. Jenks met me at the door with a dry martini.

"Thanks," I said, sipping. As usual, it was superb. Old Wally knew his martinis.

"Well," he said, all cheer, "how goes?"

"Badsville," I answered. "Care to hear?"

"By all means. Unburden."

We sat down, facing one another across the tastefully furnished room. I sipped the martini and told Wally about things. "This morning, bout forty minutes ago, I heard a butterfly humming Puccini. Then I saw a cat carrying what I can only assume was a live baby."

"Human?"

"Don't know. Could have been a cat baby."

"Cat say anything?"

"He shouted 'Gangway!'"

"Proceed."

"Then—on the way upstairs—I had a brief conversational exchange with at least a thousand mice."

"In the walls?"

"Where else?"

"Finish your drinkie," said Jenks, finishing his.

I did so.

"Nother?" he asked.

"Nope. Gotta be trotting. I'm in for a mental purge."

"Well, I wouldn't worry too much," he assured me. "Humming insects, talking felines and odd-ball answering mice are admittedly unsettling. But . . . there *are* stranger things in this man's world."

I looked over at him. And knew he was correct—for old Wally Jenks had turned into a loose-pelted brown camel with twin humps, all stained and worn-looking at the tops. I swallowed.

"See you," I said.

Wally grinned, or rather the camel did, and it was awful. Long, cracked yellow teeth like old carnival dishes inside his black gums. I gave a nervous little half-wave, and moved for the door. One final glance over my shoulder at old Jenks verified the fact that he was still grinning at me with those big wet desert-red eyes of his.

Back on the street I quickened my stride, anxious now to reach Mellowthin and render a full account of the day's events. Only a half-block to go.

Then a policeman stopped me. He was all sweaty inside his tight uniform, and his face was dark with hatred.

"Thought you was the wise one, eh, Mugger?" he rasped in a venom-filled voice. "Thought you could give John Law the finger?"

"But, officer, I don't—"

"Come right along, Mugger. We got special cages for the likes 'a you." He was about to snap a pair of silver cuffs to my wrists when I put a quick knee to his vitals and rabbit-punched him on the way down. Then I grabbed his revolver.

"Here!" I shouted to several passers-by. "This man is a fraud. Killed a cop to get this rig. He's a swine of the worst sort. Record as long as your arm. Blackmail, rape, arson, autotheft, kidnapping, grand larceny, wife-beating and petty pilfering. You name it, he's done it!"

I thrust the revolver at a wide-eyed, trembling woman. "Take this weapon, lady. If he makes a funny move, shoot to kill!"

She aimed the gun at the stunned policeman, who was only now getting his breath. He attempted to rise.

"OOPS!" I yelled, "he's going for a knife. Let him have it—NOW!"

The trembling woman shut both eyes and pulled the trigger. The cop pitched forward on his face, stone dead.

"May heaven forgive you," I moaned, backing away. "You've murdered an officer of the law, a defender of public morals . . . May heaven be merciful!"

The woman flapped off. She had turned into a heavy-billed pelican. The policeman had become a fat-bellied seal with flippers, but he was still dead.

Hurrying, and somewhat depressed, I entered Dr. Mellowthin's office and told the girl at the desk it was an emergency.

"You may go right in," she told me. "The doctor will see you immediately."

In another moment I was pumping Mellowthin's hand.

"Sit down, boy," he told me. "So . . . we've got our little complications again today, have we?"

"Sure have," I said, pocketing one of his cigars. I noted that it was stale.

"Care to essay the couch?"

I slid onto the rich dark leather and closed my eyes.

"Now—tell me all about it."

"First a butterfly sang *La Boheme*, or hummed it rather. Then a Tomcat shot out of an alley with a baby in its paws. Then some mice in an apartment house yelled back at me. Then one of my oldest and dearest friends turned into a camel."

"One hump or two?" asked Mellowthin.

"Two," I said. "Large and scruffy and all worn at the tops."

"Anything else?"

"Then a big, pseudo-English cop stopped me. His dialogue was fantastic. Called me Mugger. Said I was fit for a cage. Started to put cuffs on me. I kned him in the kishkas and gave his gun to a nice trembly lady who shot him. Then she turned into a pelican and flapped off, and he turned into a seal with flippers. Then I came here."

I opened my eyes and sat up.

I stared at Dr. Mellowthin.

"What's the matter?" he asked, somewhat uneasily.

"Well . . ." I said, "to begin with you have large brown, sad-looking, liquidy eyes."

"And?"

"And I bet your nose is cold!" I grinned.

"Anything else?"

"Not really."

"What about my overall appearance?"

"Well, of course you're covered with long black shaggy hair, even down to the tips of your big floppy ears."

A moment of strained silence.

"Can you do tricks?" I asked.

"A few," Mellowthin replied uncomfortably.

"Roll over!" I commanded.

He did.

"Play dead!"

His liquidy eyes rolled up white and his long pink tongue lolled loosely from his jaws.

"Good doggie," I said. "Nice doggie."

"Woof," barked Dr. Mellowthin softly, wagging his tail.

Putting on my hat I tossed him a bone I'd saved from the garden and left his office.

There was absolutely no getting around it.

This was simply one of those days.

In this issue . . .

. . . Three new planets swim into our ken, in the persons of Terry Carr, whose first professionally published story is a tart and witty account of a new science versus an old religion, and a reminder that a Certain Personage has perhaps not been called The Lier From The Beginning for nothing; Otis Kidwell Burger, relating the history of a love so strong that, although unconsumated in the flesh, it bore strange and wondrous issue; and William Bankier of Canada, describing what happened to an old man in an old house when time began to run out. Old Masters James Blish, Gordon Dickson, and Ron Goulart are back with goodies in their hampers; and New Master Vance Aandahl returns with a vivid portrait of a world where the wind still blows sweetly on the heath and the rivers run unvexed to the sea once more and man alone is withered and wracked. The unfailing Dr. Asimov is his usual sapient self. The urbane Mr. Bester bows in, as Guest Columnist For Books, the no-less-polished Mr. Leiber. And the muster roll for May is wound up with the names of Joseph Nesvadba, William F. Nolan, Eric Frazee, and some hack whose name we can't lay our hands on just at this moment.

Coming next . . .

. . . are stories by Kate Wilhelm (space travel and conflicts of supreme loyalties), Will Stanton (space travel in a lighter vein), John Brunner (today's experimental work on sleep and dreams carried into early tomorrow morning), Gary Jennings (Who—in present-day Virginia—remembered the ancient warning of Laocoön?), Kris Neville (when the universe got all shook up and only the Smight family . . .), Zenna Henderson, G. C. Edmondson, and other experts.