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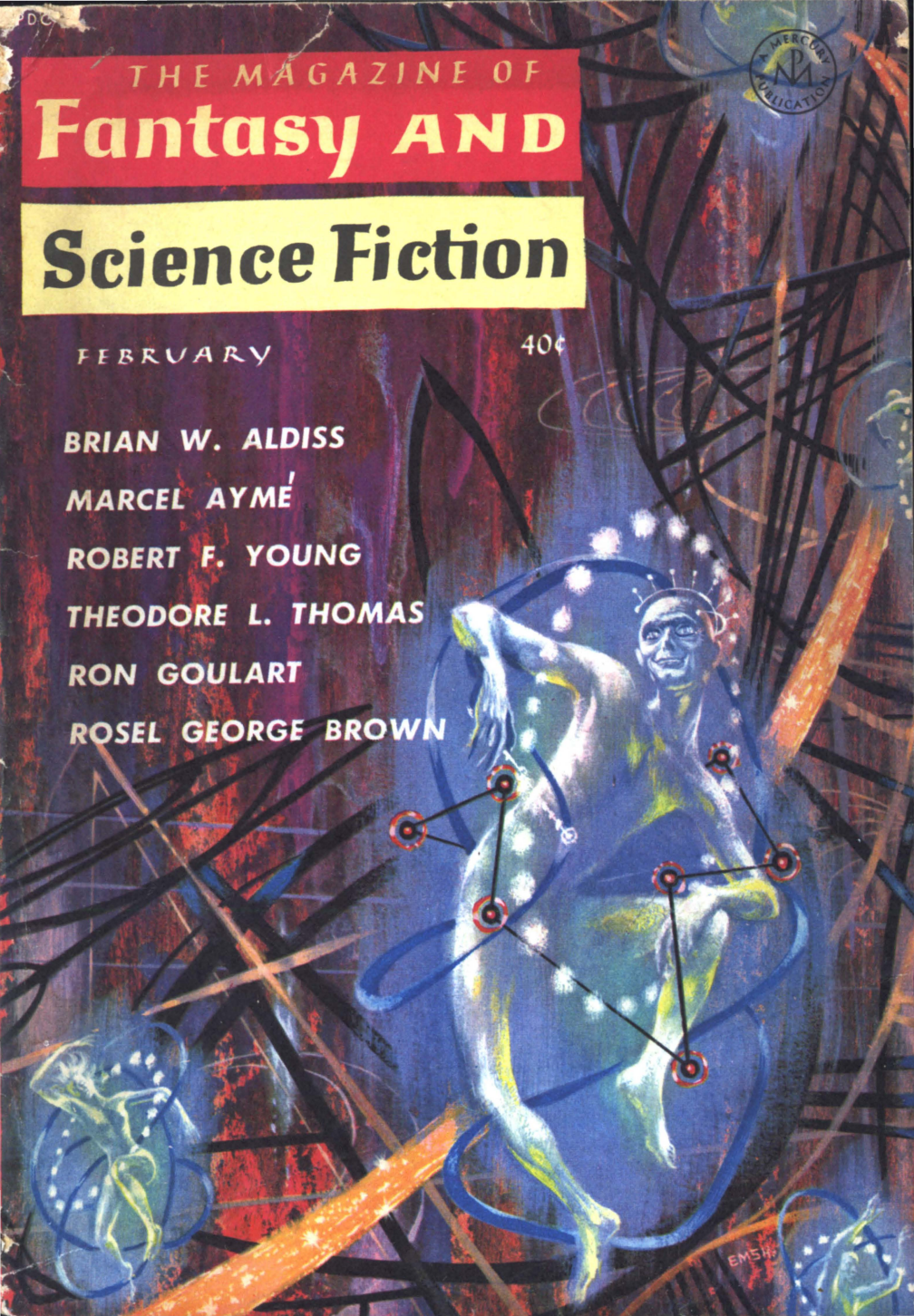

Fantasy and Science Fiction

FEBRUARY *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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In this issue . . .

A few months ago we commented on having heard of a new drink called a Lord and Lady, which for some reason reminded us that we had not heard of any new science fiction drink ideas lately. In "Storm Over Sodom," Robert F. Young refers to an interesting sort of concoction, but is, regrettably, more specific about its effects than its properties. We are still waiting hopefully. . . .

Coming next month . . .

. . . an All Star Issue, featuring a longish novelet by Philip Jose Farmer —"Prometheus"—which is a sequel to "A Few Miles" (Oct. 1960 F&SF), and a novelet by Zenna Henderson—"Return"—which is a new story of the People. The rest of the issue is not yet definite, but will be drawn from such stories as: "The Beetle," by Jay Williams, "Saturn Rising," by Arthur C. Clarke, "Night Piece," by Poul Anderson, "All the Tea in China," by R. Bretnor, "Something Rich and Strange," by Randall Garrett and Avram Davidson, "Softly While You're Sleeping," by Evelyn E. Smith . . . and others. Also, of course, Isaac Asimov on Science, and Alfred Bester on Books (Mr. Bester, incidentally, will turn in that column from this month's blast to an examination of some of the good things on the current science fiction scene). . . . To be sure of not missing any of these, you might do well to fill in the simple little form below. . . .

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One of the attractive aspects of Brian Aldiss' work is its pleasant unpredictability. There is something about his stories which makes them quite unlike those of other writers in the field, and no group of his stories gives any clear indication of what his next will be like. . . . The present novelet is, we think, a most intriguing example of science fantasy, and it does *give an indication of what to expect next, because Mr. Aldiss is doing a series of novelets on the most unusual world he creates in "Hothouse" . . . the second of which, titled "Nomansland," will be along in two or three months.*

HOTHOUSE

by Brian W. Aldiss

My vegetable love should grow
Vaster than empires and more slow.

ANDREW MARVELL

I

The heat, the light, the humidity —these were constant and had remained constant for . . . but nobody knew how long. Nobody cared any more for the big questions that begin "How long . . .?" or "Why . . .?" It was no longer a place for mind. It was a place for growth, for vegetables. It was like a hothouse.

In the green light, some of the children came out to play. Alert for enemies, they ran along the branch, calling to each other in soft voices. A fast-growing berry-whisk moved upwards to one side, its sticky crimson mass of berries gleaming. Clearly it was intent on seeding and would offer the children no harm. They scuttled past it. Beyond the margin of the group strip, some nettlemoss had sprung up during their period of sleep. It stirred as the children approached.

"Kill it," Toy said simply. She was the head child of the group. She was ten. The others obeyed her. Unsheathing the sticks every child carried in imitation of every adult, they scraped at the nettlemoss. They scraped at it and hit

it. Excitement grew in them as they beat down the plant, squashing its poisoned tips.

Clat fell forward in her excitement. She was only five, the youngest of the group's children. Her hands fell among the poisonous stuff. She cried aloud and rolled aside. The other children also cried, but did not venture into the nettlemoss to save her.

Struggling out of the way, little Clat cried again. Her fingers clutched at the rough bark—then she was tumbling from the branch.

The children saw her fall onto a great spreading leaf several lengths below, clutch it, and lie there quivering on the quivering green. She looked up pitifully.

"Fetch Lily-yo," Toy told Gren. Gren sped back along the branch to get Lily-yo. A tigerfly swooped out of the air at him, humming its anger deeply. He struck it aside with a hand, not pausing. He was nine, a rare man child, very brave already, and fleet and proud. Swiftly he ran to the Headwoman's hut.

Under the branch, attached to its underside, hung eighteen great homemaker nuts. Hollowed out they were, and cemented into place with the cement distilled from the acetoyle plant. Here lived the eighteen members of the group, one to each homemaker's nut—the Headwoman, her five women, their man, and the eleven surviving children.

Hearing Gren's cry, out came Lily-yo from her nuthut, climbing up a line to stand on the branch beside him.

"Clat falls!" cried Gren.

With her stick, Lily-yo rapped sharply on the bough before running on ahead of the child.

Her signal called out the other six adults, the women Flor, Daphe, Hy, Ivin, and Jury, and the man Haris. They hastened from their nuthuts, weapons ready, poised for attack or flight.

As Lily-yo ran, she whistled on a sharp split note.

Instantly to her from the thick foliage nearby came a dumbler, flying to her shoulder. The dumbler rotated, a fleecy umbrella whose separate spokes controlled its direction. It matched its flight to her movement.

Both children and adults gathered round Lily-yo when she looked down at Clat, still sprawled some way below on her leaf.

"Lie still, Clat! Do not move!" called Lily-yo. "I will come to you." Clat obeyed that voice, though she was in pain and fear.

Lily-yo climbed astride the hooked base of the dumbler, whistling softly to it. Only she of the group had fully mastered the art of commanding dumblers. These dumblers were the half-sentient spores of the whistlethistle. The tips of their feathered spokes carried seeds; the seeds were strangely shaped, so that a light breeze

whispering in them made them into ears that listened to every advantage of the wind that would spread their propagation. Humans, after long years of practice, could use these crude ears for their own purposes and instructions, as Lily-yo did now.

The dumbler bore her down to the rescue of the helpless child. Clat lay on her back, watching them come, hoping to herself. She was still looking up when green teeth sprouted through the leaf all about her.

"Jump, Clat!" Lily-yo cried.

The child had time to scramble to her knees. Vegetable predators are not so fast as humans. Then the green teeth snapped shut about her waist.

Under the leaf, a trappersnapper had moved into position, sensing the presence of prey through the single layer of foliage. It was a horny, caselike affair, just a pair of square jaws hinged and with many long teeth. From one corner of it grew a stalk, very muscular and thicker than a human. It looked like a neck. Now it bent, carrying Clat away, down to its true mouth, which lived with the rest of the plant far below on the unseen forest Ground, slobbering in darkness and wetness and decay.

Whistling, Lily-yo directed her dumbler back up to the home bough. Nothing now could be done for Clat. It was the way.

Already the rest of the group was dispersing. To stand in a bunch was to invite trouble from the unnumbered enemies of the forest. Besides, Clat's was not the first death they had witnessed.

Lily-yo's group had once been of seven underwomen and two men. Two women and one man had fallen to the green. Among them, the eight women had born twenty-two children to the group, four of them being man children. Deaths of children were many, always. Now that Clat was gone, over half the children had fallen to the green. Only two man children were left, Gren and Veggy.

Lily-yo walked back along the branch in the green light. The dumbler drifted from her unheeded, obeying the silent instructions of the forest air, listening for word of a seeding place. Never had there been such an overcrowding of the world. No bare places existed. The dumblers sometimes drifted through the jungles for centuries waiting to alight.

Coming to a point above one of the nuthuts, Lily-ho lowered herself into it by the creeper. This had been Clat's nuthut. The headwoman could hardly enter it, so small was the door. Humans kept their doors as narrow as possible, enlarging them as they grew. It helped to keep out unwanted visitors.

All was tidy in the nuthut. From the interior soft fibre a bed had been cut; there the five year old had slept, when a feeling for sleep came among the unchanging forest green. On the cot lay Clat's soul. Lily-yo took it and thrust it into her belt.

She climbed out onto the creeper, took her knife, and began to slash at the place where the bark of the tree had been cut away and the nuthut was attached to the living wood. After several slashes, the cement gave. Clat's nuthut hinged down, hung for a moment, then fell.

As it disappeared among huge coarse leaves, there was a flurry of foliage. Something was fighting for the privilege of devouring the huge morsel.

Lily-yo climbed back onto the branch. For a moment she paused to breathe deeply. Breathing was more trouble than it had been. She had gone on too many hunts, borne too many children, fought too many fights. With a rare and fleeting knowledge of herself, she glanced down at her bare green breasts. They were less plump than they had been when she first took the man Haris to her; they hung lower. Their shape was less beautiful.

By instinct she knew her youth was over. By instinct she knew it was time to Go Up.

The group stood near the Hollow, awaiting her. She ran to them. The Hollow was like an upturned armpit, formed where the branch joined the trunk. In the Hollow collected their water supply.

Silently, the group was watching a line of termights climb the trunk. One of the termights now and again signalled greetings to the humans. The humans waved back. As far as they had allies at all, the termights were their allies. Only five great families survived here in the all-conquering vegetable world; the tigerflies, the treebees, the plantants and the termights were social insects, mighty and invincible. And the fifth family was man, lowly and easily killed, not organised as the insects were, but not extinct—the last animal species remaining.

Lily-yo came up to the group. She too rasied her eyes to follow the moving line of termights until it disappeared into the layers of green. The termights could live on any level of the great forest, in the Tips or down on the Ground. They were the first and last of insects; as long as anything lived, the termights and tigerflies would.

Lowering her eyes, Lily-yo called to the group.

When they looked, she brought out Clat's soul, lifting it above her head to show to them.

"Clat has fallen to the green," she said. "Her soul must go to the Tips, according to the custom.

Flor and I will take it at once, so that we can go with the termights. Daphe, Hy, Ivin, Jury, you guard well the man Haris and the children till we return."

The women nodded solemnly. Then they came one by one to touch Clat's soul.

The soul was roughly carved of wood into the shape of a woman. As a child was born, so with rites its male parent carved it a soul, a doll, a totem soul—for in the forest when one fell to the green there was scarcely ever a bone surviving to be buried. The soul survived for burial in the Tips.

As they touched the soul, Gren adventurously slipped from the group. He was nearly as old as Toy, as active and as strong. Not only had he power to run. He could climb. He could swim. Ignoring the cry of his friend Veggy, he scampered into the Hollow and dived into the pool.

Below the surface, opening his eyes, he saw a world of bleak clarity. A few green things like clover leaves grew at his approach, eager to wrap round his legs. Gren avoided them with a flick of his hand as he shot deeper. Then he saw the crocksock—before it saw him.

The crocksock was an aquatic plant, semi-parasitic by nature. Living in hollows, it sent down its saw-toothed suckers into the trees' sap. But the upper section of it, rough and tongue-shaped like a sock, could also feed. It unfolded, wrapping round Gren's left arm, its fibres instantly locking to increase the grip.

Gren was ready for it.

With one slash of his knife, he clove the crocksock in two, leaving the lower half to thrash uselessly at him. Before he could rise to the surface, Daphe the skilled huntress was beside him, her face angered, bubbles flashing out silver like fish from between her teeth. Her knife was ready to protect him.

He grinned at her as he broke surface and climbed out onto the dry bank. Nonchalantly he shook himself as she climbed beside him.

" 'Nobody runs or swims or climbs alone,' " Daphe called to him, quoting one of the laws. "Gren, have you no fear? Your head is an empty burr!"

The other women too showed anger. Yet none of them touched Gren. He was a man child. He was tabu. He had the magic powers of carving souls and bringing babies—or would have when fully grown, which would be soon now.

"I am Gren, the man child!" he boasted to them. His eyes sought Haris's for approval. Haris merely looked away. Now that Gren was so big, Haris did not cheer as once he had, though the boy's deeds were braver than before.

Slightly deflated, Gren jumped about, waving the strip of crock-

sock still wrapped round his left arm. He called and boasted at the women to show how little he cared for them.

"You are a baby yet," hissed Toy. She was ten, his senior by one year. Gren fell quiet.

Scowling, Lily-yo said, "The children grow too old to manage. When Flor and I have been to the Tips to bury Clat's soul, we shall return and break up the group. Time has come for us to part. Guard yourselves!"

It was a subdued group that watched their leader go. All knew that the group had to split; none cared to think about it. Their time of happiness and safety—so it seemed to all of them—would be finished, perhaps forever. The children would enter a period of lonely hardship, fending for themselves. The adults embarked on old age, trial, and death when they Went Up into the unknown.

II

Lily-yo and Flor climbed the rough bark easily. For them it was like going up a series of more or less symmetrically placed rocks. Now and again they met some kind of vegetable enemy, a thinpin or a pluggyrug, but these were small fry, easily dispatched into the green gloom below. Their enemies were the termights' enemies, and the moving column had already dealt with the foes in its path. Lily-yo and Flor climbed close to the termights, glad of their company.

They climbed for a long while. Once they rested on an empty branch, capturing two wandering burrs, splitting them, and eating their oily white flesh. On the way up, they had glimpsed one or two groups of humans on different branches; sometimes these groups waved shyly, sometimes not. Now they were too high for humans.

Nearer the Tips, new danger threatened. In the safer middle layers of the forest the humans lived, avoided the perils of the Tips or the Ground.

"Now we move on," Lily-yo told Flor, getting to her feet when they had rested. "Soon we will be at the Tips."

A commotion silenced the two women. They looked up, crouching against the trunk for protection. Above their heads, leaves rustled as death struck.

A leapycreeper flailed the rough bark in a frenzy of greed, attaching the termight column. The leapycreeper's roots and stems were also tongues and lashes. Whipping round the trunk, it thrust its sticky tongues into the termights.

Against this particular plant, flexible and hideous, the insects had little defence. They scattered but kept doggedly climbing up, each perhaps trusting in the blind law of averages to survive.

For the humans, the plant was less of a threat—at least when met on a branch. Encountered on a trunk, it could easily dislodge them and send them helplessly falling to the green.

"We will climb on another trunk," Lily-yo said.

She and Flor ran deftly along the branch, once jumping a bright parasitic bloom round which tree-bees buzzed, a forerunner of the world of colour above them.

A far worse obstacle lay waiting in an innocent-looking hole in the branch. As Flor and Lily-yo approached, a tigerfly zoomed up at them. It was all but as big as they were, a terrible thing that possessed both weapons and intelligence—and malevolence. Now it attacked only through viciousness, its eyes large, its mandibles working, its transparent wings beating. Its head was a mixture of shaggy hair and armour-plating, while behind its slender waist lay the great swivel-plated body, yellow and black, sheathing a lethal sting on its tail.

It dived between the women, aiming to hit them with its wings. They fell flat as it sped past. Angrily, it tumbled against the branch as it turned on them again; its golden-brown sting flicked in and out.

"I'll get it!" Flor said. A tigerfly had killed one of her babes.

Now the creature came in fast and low. Ducking, Flor reached up and seized its shaggy hair, swinging the tigerfly off balance. Quickly she raised her sword. Bringing it down in a mighty sweep, she severed that chitinous and narrow waist.

The tigerfly fell away in two parts. The two women ran on.

The branch, a main one, did not grow thinner. Instead, it ran on for another twenty yards and grew into another trunk. The tree, vastly old, the longest lived organism ever to flourish on this little world, had a myriad trunks. Very long ago—two thousand million years past—trees had grown in many kinds, depending on soil, climate, and other conditions. As temperatures climbed, they proliferated and came into competition with each other. The banyan, thriving in the heat, using its complex system of self-rooting branches, gradually established ascendancy over the other species. Under pressure, it evolved and adapted. Each banyan spread out further and further, sometimes doubling back on itself for safety. Always it grew higher and crept wider, protecting its parent stem as its rivals multiplied, dropping down trunk after trunk, throwing out branch after branch, until at last it learnt the trick of growing into its neighbour banyan, forming a thicket against which no other tree could strive. Their complexity became unrivalled, their immortality established.

On this great continent where the humans lived, only one banyan tree grew now. It had become first King of the forest, then it had become the forest itself. It had conquered the deserts and the mountains and the swamps. It filled the continent with its interlaced scaffolding. Only before the wider rivers or at the margins of the sea, where the deadly seaweeds could assail it, did the tree not go.

And at the terminator, where all things stopped and night began, there too the tree did not go.

The women climbed slowly now, alert as the odd tigerfly zoomed in their direction. Splashes of colour grew everywhere, attached to the tree, hanging from lines, or drifting free. Lianas and fungi blossomed. Dumblers moved mournfully through the tangle. As they gained height, the air grew fresher and colour rioted, azures and crimsons, yellows and mauves, all the beautifully tinted snares of nature.

A dripperlip sent its scarlet dribbles of gum down the trunk. Several thinpins, with vegetable skill, stalked the drops, pounced, and died. Lily-yo and Flor went by on the other side.

Slashweed met them. They slashed back and climbed on.

Many fantastic plant forms there were, some like birds, some like butterflies. Ever and again, whips and hands shot out.

"Look!" Flor whispered. She pointed above their heads.

The tree's bark was cracked almost invisibly. Almost invisibly, a part of it moved. Thrusting her stick out at arm's length, Flor eased herself up until stick and crack were touching. Then she prodded.

A section of the bark gaped wide, revealing a pale deadly mouth. An oystermaw, superbly camouflaged, had dug itself into the tree. Jabbing swiftly, Flor thrust her stick into the trap. As the jaws closed, she pulled with all her might, Lily-yo steadying her. The oystermaw, taken by surprise, was wrenched from its socket.

Opening its maw in shock, it sailed outward through the air. A rayplane took it without trying.

Lily-yo and Flor climbed on.

The Tips was a strange world of its own, the vegetable kingdom at its most imperial and most exotic.

If the banyan ruled the forest, *was* the forest, then the traversers ruled the Tips. The traversers had formed the typical landscape of the Tips. Theirs were the great webs trailing everywhere, theirs the nests built on the tips of the tree.

When the traversers deserted their nests, other creatures built there, other plants grew, spreading their bright colours to the sky.

Debris and droppings knitted these nests into solid platforms. Here grew the burnurn plant, which Lily-yo sought for the soul of Clat.

Pushing and climbing, the two women finally emerged onto one of these platforms. They took shelter from the perils of the sky under a great leaf and rested from their exertions. Even in the shade, even for them, the heat of the Tips was formidable. Above them, paralysing half the heaven, burned a great sun. It burnt without cease, always fixed and still at one point in the sky, and so would burn until that day—now no longer impossibly distant—when it burnt itself out.

Here in the Tips, relying on that sun for its strange method of defence, the burnurn ruled among stationary plants. Already its sensitive roots told it that intruders were near. On the leaf above them, Lily-yo and Flor saw a circle of light move. It wandered over the surface, paused, contracted. The leaf smouldered and burst into flames. Focussing one of its urns on them, the plant was fighting them with its terrible weapon—fire.

"Run!" Lily-yo commanded, and they dashed behind the top of a whistlethistle, hiding beneath its thorns, peering out at the burnurn plant.

It was a splendid sight.

High reared the plant, displaying perhaps half a dozen cerise flowers, each flower larger than a human. Other flowers, fertilized, had closed together, forming many-sided urns. Later stages still could be seen, where the colour drained from the urns as seed swelled at the base of them. Finally, when the seed was ripe, the urn—now hollow and immensely strong—turned transparent as glass and became a heat weapon the plant could use even after its seeds were scattered.

Every vegetable and creature shrank from fire—except humans. They alone could deal with the burnurn plant and use it to advantage.

Moving cautiously, Lily-yo stole forth and cut off a big leaf which grew through the platform on which they stood. A pluggyrug launched a spine at her from underneath, but she dodged it. Seizing the leaf, so much bigger than herself, she ran straight for the burnurn, hurling herself among its foliage and shinning to the top of it in an instant, before it could bring its urn-shaped lenses up to focus on her.

"Now!" she cried to Flor.

Flor was already on the move, sprinting forward.

Lily-yo raised the leaf above the burnurn, holding it between the plant and the sun. As if realising that this ruined its method of defence, the plant drooped in the shade as though sulking. Its flow-

ers and its urns hung down limply.

Her knife out ready, Flor darted forward and cut off one of the great transparent urns. Together the two women dashed back for the cover of the whistlethistle while the burnurn came back to furious life, flailing its urns as they sucked in the sun again.

They reached cover just in time. A vegbird swooped out of the sky at them—and impaled itself on a thorn.

Instantly, a dozen scavengers were fighting for the body. Under cover of the confusion, Lily-yo and Flor attacked the urn they had won. Using both their knives and all their strength, they prized up one side far enough to put Clat's soul inside the urn. The side instantly snapped back into place again, an airtight join. The soul stared woodenly out at them through the transparent facets.

"May you Go Up and reach heaven," Lily-yo said.

It was her business to see the soul stood at least a sporting chance of doing so. With Flor, she carried the urn across to one of the cables spun by a traverser. The top end of the urn, where the seed had been, was enormously sticky. The urn adhered easily to the cable and hung there in the sun.

Next time a traverser climbed up the cable, the urn stood an excellent chance of sticking like a burr to one of its legs. Thus it would be carried away to heaven.

As they finished the work, a shadow fell over them. A mile-long body drifted down towards them. A traverser, a gross vegetable-equivalent of a spider, was descending to the Tips.

Hurriedly, the women burrowed their way through the platform. The last rites for Clat had been carried out: it was time to return to the group.

Before they climbed down again to the green world of middle levels, Lily-yo looked back.

The traverser was descending slowly, a great bladder with legs and jaws, fibery hair covering most of its bulk. To her it was like a god, with the powers of a god. It came down a cable, floated nimbly down the strand trailing up into the sky.

As far as could be seen, cables slanted up from the jungle, pointing like slender drooping fingers to heaven. Where the sun caught them, they glittered. They all trailed up in the same direction, toward a floating silver half-globe, remote and cool, but clearly visible even in the glare of eternal sunshine.

Unmoving, steady, the half-moon remained always in the same sector of the sky.

Through the eons, the pull of this moon had gradually slowed the axial revolution of its parent planet to a standstill, until day

and night slowed, and became fixed forever, day always on one side of the planet, night on the other. At the same time, a reciprocal braking effect had checked the moon's apparent flight. Drifting further from Earth, the moon had shed its role as Earth's satellite and rode along in Earth's orbit, an independent planet in its own right. Now the two bodies, for what was left of the afternoon of eternity, faced each other in the same relative position. They were locked face to face, and so would be, until the sands of time ceased to run, or the sun ceased to shine.

And the multitudinous strands of cable floated across the gap, uniting the worlds. Back and forth the traversers could shuttle at will, vegetable astronauts huge and insensible, with Earth and Luna both enmeshed in their indifferent net.

With surprising suitability, the old age of the Earth was snared about with cobwebs.

III

The journey back to the group was fairly uneventful. Lily-yo and Flor travelled at an easy pace, sliding down again into the middle levels of the tree. Lily-yo did not press forward as hard as usual, for she was reluctant to face the break-up of the group.

She could not express her few thoughts easily.

"Soon we must Go Up like Clat's soul," she said to Flor, as they climbed down.

"It is the way," Flor answered, and Lily-yo knew she would get no deeper word on the matter than that. Nor could she frame deeper words herself; human understandings trickled shallow these days.

The group greeted them soberly when they returned. Being weary, Lily-yo offered them a brief salutation and retired to her nuthut. Jury and Ivin soon brought her food, setting not so much as a finger inside her home, that being tabu. When she had eaten and slept, she climbed again onto the home strip of branch and summoned the others.

"Hurry!" she called, staring fixedly at Haris, who was not hurrying. Why should a difficult thing be so precious—or a precious thing so difficult?

At that moment, while her attension was diverted, a long green tongue licked out from behind the tree trunk. Uncurling, it hovered daintily for a second. It took Lily-yo round the waist, pinning her arms to her side, lifting her off the branch. Furiously she kicked and cried.

Haris pulled a knife from his belt, lept forward with eyes slitted, and hurled the blade. Singing, it pierced the tongue and pinned it to the rough trunk of the tree.

Haris did not pause after throwing. As he ran towards the pin-

ioned tongue, Daphe and Jury ran behind him, while Flor scuttled the children to safety. In its agony, the tongue eased its grip on Lily-yo.

Now a terrific thrashing had set in on the other side of the tree trunk: the forest seemed full of its vibrations. Lily-yo whistled up two dumblers, fought her way out of the green coils round her, and was now safely back on the branch. The tongue, writhing in pain, flicked about meaninglessly. Weapons out, the four humans moved forward to deal with it.

The tree itself shook with the wrath of the trapped creature. Edging cautiously round the trunk, they saw it. Its great vegetable mouth distorted, a wiltmilt stared back at them with the hideous palmate pupil of its single eye. Furiously it hammered itself against the tree, foaming and mouthing. Though they had faced wiltmilts before, yet the humans trembled.

The wiltmilt was many times the girth of the tree trunk at its present extension. If necessary, it could have extended itself up almost to the Tips, stretching and becoming thinner as it did so. Like an obscene jack-in-the-box, it sprang up from the Ground in search of food, armless, brainless, gouging its slow way over the forest floor on wide and rooty legs.

"Pin it!" Lily-yo cried.

Concealed all along the branch were sharp stakes kept for such emergencies. With these they stabbed the writhing tongue that cracked like a whip about their heads. At last they had a good length of it secured, staked down to the tree. Though the wiltmilt writhed, it would never get free now.

"Now we must leave and Go Up," Lily-yo said.

No human could ever kill a wiltmilt. But already its struggles were attracting predators, the thinpins—those mindless sharks of the middle levels—rayplanes, trapper-snappers, gargoyles, and smaller vegetable vermin. They would tear the wiltmilt to living pieces and continue until nothing of it remained—and if they happened on a human at the same time . . . well, it was the way.

Lily-yo was angry. She had brought on this trouble. She had not been alert. Alert, she would never have allowed the wiltmilt to catch her. Her mind had been tied with thought of her own bad leadership. For she had caused two dangerous trips to be made to the Tips where one would have done. If she had taken all the group with her when Clat's soul was disposed of, she would have saved this second ascent. What ailed her brain that she had not seen this beforehand?

She clapped her hands. Standing for shelter under a giant leaf, she made the group come about

her. Sixteen pairs of eyes stared trustingly at her. She grew angry to see how they trusted her.

"We adults grow old," she told them. "We grow stupid. I grow stupid. I let a slow wiltmilt catch me. I am not fit to lead. Not any more. The time is come for the adults to Go Up and return to the gods who made us. Then the children will be on their own. They will be the group. Toy will lead the group. By the time you are sure of your group, Gren and soon Veggy will be old enough to give you children. Take care of the man children. Let them not fall to the green, or the group dies. Better to die yourself than let the group die."

Lily-yo had never made, the others had never heard, so long a speech. Some of them did not understand it all. What of this talk about falling to the green? One did or one did not: it needed no talk. Whatever happened was the way, and talk could not touch it.

May, a girl child, said cheekily, "On our own we can enjoy many things."

Reaching out, Flor clapped her on an ear.

"First you make the hard climb to the Tips," she said.

"Yes, move," Lily-yo said. She gave the order for climbing, who should lead, who follow.

About them the forest throbbed, green creatures sped and snapped as the wiltmilt was devoured.

"The climb is hard. Begin quickly," Lily-yo said, looking restlessly about her.

"Why climb?" Gren asked rebelliously. "With dumblers we can fly easily to the Tips and suffer no pain."

It was too complicated to explain to him that a human drifting in the air was far more vulnerable than a human shielded by a trunk, with the good rough bark nodules to squeeze between in case of attack.

"While I lead, you climb," Lily-yo said. She could not hit Gren. He was a tabu man child.

They collected their souls from their nuthuts. There was no pomp about saying goodbye to their old home. Their souls went in their belts, their swords—the sharpest, hardest, thorns available—went in their hands. They ran along the branch after Lily-yo, away from the disintegrating wiltmilt, away from their past.

Slowed by the younger children, the journey up to the Tips was long. Although the humans fought off the usual hazards, the tiredness growing in small limbs could not be fought. Half way to the Tips, they found a side branch to rest on, for there grew a fuzzypuzzle, and they sheltered in it.

The fuzzypuzzle was a beautiful, disorganised fungus. Although it looked like nettlemoss on a larger scale, it did not harm hu-

mans, drawing in its poisoned pistils as if with disgust when they came to it. Ambling in the eternal branches of the tree, fuzzypuzzles desired only vegetable food. So the group climbed into the middle of it and slept. Guarded among the waving viridian and yellow stalks, they were safe from nearly all forms of attack.

Flor and Lily-yo slept most deeply of the adults. They were tired by their previous journey. Haris the man was the first to awake, knowing something was wrong. As he roused, he woke up Jury by poking her with his stick. He was lazy; besides, it was his duty to keep out of danger. Jury sat up. She gave a shrill cry of alarm and jumped at once to defend the children.

Four winged things had invaded the fuzzypuzzle. They had seized Veggy, the man child, and Bain, one of the younger girl children, gagging and tying them before the pair could wake properly.

At Jury's cry, the winged ones looked round.

They were flymen!

In some aspects they resembled humans. They had one head, two long and powerful arms, stubby legs, and strong fingers on hands and feet. But instead of smooth green skin, they were covered in a glittering horny substance, here black, here pink. And large scaly wings resembling those of a vegbird grew from their wrists to their ankles. Their faces were sharp and clever. Their eyes glittered.

When they saw the humans waking, the flymen grabbed up the two captive children. Bursting through the fuzzypuzzle, which did not harm them, they ran towards the edge of the branch to jump off.

Flymen were crafty enemies, seldom seen but much dreaded by the group. They worked by stealth. Though they did not kill unless forced to, they stole children. Catching them was hard. Flymen did not fly properly, but the crash glides they fell into carried them swiftly away through the forest, safe from human reprisal.

Jury flung herself forward with all her might, Ivin behind her. She caught an ankle, seized part of the leathery tendon of wing where it joined the foot, and clung on. One of the flymen holding Veggy staggered with her weight, turning as he did so to free himself. His companion, taking the full weight of the boy child, paused, dragging out a knife to defend himself.

Ivin flung herself at him with savagery. She had mothered Veggy: he should not be taken away. The flyman's blade came to meet her. She threw herself on it. It ripped her stomach till the brown entrails showed, and she toppled from the branch with no cry. There was a commotion in the foliage below as trappersnappers fought for her.

Deciding he had done enough, the flyman dropped the bound Veggy and left his friend still struggling with Jury. He spread his wings, taking off heavily after the two who had born Bain away between them into the green thicket.

All the group were awake now. Lily-yo silently untied Veggy, who did not cry, for he was a man child. Meanwhile, Haris knelt by Jury and her winged opponent, who fought without words to get away. Quickly, Haris brought out a knife.

"Don't kill me. I will go!" cried the flyman. His voice was harsh, his words hardly understandable. The mere strangeness of him filled Haris with savagery, so that his lips curled back and his tongue came thickly between his bared teeth.

He thrust his knife deep between the flyman's ribs, four times over, till the blood poured over his clenched fist.

Jury stood up gasping and leant against Ivin. "I grow old," she said. "Once it was no trouble to kill a flyman."

She looked at the man Haris with gratitude. He had more than one use.

With one foot she pushed the limp body over the edge of the branch. It rolled messily, then dropped. Its old wizened wings tucked uselessly about its head, the flyman fell to the green.

IV

They lay among the sharp leaves of two whistlethistle plants, dazed by the bright sun but alert for new dangers. Their climb had been completed. Now the nine children saw the Tips for the first time—and were struck mute by it.

Once more Lily-yo and Flor lay siege to a burnurn, with Daphe helping them. As the plant slumped defencelessly in the shadow of their upheld leaves, Daphe severed six of the great transparent pods that were to be their coffins. Hy helped her carry them to safety, after which Lily-yo and Flor dropped their leaves and ran for the shelter of the whistlethistles.

A cloud of paperwings drifted by, their colours startling to eyes generally submerged in green: sky blues and yellows and bronzes and a viridian that flashed like water.

One of the paperwings alighted fluttering on a tuft of emerald foliage near the watchers. The foliage was a dripperlip. Almost at once the paperwing turned grey as its small nourishment content was sucked out. It disintegrated like ash.

Rising cautiously, Lily-yo led the group over to the nearest cable of traverser web. Each adult carried her own urn.

The traversers, largest of all creatures, vegetable or otherwise, could never go into the forest.

They spurted out their line among the upper branches, securing it with side strands.

Finding a suitable cable with no traverser in sight, Lily-yo turned, signalling for the urns to be put down. She spoke to Toy, Gren, and the seven other children.

"Now help us climb with our souls into our burnurns. See us tight in. Then carry us to the cable and stick up to it. Then good-bye. We Go Up. You are the group now."

Toy momentarily hesitated. She was a slender girl, her breasts like pearfruit.

"Do not go, Lily-yo," she said. "We still need you."

"It is the way," Lily-yo said firmly.

Prizing open one of the facets of her urn, she slid into her coffin. Helped by the children, the other adults did the same. From habit, Lily-yo glanced to see that Haris was safe.

They were all in now, and helpless. Inside the urns it was surprisingly cool.

The children carried the coffins between them, glancing nervously up at the sky meanwhile. They were afraid. They felt helpless. Only the bold man child Gren looked as if he was enjoying their new sense of independence. He more than Toy directed the others in the placing of the urns upon the traverser's cable.

Lily-yo smelt a curious smell in the urn. As it soaked through her lungs, her senses became detached. Outside, the scene which had been clear clouded and shrank. She saw she hung suspended on a traverser cable above the tree tops, with Flor, Haris, Daphe, Hy and Jury in other urns nearby, hanging helplessly. She saw the children, the new group, run to shelter. Without looking back, they dived into the muddle of foliage on the platform and disappeared.

The traverser hung ten and a half miles above the Tops, safe from its enemies. All about it, space was indigo, and the invisible rays of space bathed it and nourished it. Yet the traverser was still dependent on Earth for some food. After many hours of vegetative dreaming, it swung itself over and climbed down a cable.

Other traversers hung motionless nearby. Occasionally one would blow a globe of oxygen or hitch a leg to try and dislodge a troublesome parasite. Theirs was a leisureliness never attained before. Time was not for them; the sun was theirs, and would ever be until it became unstable, turned nova, and burnt both them and itself out.

The traverser fell fast, its feet twinkling, hardly touching the cable, fell straight to the forest, plunging towards the leafy cathedrals of the forest. Here in the air

lived its enemies, enemies many times smaller, many times more vicious, many times more clever. Traversers were prey to one of the last families of insect, the tigerflies.

Only tigerflies could kill traversers—kill in their own insidious, invincible way.

Over the long slow eons as the sun's radiation increased, vegetation had evolved to undisputed supremacy. The wasps had developed too, keeping pace with the new developments. They grew in numbers and size as the animal kingdom fell into eclipse and dwindled into the rising tide of green. In time they became the chief enemies of the spider-like traversers. Attacking in packs, they could paralyse the primitive nerve centres, leaving the traversers to stagger to their own destruction. The tigerflies also laid their eggs in tunnels bored into the stuff of their enemies' bodies; when the eggs hatched, the larvae fed happily on living flesh.

This threat it was, more than anything, that had driven the traversers further and further into space many millenia past. In this seemingly inhospitable region, they reached their full and monstrous flowering.

Hard radiation became a necessity for them. Nature's first astronauts, they changed the face of the firmament. Long after man had rolled up his affairs and retired to the trees from whence he came, the traversers reconquered that vacant pathway he had lost. Long after intelligence had died from its peak of dominance, the traversers linked indissolubly the green globe and the white—with that antique symbol of neglect, a spider's web.

The traverser scrambled down among the upper leaves, erecting the hairs on its back, where patchy green and black afforded it natural camouflage. On its way down it had collected several creatures caught fluttering in its cables. It sucked them peacefully. When the soupy noises stopped, it vegetated.

Buzzing roused it from its doze. Yellow and black stripes zoomed before its crude eyes. A pair of tigerflies had found it.

With great alacrity, the traverser moved. Its massive bulk, contracted in the atmosphere, had an overall length of over a mile, yet it moved lightly as pollen, scuttling up a cable back to the safety of vacuum.

As it retreated, its legs brushing the web, it picked up various spores, burrs, and tiny creatures that adhered there. It also picked up six burnurns, each containing an insensible human, which swung unregarded from its shin.

Several miles up, the traverser paused. Recovering from its fright, it ejected a globe of oxygen, attaching it gently to a cable. It paused. Its palps trembled. Then it headed out towards deep space,

expanding all the time as pressure dropped.

Its speed increased. Folding its legs, the traverser began to eject fresh web from the spinnerets under its abdomen. So it propelled itself, a vast vegetable almost without feeling, rotating slowly to stabilise its temperature.

Hard radiations bathed it. The traverser basked in them. It was in its element.

Daphe roused. She opened her eyes, gazing without intelligence. What she saw had no meaning. She only knew she had Gone Up. This was a new existence and she did not expect it to have meaning.

Part of the view from her urn was eclipsed by stiff yellowy whisps that might have been hair or straw. Everything else was uncertain, being washed either in blinding light or deep shadow. Light and shadow revolved.

Gradually Daphe identified other objects. Most notable was a splendid green half-ball mottled with white and blue. Was it a fruit? To it trailed cables, glinting here and there, many cables, silver or gold in the crazy light. Two traversers she recognised at some distance, travelling fast, looking mummified. Bright points of lights sparkled painfully. All was confusion.

This was where gods lived.

Daphe had no feeling. A curious numbness kept her without motion or the wish to move. The smell in the urn was strange. Also the air seemed thick. Everything was like an evil dream. Daphe opened her mouth, her jaw sticky and slow to respond. She screamed. No sound came. Pain filled her. Her sides in particular ached.

Even when her eyes closed again, her mouth hung open.

Like a great shaggy balloon, the traverser floated down to the moon.

It could hardly be said to think, being a mechanism or little more. Yet somewhere in it the notion stirred that its pleasant journey was too brief, that there might be other directions in which to sail. After all, the hated tigerflies were almost as many now, and as troublesome, on the moon as on the earth. Perhaps somewhere there might be a peaceful place, another of these half-round places with green stuff, in the middle of warm delicious rays. . . .

Perhaps some time it might be worth sailing off on a full belly and a new course. . . .

Many traversers hung above the moon. Their nets straggled untidily everywhere. This was their happy base, better liked than the earth, where the air was thick and their limbs were clumsy. This was the place they had discovered first —except for some puny creatures who had been long gone before they arrived. They were the last

lords of creation. Largest and lordliest, they enjoyed their long lazy afternoon's supremacy.

The traverser slowed, spinning out no more cable. In leisurely fashion, it picked its way through a web and drifted down to the pallid vegetation of the moon. . . .

Here were conditions very unlike those on the heavy planet. The many-trunked banyans had never gained supremacy here; in the thin air and low gravity they outgrew their strength and collapsed. In their place, monstrous celeries and parsleys grew, and it was into a bed of these that the traverser settled. Hissing from its exertions, it blew off a great cloud of oxygen and relaxed.

As it settled down into the foliage, its great sack of body rubbed against the stems. Its legs too scraped into the mass of leaves. From legs and body a shower of light debris was dislodged—burrs, seeds, grit, nuts, and leaves caught up in its sticky fibres back on distant earth. Among this detritus were six seed casings from a burnurn plant. They rolled over the ground and came to a standstill.

Haris the man was the first to awaken. Groaning with an unexpected pain in his sides, he tried to sit up. Pressure on his forehead reminded him of where he was. Doubling up knees and arms, he pushed against the lid of his coffin.

Momentarily, it resisted him. Then the whole urn crumbled into pieces, sending Haris sprawling. The rigours of total vacuum had destroyed its cohesive powers.

Unable to pick himself up, Haris lay where he was. His head throbbed, his lungs were full of an unpleasant odour. Eagerly he gasped in fresh air. At first it seemed thin and chill, yet he sucked it in with gratitude.

After a while, he was well enough to look about him.

Long yellow tendrils were stretching out of a nearby thicket, working their way gingerly towards him. Alarmed, he looked about for a woman to protect him. None was there. Stiffly, his arms so stiff, he pulled his knife from his belt, rolled over on one side, and lopped the tendrils off as they reached him. This was an easy enemy!

Haris cried. He screamed. He jumped unsteadily to his feet, yelling in disgust at himself. Suddenly he had noticed he was covered in scabs. Worse, as his clothes fell in shreds from him, he saw that a mass of leathery flesh grew from his arms, his ribs, his legs. When he lifted his arms, the mass stretched out almost like wings. He was spoilt, his handsome body ruined.

A sound made him turn, and for the first time he remembered his fellows. Lily-yo was struggling from the remains of her burnurn. She raised a hand in greeting.

To his horror, Haris saw that

she bore disfigurements like his own. In truth, at first he scarcely recognised her. She resembled nothing so much as one of the hated flymen. He flung himself to the ground and wept as his heart expanded in fear and loathing.

Lily-yo was not born to weep. Disregarding her own painful deformities, breathing laboriously, she cast about, seeking the other four coffins.

Flor's was the first she found, half buried though it was. A blow with a stone shattered it. Lily-yo lifted up her friend, as hideously transformed as she, and in a short while Flor roused. Inhaling the strange air raucously, she too sat up. Lily-yo left her to seek the others. Even in her dazed state, she thanked her aching limbs for feeling so light.

Daphe was dead. She lay stiff and purple in her urn. Though Lily-yo shattered it and called aloud, Daphe did not stir. Her swollen tongue stayed dreadfully protruding from her mouth. Daphe was dead, Daphe who had lived, Daphe who had been the sweet singer.

Hy also was dead, a poor shrivelled thing lying in a coffin that had cracked on its arduous journey between the two worlds. When that coffin shattered under Lily-yo's blow, Hy fell away to powder. Hy was dead. Hy who had born a man child. Hy always so fleet of foot.

Jury's urn was the last. She stirred as the headwoman reached her. A minute later, she was sitting up, eying her deformities with a stoical distaste, breathing the sharp air. Jury lived.

Haris staggered over to the women. In his hand he carried his soul.

"Four of us!" he exclaimed. "Have we been received by the gods or no?"

"We feel pain—so we live," Lily-yo said. "Daphe and Hy have fallen to the green."

Bitterly, Haris flung down his soul and trampled it underfoot.

"Look at us! Better be dead!" he said.

"Before we decide that, we will eat," said Lily-yo.

Painfully, they retreated into the thicket, alerting themselves once more to the idea of danger. Flor, Lily-yo, Jury, Haris, each supported the other. The idea of tabu had somehow been forgotten.

V

"No proper trees grow here," Flor protested, as they pushed among giant celeries whose crests waved high above their heads.

"Take care!" Lily-yo said. She pulled Flor back. Something rattled and snapped like a chained dog, missing Flor's leg by inches.

A trappersnapper, having missed its prey, was slowly reopening its jaws, baring its green teeth. This

one was only a shadow of the terrible trappersnappers spawned on the jungle floors of earth. Its jaws were weaker, its movements far more circumscribed. Without the shelter of the giant banyans, the trappersnappers were disinherited.

Something of the same feeling overcame the humans. They and their ancestors for countless generations had lived in the high trees. Safety was arboreal. Here there were only celery and parsley trees, offering neither the rock-steadiness nor the unlimited boughs of the giant banyan.

So they journeyed, nervous, lost, in pain, knowing neither where they were nor why they were.

They were attacked by leapy-creepers and sawthorns, and beat them down. They skirted a thicket of nettlemoss taller and wider than any to be met with on earth. Conditions that worked against one group of vegetation favoured others. They climbed a slope and came on a pool fed by a stream. Over the pool hung berries and fruits, sweet to taste, good to eat.

"This is not so bad," Haris said. "Perhaps we can still live."

Lily-yo smiled at him. He was the most trouble, the most lazy; yet she was glad he was still here. When they bathed in the pool, she looked at him again. For all the strange scales that covered him, and the two broad sweeps of flesh that hung by his side, he was still good to look on just because he was Haris. She hoped she was also comely. With a burr she raked her hair back; only a little of it fell out.

When they had bathed, they ate. Haris worked then, collecting fresh knives from the bramble bushes. They were not as tough as the ones on earth, but they would have to do. Then they rested in the sun.

The pattern of their lives was completely broken. More by instinct than intelligence they had lived. Without the group, without the tree, without the earth, no pattern guided them. What was the way or what was not became unclear. So they lay where they were and rested.

As she lay there, Lily-yo looked about her. All was strange, so that her heart beat faintly.

Though the sun shone bright as ever, the sky was as deep blue as a vandalberry. And the half-globe in the sky was monstrous, all streaked with green and blue and white, so that Lily-yo could not know it for somewhere she had lived. Phantom silver lines pointed to it, while nearer at hand the tracery of traverser webs glittered, veining the whole sky. Traversers moved over it like clouds, their great bodies slack.

All this was their empire, their creation. On their first journeys here, many millenia ago, they had literally laid the seeds of this

world. To begin with, they had withered and died by the thousand on the inhospitable ash. But even the dead had brought their little legacies of oxygen, soil, spores, and seed, some of which later sprouted on the fruitful corpses. Under the weight of dozing centuries, they gained a sort of foothold.

They grew. Stunted and ailing in the beginning, they grew. With vegetal tenacity, they grew. They exhaled. They spread. They thrived. Slowly the broken wastes of the moon's lit face turned green. In the craters creepers grew. Up the ravaged slopes the parsleys crawled. As the atmosphere deepened, so the magic of life intensified, its rhythm strengthened, its tempo increased. More thoroughly than another dominant species had once managed to do, the traversers colonised the moon.

Lily-yo could know or care little about any of this. She turned her face from the sky.

Flor had crawled over to Haris the man. She lay against him in the circle of his arms, half under the shelter of his new skin, and she stroked his hair.

Furious, Lily-yo jumped up, kicked Flor on the shin, and then flung herself upon her, using teeth and nails to pull her away. Jury ran to join in.

"This is not time for mating!" Lily-yo cried.

"Let me *go!*" cried Flor.

Haris in his startlement jumped up. He stretched his arms, waved them, and rose effortlessly into the air.

"Look!" he shouted in alarmed delight.

Over their heads he circled once, perilously. Then he lost his balance and came sprawling head first, mouth open in fright. Head first he pitched into the pool.

Three anxious, awe-struck, love-struck female humans dived after him in unison.

While they were drying themselves, they heard noises in the forest. At once they became alert, their old selves. They drew their new swords and looked to the thicket.

The wiltmilt when it appeared was not like its Earthly brothers. No longer upright like a jack-in-the-box, it groped its way along like a caterpillar.

The humans saw its distorted eye peak from the celeries. Then they turned and fled.

Even when the danger was left behind, they moved rapidly, not knowing what they sought. Once they slept, ate, and then again pressed on through the unending growth, the undying daylight, until they came to where the jungle gaped.

Ahead of them, everything seemed to cease and then go on again.

Cautiously they approached. The ground underfoot had been badly uneven. Now it broke altogether into a wide crevasse. Beyond the crevasse the vegetation grew again—but how did humans pass the gulf? The four of them stood anxiously where the ferns ended, looking across at the far side.

Haris the man screwed his face in pain to show he had a troublesome idea in his head.

"What I did before—going up in the air," he began awkwardly. "If we do it again now, all of us, we go in the air across to the other side."

"No!" Lily-yo said. "When you go up you come down hard. You will fall to the green!"

"I will do better than before."

"No!" repeated Lily-yo. "You are not to go."

"Let him go," Flor said.

The two women turned to glare at each other. Taking his chance, Haris raised his arms, waved them, rose slightly from the ground, and began to use his legs too. He moved forward over the crevasse before his nerve broke.

As he fluttered down, Flor and Lily-yo, moved by instinct, dived into the gulf after him. Spreading their arms, they glided about him, shouting. Jury remained behind, crying in baffled anger down to them.

Regaining a little control, Haris landed heavily on an outcropping ledge. The two women alighted chattering and scolding beside him. They looked up. Two lips fringed with green fern sucked a narrow purple segment of sky. Jury could not be seen, though her cries still echoed down to them.

Behind the ledge on which they stood a tunnel ran into the cliff. All the rock face was peppered with similar holes, so that it resembled a sponge. From the hole behind the ledge ran three flymen, two male and one female. They rushed out with ropes and spears.

Flor and Lily-yo were bending over Haris. Before they had time to recover, they were knocked sprawling and tied with the ropes. Helpless, Lily-yo saw other flymen launch themselves from other holes and come gliding in to help secure them. Their flight seemed more sure, more graceful, than it had on earth. Perhaps the way humans were lighter here had something to do with it.

"Bring them in!" the flymen cried to each other. Their sharp, clever faces jostled round eagerly as they hoisted up their captives and bore them into the tunnel.

In their alarm, Lily-yo, Flor and Haris forgot about Jury, still crouching on the lip of the crevasse. They never saw her again. A pack of thinpins got her.

The tunnel sloped gently down. Finally it curved and led into another which ran level and true.

This in its turn led into an immense cavern with regular sides and a regular roof. Grey daylight flooded in at one end, for the cavern stood at the bottom of the crevasse.

To the middle of this cavern the three captives were brought. Their knives were taken from them and they were released. As they huddled together uneasily, one of the flymen stood forward and spoke.

"We will not harm you unless we must," he said. "You come by traverser from the Heavy World. You are new here. When you learn our ways, you will join us."

"I am Lily-yo," Lily-yo proudly said. "Let me go. We three are humans. You are flymen."

"Yes, you are humans, we are flymen. Also we are humans, you are flymen. Now you know nothing. Soon you will know, when you have seen the Captives. They will tell you many things."

"I am Lily-yo. I know many things."

"The Captives will tell you many more things."

"If there were many more things, then I should know them."

"I am Band Appa Bondi and I say come to see the Captives. Your talk is stupid Heavy World talk, Lily-yo."

Several flymen began to look aggressive, so that Haris nudged Lily-yo and muttered, "Let us do what he asks."

Grumpily, Lily-yo let herself and her two companions be led to another chamber. This one was partially ruined, and stank. At the far end of it, a fall of cindery rock marked where the roof had fallen in, while a shaft of the unremitting sunlight burnt on the floor, sending up a curtain of golden light about itself. Near this light were the Captives.

"Do not fear to see them. They will not harm you," Band Appa Bondi said, going forward.

The encouragement was needed, for the Captives were not prepossessing.

Eight of them there were, eight Captives, kept in eight great burnurns big enough to serve them as narrow cells. The cells stood grouped in a semicircle. Band Appa Bondi led Lily-yo, Flor and Haris into the middle of this semicircle, where they could survey and be surveyed.

The Captives were painful to look on. All had some kind of deformity. One had no legs. One had no flesh on his lower jaw. One had four gnarled dwarf arms. One had short wings of flesh connecting ear lobes and thumbs, so that he lived perpetually with hands half raised to his face. One had boneless arms trailing at his side and one boneless leg. One had monstrous wings which trailed about him like carpet. One was hiding his ill-shaped form away behind a screen of his own excre-

ment, smearing it onto the transparent walls of his cell. And one had a second head, a small wizened thing growing from the first that fixed Lily-yo with a malevolent eye. This last captive, who seemed to lead the others, spoke now, using the mouth of his main head.

"I am the Chief Captive. I greet you. You are of the Heavy World. We are of the True World. Now you join us because you are of us. Though your wings and your scars are new, you may join us."

"I am Lily-yo. We three are humans. You are only flymen. We will not join you."

The Captives grunted in boredom. The Chief Captive spoke again.

"Always this talk from you of the Heavy World! You *have* joined us! You are flymen, we are human. You know little, we know much."

"But we—"

"Stop your stupid talk, woman!"

"We are—"

"Be silent, woman, and listen," Band Appa Bondi said.

"We know much," repeated the Chief Captive. "Some things we will tell you. All who make the journey from the Heavy World become changed. Some die. Most live and grow wings. Between the worlds are many strong rays, not seen or felt, which change our bodies. When you come here, when you come to the True World, you become a true human. The grub of the tigerfly is not a tigerfly until it changes. So humans change."

"I cannot know what he says," Haris said stubbornly, throwing himself down. But Lily-yo and Flor were listening.

"To this True World, as you call it, we come to die," Lily-yo said, doubtingly.

The Captive with the fleshless jaw said, "The grub of the tigerfly thinks it dies when it changes into a tigerfly."

"You are still young," said the Chief Captive. "You begin newly here. Where are your souls?"

Lily-yo and Flor looked at each other. In their flight from the wiltmilt they had heedlessly thrown down their souls. Haris had trampled on his. It was unthinkable!

"You see. You needed them no more. You are still young. You may be able to have babies. Some of those babies may be born with wings."

The Captive with the boneless arms added, "Some may be born wrong, as we are. Some may be born right."

"You are too foul to live!" Haris growled. "Why are you not killed?"

"Because we know all things," the Chief Captive said. Suddenly his second head roused itself and declared, "To be a good shape is not all in life. To know is also

good. Because we cannot move well we can—*think*. This tribe of the True World is good and knows these things. So it lets us rule it."

Flor and Lily-yo muttered together.

"Do you say that you poor Captives *rule* the True World?" Lily-yo asked at last.

"We do."

"Then why are you captives?"

The flyman with ear lobes and thumbs connected, making his perpetual little gesture of protest, spoke for the first time.

"To rule is to serve, woman. Those who bear power are slaves to it. Only an outcast is free. Because we are Captives, we have the time to talk and think and plan and know. Those who know command the knives of others."

"No hurt will come to you, Lily-yo," Band Appa Bondi added. "You will live among us and enjoy your life free from harm."

"No!" the Chief Captive said with both mouths. "Before she can enjoy, Lily-yo and her companion Flor—this other man creature is plainly useless—must help our great plan."

"The invasion?" Bondi asked.

"What else? Flor and Lily-yo, you arrive here at a good time. Memories of the Heavy World and its savage life are still fresh in you. We need such memories. So we ask you to go back there on a great plan we have."

"Go back?" gasped Flor.

"Yes. We plan to attack the Heavy World. You must help to lead our force."

VI

The long afternoon of eternity wore on, that long golden road of an afternoon that would somewhen lead to everlasting night. Motion there was, but motion without event—except for those negligible events that seemed so large to the creatures participating in them.

For Lily-yo, Flor and Haris there were many events. Chief of these was that they learned to fly properly.

The pains associated with their wings soon died away as the wonderful new flesh and tendon strengthened. To sail up in the light gravity became an increasing delight—the ugly flopping movements of flymen on the Heavy World had no place here.

They learned to fly in packs, and then to hunt in packs. In time they were trained to carry out the Captives' plan.

The series of accidents that had first delivered humans to this world in burnurns had been a fortunate one, growing more fortunate as millennia tolled away. For gradually the humans adapted better to the True World. Their survival factor became greater, their power surer. And all this as

on the Heavy World conditions grew more and more adverse to anything but the giant vegetables.

Lily-yo at least was quick to see how much easier life was in these new conditions. She sat with Flor and a dozen others eating pulped pluggyrug, before they did the Captives' bidding and left for the Heavy World.

It was hard to express all she felt.

"Here we are safe," she said, indicating the whole green land that sweltered under the silver network of webs.

"Except from the tigerflies," Flor agreed.

They rested on a bare peak, where the air was thin and even the giant creepers had not climbed. The turbulent green stretched away below them, almost as if they were on Earth—although here it was continually checked by the circular formations of rock.

"This world is smaller," Lily-yo said, trying again to make Flor know what was in her head. "Here we are bigger. We do not need to fight so much."

"Soon we must fight."

"Then we can come back here again. This is a good place, with nothing so savage and with not so many enemies. Here the groups could live without so much fear. Veggy and Toy and May and Gren and the other little ones would like it here."

"They would miss the trees."

"We shall soon miss the trees no longer. We have wings instead."

This idle talk took place beneath the unmoving shadow of a rock. Overhead, silver blobs against a purple sky, the transversers went, walking their networks, descending only occasionally to the celeries far below. As Lily-yo fell to watching these creatures, she thought in her mind of the grand plan the Captives had hatched, she flicked it over in a series of vivid pictures.

Yes, the Captives knew. They could see ahead as she could not. She and those about her had lived like plants, doing what came. The Captives were not plants. From their cells they saw more than those outside.

This, the Captives saw: that the few humans who reached the True World bore few children, because they were old, or because the rays that made their wings grow made their seed die; that it was good here, and would be better still with more humans; that one way to get more humans here was to bring babies and children from the Heavy World.

For countless time, this had been done. Brave flymen had travelled back to that other world and stolen children. The flymen who had once attacked Lily-yo's group on their climb to the Tips had been on that mission. They had taken Bain to bring her to the

True World in burnurns—and had not been heard of since.

Many perils and mischances lay in that long double journey. Of those who set out, few returned.

Now the Captives had thought of a better and more daring scheme.

"Here comes a traverser," Band Appa Bondi said. "Let us be ready to move."

He walked before the pack of twelve flyers who had been chosen for this new attempt. He was the leader. Lily-yo, Flor, and Haris were in support of him, together with eight others, three male, five female. Only one of them, Band Appa Bondi himself, had been carried to the True World as a boy.

Slowly the pack stood up, stretching their wings. The moment for their great adventure was here. Yet they felt little fear; they could not look ahead as the Captives did, except perhaps for Band Appa Bondi and Lily-yo. She strengthened her will by saying, "It is the way." Then they all spread their arms wide and soared off to meet the traverser.

The traverser had eaten.

It had caught one of its most tasty enemies, a tigerfly, in a web, and had sucked it till only a shell was left. Now it sank down into a bed of celeries, crushing them under its great bulk. Gently, it began to bud. Afterwards, it would head out for the great black gulfs, where heat and radiance called it. It had been born on this world. Being young, it had never yet made that dreaded, desired journey.

Its buds burst up from its back, hung over, popped, fell to the ground, and scurried away to bury themselves in the pulp and dirt where they might begin their ten thousand years' growth in peace.

Young though it was, the traverser was sick. It did not know this. The enemy tigerfly had been at it, but it did not know this. Its vast bulk held little sensation.

The twelve humans glided down and landed on its back, low down on the abdomen in a position hidden from the creature's cluster of eyes. They sank among the tough shoulder-high fibres that served the traverser as hair, and looked about them. A rayplane swooped overhead and disappeared. A trio of tumbleweeds skittered into the fibres and were seen no more. All was as quiet as if they lay on a small deserted hill.

At length they spread out and moved along in line, heads down, eyes searching, Band Appa Bondi at one end, Lily-yo at the other. The great body was streaked and pitted and scarred, so that progress down the slope was not easy. The fibre grew in patterns of different shades, green, yellow, black, breaking up the traverser's bulk when

seen from the air, serving it as natural camouflage. In many places, tough parasitic plants had rooted themselves, drawing their nourishment entirely from their host; most of them would die when the traverser launched itself out between worlds.

The humans worked hard. Once they were thrown flat when the traverser changed position. As the slope down which they moved grew steeper, so progress became more slow.

"Here!" cried Y Coyin, one of the women.

At last they had found what they sought, what the Captives sent them to seek.

Clustering round Y Coyin with their knives out, the pack looked down.

Here the fibres had been neatly champed away in swathes, leaving a bare patch as far across as a human was long. In this patch was a round scab. Lily-yo felt it. It was immensely hard.

Lo Jint put his ear to it. Silence.

They looked at each other.

No signal was needed, none given.

Together they knelt, prizing with their knives round the scab. Once the traverser moved, and they threw themselves flat. A bud rose nearby, popped, rolled down the slope and fell to the distant ground. A thinpin devoured it as it ran. The humans continued prising.

The scab moved. They lifted it off. A dark and sticky tunnel was revealed to them.

"I go first," Band Appa Bondi said.

He lowered himself into the hole. The others followed. Dark sky showed roundly above them until the twelfth human was in the tunnel. Then the scab was drawn back into place. A soft slobber of sound came from it, as it began to heal back into position again.

They crouched where they were for a long time. They crouched, their knives ready, their wings folded round them, their human hearts beating strongly.

In more than one sense they were in enemy territory. At the best of times, traversers were only allies by accident; they ate humans as readily as they devoured anything else. But this burrow was the work of that yellow and black destroyer, the tigerfly. One of the last true insects to survive, the tough and resourceful tigerflies had instinctively made the most invincible of all living things its prey.

The female tigerfly alights and bores her tunnel into the traverser. Working her way down, she at last stops and prepares a natal chamber, hollowing it from the living traverser, paralysing the matter with her needletail to prevent it healing again. There she lays her store of eggs before climbing

back to daylight. When the eggs hatch, the larvae have fresh and living stuff to nourish them.

After a while, Band Appa Bondi gave a sign and the pack moved forward, climbing awkwardly down the tunnel. A faint luminescence guided their eyes. The air lay heavy and green in their chests. They moved very slowly, very quietly, for they heard movement ahead.

Suddenly the movement was on them.

"Look out!" Band Appa Bondi cried.

From the terrible dark, something launched itself at them.

Before they realised it, the tunnel had curved and widened into the natal chamber. The tigerfly's eggs had hatched. Two hundred larvae with jaws as wide as a man's reach turned on the intruders, snapping in fury and fear.

Even as Band Appa Bondi sliced his first attacker, another had his head off. He fell, and his companions launched themselves over him. Pressing forward, they dodged those clicking jaws.

Behind their hard heads, the larvae were soft and plump. One slash of a sword and they burst, their entrails flowing out. They fought, but knew not how to fight. Savagely the humans stabbed, ducked and stabbed. No other human died. With backs to the wall they cut and thrust, breaking jaws, ripping flimsy stomachs. They killed unceasingly with neither hate nor mercy until they stood knee deep in slush. The larvae snapped and writhed and died. Uttering a grunt of satisfaction, Haris slew the last of them.

Wearily then, eleven humans crawled back to the tunnel, there to wait until the mess drained away—and then to wait a longer while.

The traverser stirred in its bed of celeries. Vague impulses drifted through its being. Things it had done. Things it had to do. The things it had done had been done, the things it had to do were still to do. Blowing off oxygen, it heaved itself up.

Slowly at first, it swung up a cable, climbing to the network where the air thinned. Always, always before in the eternal afternoon it had stopped here. This time there seemed no reason for stopping. Air was nothing, heat was all, the heat that blistered and prodded and chafed and coaxed increasingly with height.

. . .

It blew a jet of cable from a spinneret. Gaining speed, gaining intention, it rocketed its mighty vegetable self out and away from the place where the tigerflies flew. Ahead of it floated a semicircle of light, white and blue and green, that was a useful thing to look at to avoid getting lost.

For this was a lonely place for

a young traverser, a terrible-wonderful bright-dark place, so full of nothing. Turn as you speed and you fry well on all sides . . . nothing to trouble you. . . .

. . . Except that deep in your core a little pack of humans use you as an ark for their own purposes. You carry them back to a world that once—so staggeringly long ago—belonged to their kind; you carry them back so that they may eventually—who knows?—fill another world with their own kind.

For remember, there is always plenty of time.

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Max Kearny, investigator of the occult, in the case of the night-walking model from Saint Paul . . .

TIME WAS

by Ron Goulart

IT WAS JUST THREE O'CLOCK and every stool along the coffee shop counter was filled. Max Kearny moved his cup to one side so he could rest his elbow while he talked to the tall girl next to him.

"It's just a hobby, Kate," he said.

Kate Chesterton tapped her finger on the handle of her tan coffee cup. "I know, Max. And I'm not sure if it's in your line anyway. I just have this odd feeling."

Nodding, Max said, "Well, I always like to listen."

"I don't think you've met my new room mate, Louise Esher. She's been up here about six months. A really cute girl from Southern California. Works as a secretary at Murphy and Associates."

"Not a bad agency."

"I hear they're pretty offbeat," said Kate, touching at a spot of coffee on the counter top. "I'm sure you know a lot more about occult matters than I do, Max. And maybe you'll say this isn't strange at all." A strand of her chestnut hair swung forward as she leaned toward Max. "Louise has done some amateur modeling off and on and she's kind of set on becoming a professional. She's only twenty three so maybe she still has a chance. Not really getting ahead too fast upsets her I know. The past couple of months she's been involved in something strange."

Max finished his coffee and lit a cigarette. "How so, Kate?"

"I broke up with Norm, you know," said Kate. "So I've been home a little more lately. Although I met a nice fellow who's a lawyer at a barbecue in Tiburon. Let's see now. About two months ago I was sitting up reading. On that rattan lounging chair we have, you know."

"I've never been in your new apartment, Kate. But go on." In the street outside a pretty girl in black went by with a little boy on a leash.

"I was reading the last Marquand and Louise came out of her

bedroom. I thought she'd turned in way earlier. But she was dressed and wearing her tan camel's hair coat. She walked right by me and out of the apartment. Without saying a thing."

"Was she sleep walking?"

"No, Max. Her eyes were wide open. Very wide in fact." Kate made a wide half circle with her fingers. "She came back about an hour later and went back into her room. I thought she'd just taken a walk. But I couldn't figure why she didn't say. Louise is sort of moody, but not particularly reticent. Anyway, I made up my mind to ask her just what was going on. But when I stuck my head in to ask she said she couldn't discuss it at the moment. I decided she must be meeting some married man or something and let it go at that."

Max caught the waitress' eye and pointed at his empty cup. "You don't think it's that anymore?"

"No. It's happened several times since, usually around the same hour. And that's not a particularly good hour for having an affair. As I say, I was home reading and working on my knit dress and catching up on my letter writing quite a bit since I broke up with Norm. That's why I've been able to keep track of Louise's little jaunts so well."

Max stirred sugar into his fresh coffee. "How many times has she done this, you say?"

"I don't know. A dozen or so. The thing is, Max, about the third time she came back she had something stuffed in her coat pocket. I happened to notice it. And, well, Louise always catches an earlier bus. So I looked. And that's when I decided something was a little strange."

"Why?" asked Max, playing straight man. "What did you find?"

"Once it was just a coil of rope. About the length of a jump rope I guess. And another time a handfull of little blue candles, birthday cake size. And a couple of weeks ago a funny little stuffed rag doll." Kate put her tanned fingers on Max's arm. "Does this all seem strange to you, Max?"

"Yeah. But maybe your room mate—Louise, is it?—maybe Louise is just a little eccentric." He watched three plump secretaries walk by arm in arm. "What gives you the idea this is in my line?"

"Don't you see it?" Kate sat up, disappointed. "Well, I'm certain Louise isn't crazy. I think she's fallen in with some kind of oddball cult. Candles, little rag images. It's voodoo, isn't it, Max?" Her fingers clutched tighter on his arm.

Max rubbed his crewcut for a moment. "Well, it might be."

"I got to thinking and I'm pretty sure it is, Max. Then I remembered that a girl over at your agency had told me you kind of dabbled in weird things and occult

stuff. So I decided to call you. Besides we haven't gotten together for a heck of a long time. Max, I am worried about Louise."

Lighting another cigarette, Max said, "Okay, Kate. I'll look into it."

"Now I know there's your fee," Kate said, smiling a little. "A fifth of Scotch, the girl said."

"Yeah. I don't like to charge money," he said, looking away. "Peter Dawson is the brand."

"Peter Dawson, okay." Kate caught the edge of her check and turned it over. "Why that particular brand?"

"It's the brand The Saint used to drink in all his books. It made an impression on me in high school I guess." Max took the check out of her hand and set it on top of his.

"Oh, listen. We're having a cocktail party Saturday and I want you to come. So you can meet Louise. It's a casual sort of party. Probably it would be better if you didn't have a date."

"Won't Louise have a date?"

"Yes, she will. But I thought that in case something strange should happen you'd want to be ready for action. Wouldn't have to worry about looking after a date."

"You expect something strange to happen?"

"You never know."

"Sure, Kate. I'll come alone then." He wasn't dating any one regularly, anyway.

"Good." She turned out of her chair and stood smiling at him.

Max walked Kate around the corner to her office and then cut through an alley to the advertising agency where he worked.

On the memo pad next to his drawing board he wrote. "Kate's Sat. Party. Might be case."

Max took his drink into a corner of the living room and leaned against the wall next to a shelf of ceramic and glass cats. He was thinking that maybe Kate Chesterton was a little too anxious to make sure her guests had fun. Inviting two banjo players and handing out mimeographed song sheets. Max frowned and reached a cigarette out of his side pocket.

Louise Esher, Kate's room mate, was a pretty blond girl, just a little shorter than Max. It was a good height for girls. Her date was named Chuck and worked for a paper-bag company across the bay.

One of the ceramic cats was actually a salt shaker and Max tried to count the holes in it. He knew it wasn't smart to watch Louise all the time.

"In *New Yorker* stories," someone said behind him," people stand around and take drinks from trays that men in white coats are always carrying by and they talk about books and plays and their servants and topics like that."

Smiling, Max turned to face Louise. "That's true."

"They don't have banjo players."

"Very seldom."

"You're Max, that friend of Kate's who's an art director."

Max nodded. "You weren't here when I was introduced around."

"I was having dinner with Chuck." She tilted her head toward the tall guy standing close to the lead banjo. "He's in the paper business."

"I know. I met him in the kitchen."

"Did he say, 'My name's Chuck Lunceford and I'm in paper bags' and then laugh?"

"No, he kept a straight face and I laughed. I'm good with people." Max was studying her closely, trying to detect some mannerism or sign that would tell him she was involved in something occult.

"We had dinner in a place that's made to look like a grape arbor and they have community singing. Is something wrong?"

"No. I had a feeling I'd seen your picture someplace."

"Not much chance of that. I had my picture in the papers in Southern California off and on in college. We'd have fashion shows in my house and I'd always model. I want to go into that line of work. Modeling."

"It's a tough racket," said Max, using one of his favorite clichés.

"I know. I'm attending classes at this modeling school operated by a former WAC Colonel. But I don't seem to be getting any place."

"It takes time," said Max. He had all sorts of advice like this.

Louise frowned at him. "You're kidding, aren't you?"

"Yeah. But most of what you can tell anybody about any field sounds phoney."

"That's true." She glanced toward the singers. "Chuck's catching up now. I didn't let him sing at the restaurant. I told him it wasn't polite to sing with your mouth full. I let him tap time with his fork, but that was it."

"You're kidding now?"

"No," Louise said. "You know what I hate?"

Max noticed that it had started to rain and that the window next to them was being hit softly with rain drops. "No, what?"

"Being nowhere. Being nobody. I'm twenty three and I'm nothing."

"That's a lot of negatives, all right. If things aren't any better when you're twenty four you'd better shoot yourself."

"Why wait so long? Are you drinking the punch?"

"No. This is scotch."

"Good. Would you fix me a drink, too. I'll be out on our sun deck. The terrace as Kate calls it."

Max smiled and pushed his way into the kitchen.

Perhaps it was just as well he wasn't a professional supernatural investigator. He had a tendency to get involved with the people in his cases. He had an opportunity to question Louise now. He found,

though, that he was starting to like her.

Louise had her arms folded across her stomach and was huddled under a battered canvas awning on the narrow wood sun deck. Everyone else was inside singing. The rain was still light.

"I grew up in St. Paul, Minnesota, you know," Louise said, taking her drink.

"No, I didn't know. It doesn't show."

"And I thought everything was going to be great. But it hasn't turned out that way so far."

The singing trailed off and stopped. Max stood quietly and watched the girl.

"I'd better go find Chuck," Louise said. "And I'm co-hostess, too. I have to be kind to everyone." She touched Max' arm briefly and went away.

About eleven thirty Kate came over to the bucket chair Max was sitting in. She knelt and said, close to his ear, "Louise just left. You ought to follow her, huh?"

"How about Chuck?"

"He's asleep against the ice box." Kate squeezed his shoulder. "Will you?"

Standing, Max said, "Sure." He said goodnight to the people he'd been talking to, got his raincoat and left. It hadn't been much of a party anyway.

Rain was coming heavier now and the street was slick black. A block away, to Max' left, Louise was walking slowly uphill. She had both hands jammed down in the pockets of her tan coat. The end of her black head-scarf fluttered over her upturned collar.

Max' Ford was parked around the corner and he ran down to it. He didn't know how far the girl was going and he didn't have a hat.

He got water splashed into his shoe jumping from the curb to his car. His windshield wipers made an odd creaking sound as he started after Louise.

She walked three blocks uphill and then turned off. When Max got to the corner he saw she was going up the steps of a dark wooden house that sat back from the street. Making the turn he squinted at the street sign. Norton Way, the 1900 block. He began looking for a parking place.

Either they were having several parties on this block tonight or everybody was staying home. Whichever it was, there weren't any parking spaces. Max found one, part driveway, two blocks from the house.

The top button on his rain coat had fallen off and rain got in and splashed the knot in his tie. The house Louise had gone into was two-storied and looked like a lot of San Francisco's pre-quake houses. Mansard roof and all sorts of gingerbread. It had a wrought iron fence around its shrub filled yard.

Walking slowly by the house

Max saw the weathered sign wired to the gate. For Lease. Nobody was living here. But in the room next to the wide deep doorway there were lights.

Hoping to miss any dogs that were around, Max cut into an alley made by hedges and the side of the next house. When he was up to the lighted room he pushed through the hedge, scattering raindrops.

He stopped still on the high grass and grimaced as the rain came down hard on his bare head. Apparently both his shoes leaked.

There was a stone bench in a bed of dead flowers. By standing on it Max could bring his head up near one of the side windows of the room he assumed Louise had gone into.

He hoped she wasn't just meeting some guy. Listening to somebody else's love scenes wasn't much fun, even on good days. Max turned his collar up and got as close to the window as he could. A cream-colored shade cut off any view. But over the rain he could hear something. A thumping sound.

Not too much like a voodoo drum, though. More like a ball bouncing. That stopped after ten minutes. The rain was slackening and a sharp wind was coming up. Max bent for a moment, to keep his legs from going to sleep, and then pressed up against the house again.

Some one was talking now. A man. Then there was the sound of an airplane coming in for a landing. Max blinked. Why in the hell come all this way to watch TV. As the rain faded Max could make out what the man was saying.

". . . our friends, listeners, they were somewhere over Brazil . . . Tommy knows Fury has the secret . . . wants his daughter back at all cost . . . the security of the country . . . let's listen."

Not TV then. Just a radio program. Kate and Louise had a radio on the kitchen table. Louise could have listened to the show right there and not bothered anyone, except Chuck and he was asleep.

"I don't like the looks of those monoplanes, Tommy."

"Right, Chet. That skull and crossbones insignia could mean trouble."

"You think they're in Fury's pay?"

"These are troubled times, Chet. You never know what kind of sky pirates you're going to run into. Let's hi-tail it to Uncle Jerry's hidden mountain airport."

There was something familiar about the program. Was it on one of the local stations? You didn't get dramatic shows on radio much anymore, especially at this time of night.

"You believe then, Uncle Jerry, that Von Himmelstoss is in the pay of a foreign power?"

"I'm sure of it, Tommy."

Von Himmelstoss. That was a funny name for a Russian. Then Max realized what he was hearing. Airdevil Tommy. It was an adventure serial he'd heard faithfully when he was in grammar school. The show had gone off the air sometime during World War II. And it had been on at 5:00 or 5:15.

Maybe some disc jockey had acetates of the old shows and was playing them for a gag. Or maybe Louise had some recordings and had come here to use a friend's phonograph. No, she hadn't had anything with her.

"Tomorrow, same time, same station. This is the blue network."

The lights beyond the window went out and then Max heard Louise's footsteps on the porch. Gravel crunched and then a gate closed.

Max waited nearly five minutes and then dropped from the stone bench edged around the house and up to the door. There was a big No Trespassing sign tacked to it.

Max turned the brass knob and the door gave. In the black hallway Max held his breath, listening. After a moment he clicked on his lighter. The dust he'd disturbed was settling again. On the flowered hall runner he saw faint prints of Louise's shoes. He moved carefully to a curtained archway and pulled the curtains back. He was ready to throw his lighter at somebody and run. The room was empty. And everything in it, except a large overstuffed armchair, was covered with white cloth. Max could see no radio in the room.

He hurried from one draped object to the next, hoping his lighter fuel would last. He found an arrangement of pussy willows under a bell glass and a stuffed owl. No radio. No phonograph. This was the right room, he was sure.

Something sparkled on the thick rug near the strip of hardwood floor along the wall. Pieces of metal, highly polished. Little wheels? No, for Christ sake. They were jacks. His lighter flame sank into its wick and died. When he got a match lit he couldn't find the jacks.

On his second match he took one quick survey of the room and then went out to the front door. No one was outside and the rain had stopped. He left at the same spot in the hedge.

Driving home, after he'd tossed his wet coat in the back seat, Max lit a cigarette. Either this was all a fairly elaborate joke or he had himself a real occult case to work on.

The next day he might be able to find out.

If Max Kearny hadn't moved into an apartment a block and a half from Pedway's Book Store he probably would never have gotten interested in the investigation of occult cases. He'd gone in origi-

nally looking for back issues of Startling Stories. W. R. Pedway had brought up the subject of poltergeists and one thing had led to another. Now, nearly a year later, Max knew quite a bit about the supernatural and had been involved in half a dozen real occult cases and three dubious ones.

The day after Kate Chesterton's party he walked down to the book store. Pedway was sorting a stack of pulp magazines and now and then brushing at his straight-standing grey hair. He was a short, weathered man of about forty five. "Dashiell Hammett," he said. "Very few people realize the influence he had on Hemingway. A case?"

Max sat down in the cane-bottom chair next to the counter and shook out a cigarette. "Well, I think maybe. Or possibly somebody's just crazy."

"Most insanity is caused by demon possession anyway, but go on." Pedway lit his corncob pipe and held the wood match out to Max. "Wait a minute. I'll close the store." Pedway poked the orange cat in the small display window and slid his *Closed* sign out from under it. Hanging the sign on the door shade cord, he said, "Okay. Haunting again?"

"No. I'm not just sure what it is." Max leaned forward and, as Pedway wandered among the counters and books, told him about Louise Esher and the old house on Norton Way.

"It's a leak," said Pedway, twisting the end of his green striped tie. "Sometimes there's a pressure built up and it leaks out."

"That can't be," said Max. "I was in the house. You mean part of 1939 and 1940 seeped into that room? I don't think that's it."

"A trap then."

"For whom?"

"A time trap. For the girl. I've got an essay on it in a book published privately in Des Moines, Iowa, at the turn of the century."

"What do they know about time in Des Moines?"

"The whole state of Iowa is the result of a time paradox. But that's not the matter at hand." Pedway was back behind the main counter now. "I'll explain a time trap to you."

"I thought I knew a lot about the supernatural," said Max, resting his feet on a set of Dickens. "But I've never heard of this."

"So shut up and you will. Now think of a lock and a key. Okay. Here and there the walls of reality wear a little thin. A certain person at a certain place can act as the key in the lock. This Louise may well be that kind of person. She was no doubt attracted to the old house. Her presence there opened a small door and let loose some old time."

"Why 1939?"

"Probably because it's the time she's fondest of. You must have the right person, the right location."

Pedway lifted a stack of pulp magazines and put them under the counter. "Nostalgia screws up a lot of people."

Max stood up. "Is it dangerous?"

"Certainly. According to my sources, the more she goes there the more past time she lets loose. She's up to her hips in the past now. Sooner or later it gets up to her ears."

"But they're going to lease the house eventually. That'll stop her." Max put his hands in his pockets.

"Max, you're fooling around with cosmic forces. You can't take it easy. Stop the girl."

"How? Tell her what's happening? Maybe that isn't even a time trap out there."

"It most likely is. And if you don't drag her out she may end up in the thirty's."

"Not a bad time. I mean those few years between the end of the depression and the start of the war. William Powell made a lot of good movies then."

Pedway's forehead became more wrinkled. "And watch out you don't get caught yourself. You're pretty young for an occult detective, remember."

Max sat again. "What should I do? Magic circle or some of that green fire?"

Pedway bit down on the stem of his pipe. "Time isn't affected by green fire. Takes a special kind of spell. A mixture of solid geometry and sympathetic magic, plus a few good magic phrases. I'll copy you the stuff the dentist in Des Moines worked out. And toss in some stuff of my own."

When Max left the store, the afternoon was nearly gone. He had a sheet of note paper covered with formulas and magic phrases.

After Max got the call from Kate Chesterton late Wednesday night he drove to Norton Way. There was a high fog and as he walked from his car to the hedge he could hear the bay fog horns. He looked through the damp leaves and saw that the lights were on in the living room. Louise had come here after leaving the apartment. Max patted the sheet of magic folded in his jacket pocket and pushed through the hedge.

He got silently to the front door. He had the brief notion as the fog thickened that one of the fog horns was moving closer.

From inside, the radio played Airdevil Tommy. Max turned the door knob and pushed the dark door in. A line of light separated the two drapes that closed the living room. Faint from outside he could still hear the fog horns. He looked down the hallway and at the narrow window at its end.

There was no fog in the back yard. It wasn't even very dark. Max could make out the line of trees against the back fence and the rope swing that hung from one low branch.

Then he heard a new sound. Wheels on cement. Roller skates. A wooden gate opened and slammed and the skating was louder. Then quite near the back window a child's voice called. "Louise. Hey, can you come out and play? Lou. Hey, Louise."

"As soon as my program's over."

Max inhaled and parted the curtains. "It's not a good night for going out. Let's stay in and talk, Louise."

The girl moved back toward the chair her tan coat was dropped over. "What is it?"

There was a beaded lamp hanging down from the ceiling. A pair of love birds in a cage in the corner. Next to the fireplace there was a big mahogany-colored Atwater Kent radio with a cloth-covered speaker. "I'm Max Kearny. Remember?"

Louise was pale. She dropped a magazine from her hand, frowning. "And you just walk into people's homes?"

"This isn't your home, is it? This room wasn't like this a few days ago."

"I redecorated. It's my maiden aunt's house."

"Her name is Charles G. Napoli? He's listed as owner."

"Well, damn," Louise said. "You're a detective or something."

"No. I told you. I'm an art director. This is just my hobby."

"Suppose you take your hobby and go away."

"You're in danger here, Louise."

"That's a good line. Another of your clichés?"

Max unfolded the paper Pedway had given him. Someplace in his pockets he had a piece of specially prepared chalk. "Look, Louise, I know about this place."

"So?"

"I think you ought to leave now and not come back."

Louise sat down in an armchair, reaching out and clicking off the radio. "This isn't hurting anything, least of all you. Why are you pussy-footing around after me?"

"Well, I investigate a supernatural case now and then. And I have a reputation as an amateur occult detective."

"Kate asked you to trail me."

"Yes." Max lit a cigarette." How'd you find this place?"

"I like to walk at night. Even though they say it's dangerous. One night I passed this place and I had a feeling I ought to look around. When I first tried the door nothing happened. Then finally it swung in. I came into this room and found the lights on. This is our front room in St. Paul. You knew that?"

"I thought maybe it was."

"So. I imagined I was crazy. But since this was my only delusion I decided to enjoy it. When I got to feeling low I'd wander down here. I kept hoping they wouldn't sell this place. And they haven't yet. Of course, when I

found I could bring some of my old toys and things home I came to the conclusion it was real here." She shrugged. "So what? It amuses me."

"I think it's dangerous. A time trap. As occult scholars call it."

Louise smiled at him. "A trap? Tell me now it's an escape from reality."

Max frowned. "Okay. It is."

"I told you what I wanted. I'm twenty three and I haven't got it. In some lines you know you're washed up if you haven't made it by my age."

Again Max heard the sound of roller skates. "The voice out in back. Is that the usual?"

"No, it's new. This is the first time they've called me."

Max backed to the archway. "And what do you think'll happen if you go out there?"

"I don't much care."

"For God's sake, Louise. Let's go. I'll buy you a beer someplace."

"Thanks a lot."

The child at the back window called for Louise again.

Following Pedway's diagram Max drew several mystic lines on the floor, reading magic words as he did.

"What the hell is this for?" Louise said. She stepped over the lines and into the hall.

Max followed, running backwards, slightly bent. He got ahead of her and made a line midway in the hall as he read the last of the preventative spells.

"Will you get to one side? You're just going to trip me." Louise swung out and pushed Max.

He went off balance and tripped into a small oak table.

"Come out, Lou. Come out and play."

Louise walked quickly to the window and pushed it further open. In the back yard it was still twilight.

"Hey, damnit," said Max, getting up. "Stop it, Louise."

The girl didn't look at him. She lifted one leg over the sill.

Max had read all the formulas and spells. He dived for the window. "Hey. I'll get you a job in modeling if you come in."

Louise stopped, half outside. "Oh? Exactly what?"

"We're shooting some *Army Times* ads for Royal Glow beer next week. I can use an extra girl. If you don't mind posing in a bathing suit."

Louise bit her lip. "One piece?"

"Whatever you want," Max said.

She came back and closed the window. "Let's get my things and go. What day next week?"

"You know our address? Come in Tuesday morning after ten."

While Max was standing in the hall waiting for Louise to get her coat he refolded the list of magic formulas and put them away. He smiled and lit a new cigarette. Funny thing about magic. The basic principles remain the same, but sometimes the words change.

It was a planet of peace and timelessness, where the natives had no tensions, no possessions, and apparently, no goal. Could a man be happy there, soon enough?

OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS

by Rosel George Brown

I STIRRED IN MY COLLOIDAL suspension. I could feel the transverse waves I had created bound through my little universe and rebound against me again. I was waking up. I was nearing the planet, then. Algol II, was it? My thinking would be fuzzy for a while.

I began the exercises, slowly and carefully, uncoiling from the foetal position you assume naturally in suspension. I wondered if the child *in utero* had any such premonition of the bright, violent world to come.

First one leg. Then the other. Slowly, but still the colloid shook. I did not want to wake up too fast. It is easy to panic. To thrash about wildy and be buffeted by your own struggling waves. It is too much like a nightmare of suffocation. Or claustrophobia. And if you fight too hard, your metabolism rises to normal before it's time to get out and then you just die. Nobody wants to die.

I lay still again until I felt the waves subside and the slight nausea recede. I would be well within sight of Algol. It would be blazing along one hemisphere of my windowless monad.

At least, that's what I call it. Ever since I read Leibnitz the phrase has stuck in my mind like a label for which there was no carton. When I saw the one-man spacers, I pasted my label on them immediately.

What I should have done was read more Leibnitz. Or less. Or refrained from mixing his ideas up with Bishop Berkeley's and my own.

Because when I saw the one-man spacers they were so perfect a symbol that I had a irresistible impulse to get in one. If anyone asks me why I travel about the galaxy, I say it is because I am an anthropologist and explorer. If anyone should say, No, *really* why do you do it? I would say, Because it is a quick way to be

Somebody in the eyes of my fellow man and to make money. But if God should ask me, I would have to say, There was just something about those windowless monads that fascinated me.

I began to move my left arm now, slowly, slowly stretching it out from my shoulder, I imagined, damping the sense of excitement that wanted to boil within me, the green planet rushing out to meet me. Or my windowless monad falling down to meet the planet. It doesn't matter, of course, which way you look at it.

Because each of us, locked in the windowless monads of our senses, sees only what his brain chooses to record. And if we reach out, for reassurance, to touch the hand of a friend, there are only the empty spaces between the atoms that touch, and the little deceit our senses practice.

So used am I to the deceits of my senses, that I act as though I can communicate not only with my fellow man, but also with those other races of the galaxy whom we have not known well enough to call fellow man.

I did not know whether there would be intelligent life on Algol II or not. All I had was a chemical analysis of the atmosphere, the temperature and the gravity. But it was such a planet where, in blithe disregard of Lecomte du Noüy, life might very well evolve.

If there were nothing to eat on the planet, I would die. For my windowless monad was not a little cruiser I could navigate around space like a boat on a pond. That sort of thing was a government project all by itself. My monad would set me down, cough me up, let me back in after five years, Terran time, and take off again. With exactly and only enough energy for take off. Lots of them came back empty.

I faced it, in the dark dream where I floated to my sluggish exercises. Most of them came back empty.

After long, heavy hours that faded past uncounted, when I wondered if perhaps the mechanism had failed and I would hurtle through space forever, without warning I was ejected into a world of brilliant sunshine, green trees and moving figures.

My first reactions were instinctive. I rolled over on my stomach and coughed the fluid out of my throat, my eyes tightly closed against the unaccustomed light. The sun was hot, but I felt cold, dreadfully cold, and naked in the empty air, uncontrolled breezes blowing over my damp body, the long, wet strands of my hair hanging down my neck, for my hair had grown long, even at the slow rate of life in Suspension.

I lay there, in a state of partial shock, unable for a while to think of anything but my own acute discomfort. Then my body chemistry

must have adjusted itself to the new environment, for I became aware of two sensations, as I lay with my head down in my hands, my eyes closed.

First and foremost, I was terribly hungry. Hunger was clawing at my innards and I felt that my very stomach was being ripped and torn. I was trembling with it.

The other thing I was aware of was a sound, a rushing sea sound, such as a sea shell makes in the ear.

I turned over weakly and looked at the moving figures. The sunlight flashed and danced crazily in my eyes, for they were still shocked by it. Through half-closed lids I saw figures that were unmistakably humanoid.

A grey, attenuated face came near mine. "Food!" I said, and pointed at my mouth.

A hand, too smooth and slightly scaled, helped me up. The hand wrapped twice around mine and I saw it was opposed thumb and tentacle. I believe that's all I noticed until something liquid was handed to me. I drank it and went to sleep with my head on a table.

I woke up on a couch, feeling a great deal stronger and with my eyes focusing properly.

There was a girl sitting beside me. I'm not sure how I knew it was a girl, for it was some time before I could tell one of these natives from another.

Up close she looked silvery and I saw the skin was not really scaled. It was composed of large, slightly thickened epithelial cells. She stared at me from cool, bluish eyes. This stare was one of the most difficult things I had to adjust to on Algol II. The natives stared openly and starkly, like a cat or a child. It was because they had no eyelids and in sleep the pupils contracted to shut out the light. The eyes were covered with a thick, translucent lens.

She spoke—a stream of glottal noises that sounded a little like German. Behind the noise of her speech was the muffled power of the sea sound.

I spoke, simply because it would seem ungracious not to, and she nodded her smooth, silver head, a gesture which I took to mean she did not understand me.

She handed me a white, stone bowl of liquid, which I drank. It was the same as I had had before. It tasted a little like barley. It was warm and good.

She pointed at some material hung over the back of my couch, rose and left the room. I noticed then that I had been covered with a sheet of soft fiber. I stood and put on what was obviously a garment. It was of a simple design of the sort found over and over in temperate climates. It was two pieces of material clasped at the shoulders and tied up at the waist with a sash. It was a little long, for these people were taller than I,

but I pulled it over the sash at the waist and found it quite comfortable.

I wondered whether I should go out. It occurred to me that I was still barefooted and I looked about the couch and found a pair of sandals. They were large but the leather thongs held them on securely.

It would be better to stay where I was, I decided. Obviously the natives were friendly and solicitous of me, but I had no way of knowing what taboos I might break merely by the way I tied my sash or the position in which I held my arms.

I was, I noticed, not in a room but in a tent. The floor was sand. Green sand, rather coarse, and flashing like emerald where the sun caught it. For all I cared it *could* be emeralds. I could take nothing back with me in my windowless monad. Nothing but my knowledge, that is.

The tent was white leather, well made and carefully stitched. My first deduction was that I had found a desert nomad culture. There was the tent and the sand. But I had a vague memory of trees, where I had landed. And when I looked closely at the furniture I saw it was such as no pack animal could carry. The table and couch were solid rock, though the couch was, of course, cushioned.

I tried to lift the table, for I was amazed at how heavy it looked. I could not budge it. I dug down in the sand to find that it was carved from the living stone. So was the couch.

This was no nomad culture. There was the soup, too. A nomad culture does not cultivate grain, though of course they could steal it from neighboring peoples.

Still, despite the embedded furniture, there was a feeling of transience about the room. Perhaps I had been put into a vacant tent. Perhaps that was why there was nothing personalized about it. No unguent jars, no stray clothing hung up, no pictures, no statuary, no weapons.

But there was something about the tent that kept recalling the girl. The odor. That was it. A light fragrance that had been strong when she was near and I had only now remembered it. An odor like the crushed leaves of some plant whose name I had forgotten. An odor, really, more like herbs than flowers.

I hoped she would come back. There had been a grace and gentleness about her I had liked. The way she had offered the soup. The casualness with which she had spoken—simply to give me the reassurance of speech. And the modesty she had displayed in leaving the room when I dressed. Even these little things had told me a lot about the culture in which I found myself.

I heard the deep, sighing sea

sound again and three natives entered. Not the girl. I discovered then where the sound came from. It was the noise they made breathing.

Then began the long, slow process of learning the language. If only I could have brought a linguaphone with me, it would have been merely a matter of hours. But an explorer can take nothing but his body and mind in a windowless monad. That is the challenge of the job.

And, in a way, it makes things easier. You do not find yourself looking at a crystal picturama and longing for home, or strapping on a ray gun and feeling superior to the natives. It is not possible to play God. There is no temptation to offer colored beads. You have nothing to offer but yourself. So you try to make that good.

That night the tall, silver girl came back and motioned me to follow her. We stood in line and were given a bowl and food of a more solid sort than I had had before. I followed her back to the tent and we ate in silence except for the sea sound of her breathing.

This, I discovered, was the Way to dine. The bowl never varied. Nor did the food, with slight exceptions.

She took my hand and led me outside. She pointed upward and we watched a yellow moon chase a green one slowly across forty degrees of sky. Then we took our bowls and returned them to the washing place and kitchen—a spring within the stand of trees near where I had fallen. The water was brought down to a huge, white bowl carved into the bedrock that was close to the surface. There was no artificial light, but the light of the twin moons gave this whole world a muted glow. The water flashed with colored bubbles and hung like jewels off the washed bowls.

It seemed to me everyone we passed stared at me with violent curiosity. But I later discovered their sentiment was one of only mild interest. The rest was the effect of those lidless eyes.

By the time we returned to the tent again the moons were about to set. The girl stood for a moment in the moonlight, her face holding an expression I could sense as different from the ordinary expression, but whose meaning I could, of course, not fathom.

"Grecthchra," she said, pointing at herself. This was obviously her name.

"David," I said, in turn, pointing at myself. She shook her head, meaning, I understood by now, she already knew my name. She had for some reason refrained from using it. Perhaps out of delicacy, when she had not yet made herself known to me.

She followed me into the tent and I realized, with horror, that she had probably been assigned to

me for a wife. Such a custom is not unusual.

It was unthinkable, of course. I stood there in the dark, knowing there was no way I could explain it to her, but not wanting to hurt her feelings.

She led me to the couch, removed the coverlet and laid it on the sand. She slept on the coverlet. I would rather she had slept on the couch, but I did not know how to indicate this without possible misunderstanding. So I slept all night on the pillowed couch and felt almost as if I were in a ship, with the soft sea sound of her breathing in my ears.

Most of my days thereafter were full of language lessons, and someone, I'm not sure it was always the same person, took me about the village. It was a simple society, but very highly organized. The red-tinted tents of the hunters, looking like a Christmas decoration in the emerald sand, stood all together, farthest from the spring, or oasis. Closer were the clustered tents of the weavers. The potters did not make bowls of clay. They carved them from the hard stone and it was obviously slow, weary work.

I never saw the least sign of violence in the community. Nor the least expression of discontent, though I was never able fully to fathom the expressions of these mammalian-reptile-humanoids.

Everyone seemed to be occupied, each in his cluster of tents. Male and female worked equally and I learned to distinguish the slight female characteristics these creatures bore.

I found myself, even after weeks of living with these people, still thinking of them as animals. I took myself to task about it. Was it prejudice? I have lived with animals, as a matter of fact, and thought of them as people. Why was I doing less for these intelligent, friendly creatures?

It struck me, finally, that just as the structure of their eyes deceived me into thinking they were staring, so the customs of their society deceived me into thinking they were depersonalized to such an extent that they called to mind an ant hill. They all wore, for instance, exactly the same kind of garment. In the morning it was returned to the Washing Place and turned in for a fresh garment. No one wore jewelry or ornamentation of any kind. They did not paint their faces or their bodies. Nor did they carry things about with them, such as we Terrans always do. No book, no wallet, no keys.

It is an odd feeling to possess nothing, to have no pockets and carry no pouch or purse. I would reach about unconsciously, when I prepared to go for a walk, for the things a civilized man needs to go about with. Money, keys, tickets, those minimal things. I had con-

stantly, on this planet, the irritating feeling that I had forgotten something.

There was something about these people that still, even after weeks of living with them and even when I knew the language, eluded me. It is the ignorance a child feels in a room full of adults. As though there is some common, tacit knowledge available to everyone but him. And he doesn't even know how to ask for this knowledge, for he doesn't know the nature of it.

When, therefore, Grecthchra asked if I would like to visit the Temple, I was delighted. I had noticed not the least sign of religion in the community. There was a great deal of formality, but I could see no sacred significance to it. The Temple would, perhaps, communicate to me some meaning about these people I had missed.

I tried to ask Grecthchra about it as we walked over the green sands toward a dull red hill in the distance.

"What is your *purpose* in life?"

She was silent, as is customary when a question is asked to which one does not know the answer.

"What do your people hope to achieve?"

Indeed, these were clumsy questions to ask. It occurred to me that I would not quite know what to say if someone asked *me* these kinds of questions.

We passed a band of hunters, going out on foot to spear the hard-shelled desert animals that went into our one dish.

"We want," Grecthchra finally said, "to eat each day and in the end to procreate. That is the Way."

But I knew still there was something I did not understand. And I felt like pounding on the invisible walls that separate one consciousness from another, and demanding knowledge.

The entrance to the temple, I saw as we drew near it, was a huge, square orifice, carved into the rock, and completely bare of ornament. The rock was, however, squared off to a perfect edge and beautifully polished. I became very curious as to what kind of a god would be imagined by these people whose art was restricted to the most fundamental simplicity. A monolith? Or perfectly life-like statues?

I was totally unprepared for what we saw within.

It was an empty room.

An enormous, square, red room, carved from the living rock, and empty as the craters on Luna.

"Where," I asked, "is the thing for which your Temple was created?"

She led me to one huge wall and ran a tentacle over it. I saw there were carvings in the wall. Writing, obviously. No pictures at all. The writing surprised me, for I had seen no sign of books or in-

scriptions and I had assumed the culture was not literate.

"What does it say?"

"The things that the children need to know. How to make the tents. How to cook the meals. How to hunt. The times for silence. Many things."

The children! Why had I not noticed? Perhaps because I have none myself and have no awareness of them. "I have seen no children," I said.

"They are not yet conceived," Grecthchra answered.

"There are *no* children?"

"How could there be?" This was, really, a statement.

Grecthchra did not dislike my questioning. If she had answers she gave them to me. But most of my questions were meaningless to her.

"Are there no old people?" I asked her one day, for it had struck me that they all seemed to be the same age. It could be, of course, that there were signs of age I could not recognize. Still, there had been no funerals. The only death had been that of a hunter, who died of what appeared to me to be blood poisoning. He was buried with no ceremony.

My question was greeted with silence. Again I had asked a question with no meaning.

"Where is your mother?" I asked. "The woman who gave you birth?"

"I do not know."

We were occupied with the Morning Inspection. We stood watching a potter. He had polished the sides of his stone bowl. This must have taken years. He was now grinding out the inside with a stone. Every day the hollow was a fraction of an inch deeper. Every day he held it out for our inspection.

"It is well," Grecthchra said, as she did every day.

We were, I had gathered, part of the Ruling Class, though this tribe seemed to have no need of a ruling class. There was never a thing of which Grecthchra did not say, "It is well."

The function of the ruling class was mostly, as far as I could see, to express appreciation of what the others did. Whether the potter was pleased to be told, It is well, I do not know. I assume that he was.

Two things happened to me on this planet that can never be understood by those who have led only one life. Remember that I was newborn in nakedness and loneliness on this planet, and that all I had of my own world was a memory that, after a year or two (as I approximate the time), became almost unreal. Remember that I had not even a mirror to remind me that I was a Terarn.

The first thing that happened was that I became as static and formalized as the natives with

whom I lived. I was not merely acting like them so as to study their culture. I all but forgot to study them. I was engrossed in the Morning Food Motions, the Morning Walk, the Watching of the Double Moons, and the rest of it.

The second thing that happened was that of course I fell in love with Grecthchra.

These things did not happen all at once but I became aware of them all at once, on separate occasions.

One night I had a vivid dream, a strong, real dream of home. I was in my apartment having a drink with Jack and Vivian Stall, my cocker spaniel nuzzled against my knee, the air tanged with the familiar smells of dog, tobacco and alcohol. Jack was asking, "How long will you be gone?" and suddenly a wild alarm spread through my body. I sat up with a thudding heart. In heavy blackness of the night, after the moons have set and the tent shuts out the stars, I had the illusion that I was struggling to open nerveless eyelids, or that I had gone blind.

The only reality was the slow, measured sea-keening of Grecthchra's breathing on the floor beside me.

HALFWAY MARK. The words spread across my mind.

It was, of course, the warning signal. I had no way of measuring time by Earth standards. But like anyone who has lived his life with clocks, I had a very good time sense buried too deep for me to consult consciously. The alarm had been planted by post-hypnotic suggestion.

There would be another when the five years were up. I would have a day to get to the monad.

But it was this alarm, and the dream that preceded it, that made me conscious of how completely I had given myself over to the culture of Algol II.

It had, as a matter of fact, become a habit.

There is nothing more dangerous than a habit.

It had been necessary for me to discard most of my Terran habits, from smoking to brushing my teeth. I was not aware, until the moment of the alarm, that I had replaced them with the cultural habits of Algol II.

And I had seen, on all Algol II, an area of about two miles in diameter. Only the hunters went further than this, and I was not a hunter.

I had made no systematic study of the culture. Because there were those questions I did not know how to ask and those questions I soon realized it was not proper to ask.

More, I had lost the spirit of curiosity and adventure that I had suddenly remembered possessing that night back in my old apart-

ment back on Terra, discussing my coming trip with Jack and Vivian.

What, then, had I been doing for two and a half years? In the morning I rose, at the proper time, when the sun flashed off the emerald sand at the edges of my tent and made shadows like the sea on the roof. Grecthchra and I folded our cushions and coverlets neatly, walked out and observed the sky from all directions. We observed, inevitably, that it would be a day without rain. After observing the sky, we observed the earth, always the same, glittering, green sand. Occasionally the light would be particularly interesting on a large piece of sand, perhaps the size of a marble. Then we observed, without criticism, the tents of our neighbors. One, perhaps, might be sagging slightly and need a pole shifted.

Then, in a leisurely fashion, we strolled over to the Washing Place, perhaps half a mile away. Here we handed our bedclothes to the Washer and went to separate tents where there were bowls of water for washing and fresh garments, all exactly the same.

We then lined up at the Cooking Place, received our food and carried the heavy bowls back to our tent to eat with the single spoon that came with it. We ate slowly and in silence. After breakfast, we returned our bowls and spent the morning Inspecting.

Lunch was the same as breakfast. After lunch we walked each day to one of the red hills in the distance, all like the hill into which the Temple was carved. Though they appeared red from a distance, there was white rock folded in with the red.

We sat on a red or white boulder, rested, and looked about to the far horizon. Green sand, red hills and small outcroppings of trees were all that were to be seen. Occasionally one of the small, plated desert animals darted out of its burrow in the sand and across the desert. A few small birds wheeled in the sky, apparently reptilian in character, though I never saw one close enough to be sure.

Then came the walk back to the village and the social gathering. This was not formalized. All the tents were open, and the custom was to look in at random and if anyone were home, to visit. Socializing involved small talk. Very small talk. Remark upon the weather, which was always the same. Discussion of the progress of the weavers on a certain garment. The growth of the grain, which was artificially irrigated by the spring. The most interesting conversation was that of the hunters. How an animal was pursued. How caught. When one hunter died, as I have mentioned, that, too was small talk. Casually mentioned.

After Socializing came dinner, the same as breakfast and lunch. And every night, when I had brought my bowl to the Washing Place and returned to my tent, I was tired enough to sleep without thinking. I had, after all, spent most of the day walking in the open air.

And so I spent two and a half years doing exactly nothing, vaguely happy to drift from day to day in the inertial force of habit.

When the alarm came and reminded me of who and what I was, and a sense of time possessed me again, I was amazed at what I had done. One week of such purposeless activity on Terra would have driven me mad. And yet on Algol II I had so taken it for granted that I never for a moment felt time wasted.

Now, of course, I resolved to set out the next day to explore the planet further. Since I had two and a half years left, I could go a long way and still get back in time.

But the next morning something highly unusual happened. I awoke to a noise like Grecthchra's breathing magnified a thousand times, like an angry sea upon us. I sat up in the grey light and Grecthchra looked at me, nodding her head pleasantly.

"It is raining," she said.

We walked out for our breakfast as usual. The rain was warm. The whole world was gray, now, instead of green, and Grecthchra laughed when little rivulets dripped over her lidless eyes.

"The world," she said, "looks strange through drops of water."

The day's activities went on as usual and the rain stopped in the middle of the morning. The raindrops flashed so on the tents and the sand, when the sun came out, I could hardly bear to look at it.

It was during the afternoon walk that I abandoned all thoughts of leaving the village for a expedition further into the planet.

The desert had covered its face completely. As far as the eye could see, a heavy, bluish-green foliage had sprung up, and tiny red, yellow and white flowers opened their eyes to the sun.

Only the hills rose red and bare.

I could hardly bring myself to walk on the foliage. It seemed an almost sacred eruption of life after all the barren years.

But Grecthchra expressed no surprise. She did, however, have a spring in her step which I took to denote pleasure.

We set out for the hill. Grecthchra always chose which we would climb, and I always followed her. We clambered up the red rocks, noting little pockets of flowers where the sand had collected here and there. There was a tremendous burgeoning joy in the world, a color and promise such as had never been before.

A clear wind blew, and I looked

around to see a little wave run through the sea of flowers. I felt as though the sunshine itself were running through my veins.

"Look!" Grecthchra cried from the top of the hill. Her voice was like a bell and I climbed to it.

I found her bent over a flower. It was a deep, gentian blue, fringed with black. It was the only blue one we had seen and it trembled a little under our breath as we watched it.

"It is blue," Grecthchra said, with wonder in her voice. Her face was full on mine. "Like your eyes."

Grecthchra held the soft blue flower in her strange, silver hand. The sunshine glittered on her silver skin. I knew that I had never seen anything so beautiful.

After that, my days and nights ran together in a silver stream. I did not know whether Grecthchra was more beautiful when she was like amber under the green and yellow moons, or when, lying on the emerald sand in the day, she was like a silver fish coming up from the sea.

A sense of time, oddly enough, returned to me. I felt as though we were running with a mighty wave, as though we must some day be flung up from the enchanted sea.

I could not get my meaning across to Grecthchra.

"A day and a night," she told me, "are like the day and night before and the day and night to come. Why would anyone count the number of them?"

"But Grecthchra, are you not to grow old? And die? Am I to grow old all by myself?"

"We do not grow old," she said, "like vegetation and animals. How could we?"

"There is something here," I said, "that I do not understand." Could they be immortal?

"Why should you understand?" She swapped her bowl for mine, a gesture of love. Indeed, when I looked at her I could care for nothing else. Not even understanding.

But the days and nights, as it turned out, were not all the same. Grecthchra, I think, could not have told me what was going to happen. But when things did happen, suddenly it was as though she knew it all along. Like the post-hypnotic suggestion which had waked me up in the middle of the night. It had been there and I was not aware of it. And by now I had forgotten it, for I was determined to live out my life with Grecthchra.

One night I woke to hear Grecthchra sobbing. I thought she was strangling, and it was like the sound of the sea struggling against the rocks.

"Grecthchra!" I reached out for her in the blind darkness but she was not there. I started to get up and feel for her, for I could see no faintest light.

"Stay there!" she cried. "It is the pain. It is not proper for you to be by me."

And so I lay there through the night, and late, late she crept into my arms, and slept.

In the morning I saw what it had been. There lay on the green sands a large, silvery egg, veined with blue.

Grecthchra seemed, somehow, proud, and so, though there was something a little ludicrous about it, I said, "It is well." I wondered if she realized that such was the difference in our races that this egg would never hatch.

We spent the days as we had been spending them, the egg remaining always in the corner of the tent.

In other tents, I noticed when we socialized, there were other eggs.

One morning we wakened suddenly before dawn. There was a wild, cold wind that blew through the flaps of the tent and spattered the sand against the sides.

It was gone in a moment, but it left a chill upon me and I held Grecthchra to me. Somewhere in the eternal summer, ice was forming.

That day was not as other days. The tents were empty. The weavers did not weave and the pots of the potters were stacked up neatly before their tents.

"Where are they?" I asked.

"They are preparing for the children," she said, as though she had known all along, though I am sure that when we went out she expected the potters to be in their usual places.

We walked to the Temple. Most of the village seemed to be there, working. They were bringing the green sand in from the desert and piling it in the rear of the Temple.

"Why are they doing that?" I asked.

"It is for the children," Grecthchra said.

Each day we went to watch them bringing in the sand. Each day the cold winds became more frequent.

In the mornings, now, we stayed in our tent after breakfast, and I clung to Grecthchra as though the end of the world waited outside the little summer of our tent.

By afternoon the sun reflected hot off the sands and we watched the workmen bringing the green sand into the Temple.

One morning Grecthchra said, "It is time." She picked up the silver egg and held it carefully in the folds of her garment.

I followed her to the Temple. The wind blew up a green dust and rattled the tents on their poles. It blew through the pores of my skin and made my bones feel brittle.

There was no joy in the world.

Grecthchra went into the Temple and I watched her bury the

silver egg deep in the green sand.

Then we watched others do the same thing.

"It is well," Grecthchra said.

But I did not think so.

When all were finished and we stood outside the Temple, several of the men grasped one smooth panel of the entrance and began to tug on it. A wall of rock slid out—it must have been exquisitely balanced. They closed the entrance.

The sun, I saw, was now high in the sky. It must be long past the time for the second meal.

But it was cold even now, even with the sun hot on the sands. The wind was like currents of ice water.

"What does it say?" I asked, for there was writing on the door. Grecthchra looked at me. She drew me up to the door and the others drew back politely to let us through. They were reading disinterestedly, as though it were something they knew by heart.

Grecthchra took my hand. "It says, 'We have known a great science, we have changed the face of our planet many times. And yet, our own nature does not change. In the end, what is life? To be content, to live, to procreate, to die before life becomes a burden. Ours, then, is the best of all possible worlds. Go in contentment. It is well.' "

But the others were already starting.

"Where are they going?" I asked.

"To the sea," Grecthchra answered. "Do you not hear the waves?"

I had heard them since I came. But I did not know what it meant.

I followed after her. My breath trailed behind me in frosty plumes. When I breathed, the cold air came into my whole body.

Evening came early. The sky disappeared in a grey, looming mist. Grecthchra no longer glittered silver.

The grey evening congealed into a darkness so heavy I could almost feel it. There was no moonlight through the clouds.

I took Grecthchra's hand, for everyone walked on through the night. I do not know how they knew the way, but none faltered.

Grecthchra's hand was cold and without recognition. "The sea does not call to you," she said. "Go back."

But I could not leave her, though I could tell she had already left me. I clung to her hand and followed her on through the cold washes of the night.

Finally, I heard the waves. They became louder and more violent, and drowned out the sea sound of the breathing around me.

A white, bright dawn came up and I could see, far out, the dancing sea beyond a cliff. It was green, as the sands had been, and seethed under the yellow sun.

We drew closer, and there was no sound but the crashing sea as one by one the people of Algol II stepped over the cliff.

I tried to tug Grecthchra away.

"Don't!" I cried. "There is a whole life before us, Grecthchra."

"There is a whole life behind us," she replied, as though the matter had no interest for her.

I clung to her smooth hand until it slipped away from me and she fell into the sea. I stood there watching the bodies fade into black specks and finally fall into the heaving sea below.

I could not believe it. I sat hunched over, watching the blown foam for hours, not believing it.

I even tried to throw myself over the cliff. But I found I could not. I wished there were someone to push me. But there was no one.

I was alone in the world.

I do not know how I lived through the night.

I found my way, the next day, back to the village. I was so frozen I felt I must be dead and dreaming a nightmare of life.

All the way back there was the sea sound in my ears. So that for me the air was full of ghosts. And even after I returned to the village I still imagined I could hear it.

I looked through all the tents, running and shouting.

In our tent I looked for something of Grecthchra I could hold and remember. But there was nothing. She had had no possessions.

My windowless monad was still there—round, silent and closed in on itself. How long? Days? Weeks? Maybe a year or more? I had taken no account of time.

Time was now a gross, ponderous, living thing for me. I hated it. The days and the nights.

I tore up a tent to make clothes and still I was cold. I harvested the last shreds of grain in the dying field. I sought out the desert animals and found them hibernating in the sand. I pulled them out and killed them in their sleep.

I do not know whether it was days or weeks or months before the alarm brought me to my space ship.

I still wake at night with the sea sound in my ears. I think, now, that the sea was calling to me, too.

Marcel Aymé's last two stories here concerned a man who could walk through walls and a man who had a halo he did not particularly want; this time he turns his special attention to the fairer sex, telling of a woman who acquired the ability to multiply herself, and to be at the same time in as many places as she wished. A rich gift indeed, but not, as she discovered, entirely free of thorns. . . .

THE UBIQUITOUS WIFE

by Marcel Aymé

(*translated by Whit Burnett*)

ONCE, IN MONTMARTRE, IN the rue de l'Abreuvoir, there lived a young woman by the name of Sabina who possessed the gift of ubiquity. Whenever she wished, she was able to multiply herself and be at the same time, in body and in spirit, in as many places as she pleased. Since she was married and such a rare gift could not have failed to disturb her husband, she was forced to keep this knowledge to herself and she seldom utilized her gift except in her apartment when she was quite alone. In the morning, for instance, when she was dressing, she doubled herself or tripled herself for the added convenience of studying her features or her figure in the mirror. Her examination ended, she would hurry to reassemble, that is, to melt back into one and the same person.

Antoine Lemurier, her husband, an assistant in the legal department of the S.B.N.C.A., suspected nothing and thought, of course, that he had, like everyone else in the world, an indivisible wife.

One day, coming home unexpectedly, he found himself, however, in the presence of three absolutely identical wives, all in practically the same position, gazing at him with their six eyes the same limpid blue, before whose gaze he stood with his mouth as open as a sprung barrel-head.

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When Sabina immediately reassembled, he thought he was the victim of some kind of illness, an opinion in which he was later confirmed by the family doctor who diagnosed a glandular insufficiency and prescribed expensive remedies.

One April evening, after dinner, Antoine Lemurier was checking over some accounts at the dining room table and Sabina, in an armchair, was reading a moving picture magazine. Lifting his eyes toward his wife, he was surprised at her position in the chair and the expression on her face. Her head was drooped on her shoulder, and she had let her magazine slip to the floor. Her eyes shone with a soft glow, her lips smiled, her whole face was resplendent with ineffable joy. Moved and marveling, Antoine tiptoed to her chair and leaned over devotedly, but she drew back with an impatient movement he could not understand.

Eight days before, at the corner of the Avenue Junot, Sabina had run into a young fellow of about twenty-five, with black eyes. He deliberately blocked her passing and said: "Madame." And Sabina, her chin in the air and her eyes flashing, had said: "But Monsieur!" Barely a week later, she found herself, that April evening, at the same moment in her own home and at the young man's with the black eyes, whose real name was Théorème and who pretended to be a painter.

At the very moment she was shying away from her husband, sending him back to his accounts, Théorème, in his studio in the rue Chevalier-de-la-Barre, was holding the hands of the young woman and saying: "My heart, my wings, my soul!" and other pretty things which come easily to the lips of a lover in the first days of his tenderness. Sabina had promised herself to reassemble at ten o'clock in the evening, and not to consent to a single important sacrifice, but, at midnight, she was still at Théorème's and her scruples had been reduced to little more than remorse. The following day she did not reassemble until two o'clock in the morning and the days after that it was even later.

Each evening, Antoine Lemurier marveled at the face of his wife as it glowed in an expression of a joy so wonderful that she seemed no longer to be on this earth. One day when he was exchanging confidences with a colleague in his office, he let himself go so far as to say in a moment of emotion: "If you could only see my wife when we sit up together in the evening in the dining room! You would think that she spoke with the angels."

For four months, Sabina continued to speak with the angels. Her vacation that year was the

most wonderful of her life. She was, at the same time, on a lake in Auvergne with Lemurier and at a little beach in Brittany with Théorème. "I have never seen you so beautiful," her busband told her. "Your eyes are like the lake at seven-thirty in the morning."

Meantime, on the sands of the little Breton beach, Sabina tanned herself in the sun with Théorème, both of them nearly naked. The young man with the black eyes said nothing, as if sunk in a sentiment so profound that words could not express it; actually it was because he was already repeating over and over the same things. While the young wife marveled at a silence which seemed to conceal an inexpressible passion, Théorème, numb with animal happiness, waited tranquilly for meal times, reflecting with satisfaction that his vacation was not costing him a cent.

Sabina, indeed; had sold some of her girlhood jewelry and had begged her companion to have the kindness to let the expenses of their stay in Brittany be her contribution. Somewhat astonished that she made so much of a fuss to have him accept something one might take for granted, Théorème accepted with the best grace in the world. It was his opinion that an artist ought in no case to kow-tow to stupid conventions, and he less so than others. "I do not recognize the right," he said, "of letting any scruples of mine stand in the way if they should hinder me from achieving the work of an El Greco or a Velasquez."

Living on a meager allowance from an uncle from Limoges, Théorème did not count wholly on painting to support him. A conception of art, haughty and inviolable, forbade him from painting when he was not driven to it by inspiration. "If I have to wait ten years for it," he said, "I'll wait." And that is about what he did. Generally, he worked at enriching his sensibilities in the cafés of Montmartre or refined his critical sense in watching his friends paint, and when they questioned him on his own painting, he had a reflective way of replying, "I am finding myself," which commanded respect. Besides, the big shoes, the *sabots*, and the voluminous velvet pants which were part of his winter wardrobe, had acquired for him between the rue Caulaincourt, the place du Tertre and the rue des Abbesses, the reputation of being a very fine artist. The most ill-willed still had to admit that Théorème was a man of formidable potentiality.

One morning on one of the last days of their vacation, the two lovers had just finished dressing in their room in the little Breton inn. Five or six hundred kilometers from there, in Auvergne, the Lemuriers had already been up

for three hours, and to her husband, who was rowing on the lake and praising the beauties of the site, Sabina was responding, from further and further away, in monosyllables. But in the Breton bedroom she was singing as she looked out upon the sea. She sang: *"Mes amours ont de fins doigts blancs. Le corps et l'âme à l'adevenant."* Théorème took his wallet from the mantelpiece and before slipping it into his back pocket, he pulled out a photograph.

"Hmmm! Look what I've found," he said. "That's me, last winter, taken at the Moulin de la Galette."

"Oh, my love!" exclaimed Sabina, and her eyes filled with a mist.

In the photograph Théorème was in his winter outfit, and, gazing at his sabots and the wide velvet pants so prettily pinched in at the ankles, Sabina could well see what a genius he was. She felt a twinge of remorse in her heart for having hidden something from this dear boy who was not only such a tender lover but also such an artist.

"You are handsome," she said to him. "You are big. Those *sabots!* Those velvet pants. That rabbit-skin cap! Oh, my dearest, you are an artist so pure, so understanding, and I, who was so lucky to find you, my heart! My beloved! My sweet treasure!—*I* have been hiding from you a secret!"

"What are you talking about?"

"My dear, I am going to tell you something I swore I would never confide to a soul: I have the gift of ubiquity."

Théorème began to laugh, but Sabina said: "Look!"

At the same time, she multiplied herself by nine and Théorème felt his senses totter as around him evolved nine Sabinas, exactly alike.

"You're not angry?" asked one of them timidly.

"Not at all," replied Théorème. "On the contrary."

He smiled happily, as if he were grateful, and Sabina, reassured, kissed him in a transport of joy, with all her nine mouths.

At the beginning of October, about a month after their return from vacation, Lemurier noticed that his wife hardly ever spoke any more with the angels. She seemed pensive and melancholy.

"You are not as cheerful as you used to be," he told her one evening. "You don't go out enough. Tomorrow, if you like, we shall go to the cinema."

At the same moment, Théorème was pacing his studio and shouting: "How do I know where you are this very minute? How do I know you are not at Javel or at Montparnasse in the arms of some tramp? Or at Lyons in the arms of some silk man? Or at Narbonne in bed with a wine-waterer? Or in

Persia sleeping with the Shah? . . . You swear to me, you swear to me! . . . And if you were in the arms of twenty other men you would swear to me just the same, eh? This is insane! My head is going round. I am just about ready to do—I don't know what—something terrible!"

He raised his eyes to an ancient *yatagan* he had bought the year before at the Flea Market, in order to prevent him from committing a crime. Sabina, having multiplied by twelve, held herself ready to bar his access to the oriental blade. Théorème calmed down and Sabina reassembled.

"I am so wretched," the painter concluded. "All this suffering on top of all my other troubles."

He was alluding to troubles of both a material and a spiritual order. To hear him tell it, he was in a difficult spot. His landlord, to whom he owed three months rent, was threatening seizure of his things. His uncle from Limoges had just brutally suspended his monthly allowance. On the spiritual side, Théorème was passing through a serious crisis, however fecund it was in promise. The creative powers of his genius were boiling up within him, shaping themselves, and now a lack of money was holding him back from doing anything about it. How could he paint a masterpiece, with the sheriff and the wolf both at the door?

Trembling, distressed, Sabina felt her heart in her throat. The week before, she had sold the last of her jewelry to settle a debt of honor contracted by Théorème in some den in the rue Norvins, and was in despair today at not having a single thing more to sacrifice to the aid of his talent. Actually, the situation with Théorème was neither worse nor better than usual. The uncle from Limoges, as in the past, still bled affectionately from all veins so that his nephew might become a great painter, and the landlord, naively speculating on the poverty of an artist with a future, was as willing as before that his tenant pay him on account with any old turnip of a canvas he might have tossed off without half trying. But Théorème, over and above the pleasure it gave him to play the outcast artist, the hero of Bohemia, hoped that the somber picture he was presenting would inspire the young woman to even more daring resolves.

That night, fearing to leave him alone with his woes, Sabina stayed at Théorème's and did not reassemble at all in her home in the rue de l'Abreuvoir. The next morning, she awoke at his side with a fresh and happy smile.

"I was dreaming," she said, "that we had a little grocery shop in the rue Saint-Rustique, a tiny place with hardly six feet frontage on the street. We had only one

customer, a schoolboy who used to come to buy barley-sugar candy. I was wearing a blue apron with great big pockets. You, you had on a grocer's jacket. In the evening, in the little room in back, you would write in a huge book: Day's receipts: six cents, candy. When I woke up you were just saying to me: 'For our business to succeed perfectly, we must have another customer. I see him with a little white beard. . .' I was just about to object that with another customer one wouldn't know what to do, but I didn't have time. I woke up."

"In short," said Théorème (and he spoke with a bitter nasal sneer, and his grin was bitter too), "in short," he said (and mortified and vexed, a flush of anger mounted to his ears, and his black eyes darted at her), "in short," he repeated, "your ambition would be to make me into a grocer."

"No, no! It was just a dream I was telling you."

"That's exactly what I said. You dream of seeing me a grocer. In a grocer's coat!"

"Oh, darling," Sabina protested tenderly. "If you could only have seen yourself. You looked so nice in it—in your grocer's jacket!"

His indignation made Théorème spring from the bed, crying he had been betrayed. It wasn't enough that his landlord had to throw him out in the streets, that his uncle from Limoges refused him the right to eat, and all at the very moment when there was something in him just about ready to hatch. That something, a work grandiose but fragile, which he carried inside himself, he must now lose since the woman he had loved the most turned from him in derision to dream of making him lose it. She consecreted him to a grocery! Why not to the Academy? Théorème, striding about his studio in his pajamas, shouting himself hoarse, asked what kind of misery was this? And many times he made as if to tear his heart out in order to distribute it to his landlord, to his uncle from Limoges and to her whom he loved.

On reaching home, at the noon hour, Lemurier found his wife in a state of great distraction. She had even forgotten to reassemble, and when he went into the kitchen she presented to his eyes four distinct persons, all taken up with different tasks, but all imbued alike with the same melancholy. He was extremely annoyed.

"Well," he said, "that does it! My glandular deficiency is up to its tricks again. I've got to go back to my treatments." And for some time after Lemurier remained disturbed by the pernicious sadness into which Sabina day by day sank more deeply.

"Binette," (that was the diminutive which excellent sentiments had forced this good and kindly man to choose for his young

and adored wife) "Binette," he said, "I cannot stand seeing you any longer so depressed. It will make me sick myself. In the street or in the office, when I think of your sad eyes, my heart suddenly breaks and I cry all over my blotter. . . . Binette, this morning Monsieur Porteur, of our legal department, a charming fellow, with a perfect education and a competency a person can't praise too highly, had the kindness to present me with a ticket for Longchamp, for it appears his brother-in-law, who is a very Parisian fellow, has a big job at the track. And, since you need some distraction . . ."

That afternoon, for the first time in her life, Sabina played the horses at Longchamp. Having bought a newspaper on the way out, she already had begun to dream about a horse named Théocrate VI, a name which represented an onomatopoetic link with her beloved Théorème and seemed a most favorable sign. Dressed in a blue coat, wearing a Tonkinese hat with a half-veil, Sabina was noticed by a number of racing fans, mostly men.

The first race or two left her almost indifferent. Her mind was still full of her beloved painter, a prey to the torments of baffling inspiration, and she could still see vividly the brillance of his black eyes as he worked in his studio exhausting himself in a battle with sordid reality. A sudden desire came to her to double and transport herself at once to the rue du Chevalier-de-la-Barre in order to lay her cool hands on the burning forehead of the artist, as is customary with lovers in agonizing situations. The fear of disturbing him in his work held her back and she let the idea go, which turned out just as well since Théorème, instead of being in his studio, was lifting a glass at a bar in the rue Caulaincourt and pondering whether the afternoon was too far spent to catch a full show at the movies.

At last the horses lined up for the start of the *Grand Prix* of the Ministry of Registration, and Sabina settled down to "hatch out" a winner in Théocrate VI. She had put 150 francs on him, all her current savings, figuring to win enough to appease Théorème's landlord. The jockey who rode Théocratic VI was wearing a fetching cap, half white, half green, a green so tender, delicate, light, frail and fresh it might have been lettuce grown in paradise. The horse itself was ebony black. From the start he took the lead by three lengths. Such a start, turf followers know, doesn't necessarily presage the final result of the race, but Sabina, already sure of victory and carried away by enthusiasm, jumped to her feet and shouted: "Théocrate; Théocrate!"

Around her were smiles and

grins. Seated at her right an elderly gentleman, in gloves, and wearing a monocle, glanced at her out of the corner of his eye, sympathetic and moved by her ingenuousness. But then, in the intoxication of victory, Sabina began yelling: "Théorème! Théorème!" Her neighbors were so noisily amused they almost forgot the race. She finally realized this and blushed with confusion. Upon seeing this, the old gentleman, so distinguished with his gloves and monocle, stood up shouting as loud as he could: "Théocrate! Théocrate!" The laughs in the crowd stopped immediately and from the whispers of those near her Sabina learned that the gallant man was no other than Lord Burbury.

Nevertheless, Théocrate VI lost his head start and finished in the cabbages. Seeing her hopes destroyed and Théorème condemned to misery, and as far as being an artist went, condemned to impotence, Sabina at first gave way to a sigh and then to a dry sob. Her nostrils quivering, a little moisture suddenly came to her eyes. Lord Burbury experienced great compassion. After an exchange of a few words, he asked her if she would not like to become his wife, for he had an annual income of two hundred thousand pounds sterling. At the same instant, Sabina had a vision, that of Théorème expiring on a hospital cot and cursing the name of his savior and that of his landlord. For the love of her lover and perhaps also for the love of painting, she replied to the old man that she would become his wife, informing him nevertheless that she possessed nothing, not even a family name, only a given name, and that the most ordinary: Marie, or Mary. Lord Burbury found this singularity most piquant, delighted with the effect she would produce on his sister Emily, a virgin of a certain age who had devoted her existence to the upholding of the honorable traditions of the historic families of the realm. Without waiting for the finish of the last race, he left in a car with his fiancée for the airport of Le Bourget. At six o'clock they arrived in London and at seven they were married.

While she was being married in London, Sabina was dining in the rue de l'Abrevoir opposite her husband, Antoine Lemurier. He found her looking much better and he spoke to her with approving kindness. Touched at his solicitude, she suffered a twinge of conscience, and asked herself if she could espouse Lord Burbury without contravening human and divine laws. It was a thorny question which involved another, that of the consubstantiality of the spouse of Antoine and that of the spouse of Lord Burbury.

Even if each of her were one

autonomous physical person, the fact remained that marriage, if it is consummated in the mortal flesh, is first of all a union of souls. In fact, her qualms were excessive. The legislation of marriage having failed to consider the case of ubiquity, Sabina was free to act according to her own will and might even, in all good faith, believe herself in order with Heaven, since there was no bull, brief, rescript or decretal which had ever specifically touched upon the problem. Still, she had too high a sense of conscience to take advantage of such lawyers' reasons. Furthermore, she believed it a duty to consider her marriage with Lord Burbury as a consequence of and a prolongation of adultery, which justified itself in no way and was, of course, perfectly damnable. In amends to God, to society and to her husband, since she had thus offended all three, she forbade herself ever to see Théorème again. Besides, she would have been ashamed to show herself before him after the consummation of a marriage *alimentaire consenti.*

It must be said, the beginnings of her life in England rendered Sabina's remorse and even the pain of absence supportable. Lord Burbury was truly a remarkable person. Besides being extremely rich he was a descendant in direct line from Jean sans Terre, or John Lackland, who had contracted a morganatic marriage with Ermessinde de Trencavel, a circumstance little known to historians, and by her had seventeen children, all dead at an early age with the exception of the fourteenth, Richard Hughes, founder of the house of Burbury. Among other privileges envied by all the British nobility, Lord Burbury had one, exclusively: He could open his umbrella in the king's chambers and his wife, her parasol. His marriage with Sabina was quite an event. The new Lady was the object of well-wishing curiosity, although her sister-in-law tried to circulate a rumor that she was formerly a dancer at the Bal Tabarin. Sabina, who in England was called Marie, was very much taken up with her obligations as a great lady: receptions, teas, knitting for charity, golf, fittings, never permitted a moment to yawn in. Still, all her various occupations did not make her forget Théorème.

The painter had no doubt as to the source of the checks which he received regularly from England and he accommodated himself perfectly to not seeing Sabina any more in his studio. Delivered from his material concerns by the monthly allowances which had risen to some hundreds of thousand francs, he recognized that he was going through a period of hypersensibility little conducive to the accomplishment of his work and what he needed was, so to

say, to "decant" himself. Consequently, he allowed himself a year for rest, more if it appeared to him he might need it. One saw him less and less at Montmartre. He decanted himself in the bars of Montparnasse and the *boîtes* along the Champs-Elysées where he lived on caviar and champagne with expensive girls. Having learned that he was leading a rather disordered life, Sabina, her fervor intact, imagined he was following some Goyaesque formula for art, blending the play of light with the immodest subjacencies of the female masque.

One afternoon, after returning from three weeks at Burbury Castle, Lady Burbury, entering her sumptuous residence on M—— Square, found four boxes containing, respectively, a silk dress, an afternoon gown in Roma crêpe, a woolen sports dress and a classic tailor-made in *sparadra*. Having dismissed her chambermaid, she multiplied by five in order to try on all the dresses at once. Inadvertently, Lord Burbury walked in.

"My dear, my dear!" he cried, "What four ravishing sisters you have! And you never told me anything about them!"

Instead of reassembling, Lady Burbury was confused and felt obliged to say:

"They've just arrived. Alphonsine is my elder by a year. Bridget is my twin sister. Barbara and Rosalie are my two younger sisters, also twins. People say they resemble me a lot."

The four sisters were well received in high society and fêted everywhere. Alphonsine married a millionaire American, a king of stamped leather, and crossed the Atlantic with him; Bridget married the Maharajah of Gorisapour who took her to his princely residence; Barbara married an illustrious Neapolitan tenor whom she accompanied on his world tours; Rosalie wed a Spanish explorer who took her with him to New Guinea to study the curious customs of the Papuans.

These four marriages, which were celebrated almost simultaneously, made a stir in England and even on the Continent. In Paris the newspaper accounts were accompanied by pictures. One evening, in the dining room in the rue de l'Abreuvoir, Antoine Lemurier said to Sabina:

"You've seen the photos of Lady Burbury and her four sisters? It's astonishing how much they look like you, except that you have lighter eyes, a more elongated face, a smaller mouth, a shorter nose and not so strong a chin. Tomorrow I am going to take the newspaper and your own photograph to show to Monsieur Porteur. He'll never get over it."

Antoine was pleased to be able to confound M. Porteur, legal chief of the S.B.N.C.A.

"I have to laugh when I think of Monsieur Porteur scratching his head," he explained. "Incidentally, he has given me another ticket for the races on Wednesday. What should a person do in return, in your opinion?"

"I don't know," Sabina replied. "It's a very delicate situation."

Would it be proper, or not, she asked thoughtfully, for Lemurier to send flowers to Mme. Porteur, the wife of his hierarchial superior? And at the same moment, Lady Burbury, seated at a bridge table *en face* the Duke of Leicester; the Begum of Gorisapour, stretched out on her palanquin on the back of an elephant; Mrs. Smithson, busy in Pennsylvania doing the honors of her synthetic Renaissance chateau; Barbara Cazzarini in a loge at the Vienna Opera where her tenor was singing illustriously; Rosalie Valdez y Samaniego, lying under the mosquito-netting in a Papuan village hut—all alike were absorbed in whether or not to offer flowers to Mme. Porteur.

Théorème, informed by the newspapers on these nuptial festivities, had not the slightest doubt, when he saw the photographs illustrating the reports, that all these brides were new incarnations of Sabina. Except in the case of the explorer, who he considered practiced a not very lucrative trade, he found the choices of the brides entirely judicious. It was at about this time he felt a need to go back to Montmartre. The rainy climate of Montparnasse and the noisy aridity of the Champs-Elysées had worn him out. Further, the monthly allowances from Lady Burbury had afforded him more relief in the cafés on the Butte than in these other foreign establishments. He had not changed anything in his way of living and it was not long before he was making a reputation at Montmartre as a noctambulous roisterer, good drinker and go-anywhere-do-anything fellow. His friends amused themselves with stories of his pranks and, a little envious of his new opulence from which, of course, they profited, they repeated with satisfaction that he was lost forever to painting. They did take the trouble to add that it was a pity, though, in view of the fact he had the authentic temperament of an artist.

Sabrina learned of Théorème's bad conduct and realized he was making a fatal misstep. Her faith in him and his destiny was shaken, but she loved him all the more tenderly for it and blamed herself for being the cause of his downfall. For nearly a week she wrung her hands in all four quarters of the world.

One night, toward midnight, when she was coming back from the movies in company with her

husband, Sabina saw, at the intersection of the rues Junot and Girardon, Théorème, hanging between the arms of two hilarious girls. Intoxicated, Théorème was losing all the wine he had drunk and at the same time delivering himself of disgraceful insults directed at the two creatures with him, one of whom was holding his head and familiarly addressing him as her "pig," while the other, in army terms, was rating his resources in love. Having recognized Sabina, Théorème turned his bleary face toward her, hiccoughed the name of Burbury followed by a brief but revolting commentary, and then sank in a heap at the foot of a lamp post. From the date of that encounter, Théorème was no more to Sabina than an object of hatred and disgust which she promised herself to forget.

Two weeks later, Lady Burbury, who was then with her husband in their domain of Burbury, fell in love with a young pastor of the neighborhood who had come to lunch at the castle. He did not have black eyes; his eyes were pale blue, and his mouth was not voluptuous, but rather pinched and sunk in; he had an air of well-cleansed propriety and a conscience common to people who condemn things they do not understand. But from the first luncheon, Lady Burbury was desperately in love. That evening she said to her husband:

"I have never told you, but I have still another sister. Her name is Judith."

The following week, Judith came to the castle where she lunched in the company of the pastor who showed himself to be polished but distant, as was proper in regard to a Catholic, a receptable and vehicle of false ideas. After luncheon, the two made a little tour of the grounds together and Judith, with pertinence but as if by chance, quoted the Book of Job, the Book of Numbers and Deuteronomy. The reverend saw that here was fertile soil. Eight days later he had converted Judith, fifteen days later he married her. Their happiness was brief. The pastor had nothing but the most edifying conversation, and right up to the very bed pillow he pronounced words revealing a great elevation of thought. Judith was so bored in his company that when they made a walking trip together around a lake in Scotland, she took the opportunity to drown herself accidentally. Actually, she merely let herself slip under a while, holding her breath, and once she had disappeared from her husband's sight she contrived a partial reassemblage in the bosom of Lady Burbury. The reverend suffered a frightful grief, thanked Heaven nevertheless for having sent him this trial of his soul and had a little pedestal erected in his garden *in memoriam*.

Meantime, Théorème began to worry over not having received his last monthly allowance. Thinking first it was a mere delay, he forced himself to have patience, but after having survived on his credit for more than a month, he resolved to talk these boring things over with Sabina. For three mornings in a row he posted himself in vain in the rue de l'Abreuvoir hoping to surprise her. He ran into her by chance one evening at six o'clock.

"Sabina," he said, "I've been looking for you for three days."

"But, monsieur,' replied Sabina, "I don't know you."

She started to move on, but Théorème put his hand on her shoulder.

"Look, Sabina, what reason have you for being angry? I've done everything you wanted. Then one fine day you decide not to come to my place any more. And I've suffered in silence, without even asking why you've given up coming."

"Monsieur, I do not understand anything you say, but your intimate form of address and your incomprehensible allusions are an insult. Let me pass."

"But Sabina, you can't have forgotten *everything!* Remember, now!"

Not yet daring to broach the matter of subsidy, Théorème strained to recreate an aura of intimacy. Pathetically, he evoked the most touching memories and retraced the history of their love. But Sabina looked at him with astonished eyes, a little frightened, and protested with less indignation than stupor. The young man nevertheless was stubborn.

"Finally," he said, "remember last summer—the vacation we spent together in Britanny—our room on the sea!"

"Last summer? But I spent my vacation with my husband in Auvergne!"

"Naturally! If you keep on pulling the wool over your own eyes!"

"What! Pulling the wool—You are either joking with me, or you have lost your senses. Let me go by or I'll scream!"

Théorème, irritated by a bad faith sufficiently evident by now, seized her by the arm and began shaking her and swearing by the name of God. Sabina saw her husband passing on the other side of the street without having seen them and she called out his given name. He came up and, without understanding the situation, bowed to Théorème.

"This gentleman," explained Sabina, "whom I have just met for the first time in my life, stopped me here in the street. And, not content with speaking to me familiarily, he treats me as if I had been his mistress, calling me chérie and raising up a lot of so-called memories of what might have been our past loves."

"What kind of thing is this,

Monsieur?" asked Antoine Lemurier.

"All right," grumbled Théorème, "I don't want to take advantage of the situation."

"Take advantage! Don't trouble yourself, sir," Sabina said, laughing. And she turned to Antoine. "Among other souvenirs of our supposed loves, monsieur just remembered a three-week trip he made with me last summer to a beach in Brittany. What do you say to that?"

"Let's say that I never said anything," sulked Théorème.

"You certainly couldn't do better," approved the husband. "I want you to know, monsieur, that my wife and I never left each other the whole summer and that we spent our vacation—"

"On a lake in Auvergne," cut in Théorème. "That's agreed."

"How do you know that?" asked Sabina ingenuously.

"A little bird told me one day when he was in bathing trunks on a beach in Brittany."

This response appeared to make the young woman thoughtful. The painter looked at her with his very black eyes. She smiled and added:

"In short, if I understand it, you pretend that I found myself at the same time on a lake in Auvergne with my husband and on a Breton beach with you?"

Théorème winked, a sign of yes. His case became clear then to Antoine Lemurier who restrained himself from giving the young man a good kick in the stomach.

"Monsieur," the good man said, patiently, "I suppose that you are not alone in the world. No doubt you have someone who takes care of you: a friend, a wife, parents. If you live in this quarter I should be glad to conduct you to your place."

"You don't know who I am, then?" The painter was astonished.

"Excuse me—"

"I am Vercingetorix. As for my return, don't bother. I am going to take the *metro* to Lamarck and I will get back to Alesia, in Burgundy, for dinner. So, goodnight, and go back home quickly and caress your little bourgeoisie."

With these last words, Théorème looked Sabina up and down with all the insolence possible and withdrew with atrociously audible sneers. The poor lad did not dissimulate his madness, and he was astounded himself at not having had his revelation sooner. It was not hard to prove his madness. If the Breton vacation and the ubiquity of Sabina had never had any reality other than in his mind, the whole thing was certainly the illusion of a madman. On the other hand, supposing everything were true. Théorème was in the position of a man who was witness to an absurd truth, one fit only for a mental patient. The certitude of his dementia affected the painter deeply. He became somber, with-

drawn, suspicious, avoiding his friends and discouraging their advances. He also fled the society of girls, no longer frequenting the cafés of the Butte and confining himself to his studio to meditate on his madness. Unless he lost his memory, he could not say how he would ever be cured.

Solitude had the happy result of bringing Théorème back to painting. He set himself before his easel with a wild intensity, a violence often demential. His wonderful genius, which he had thrown away in the old days in the cafés, bars and obscure byways, began to gleam a little, then to glitter and then to flash. After six months of effort, of passionate trials and experiments, he came to full realization of himself and painted nothing but masterpieces, nearly all of them immortal. Among others should be cited his famous "Woman With Nine Heads" which made such a hullaballoo, and his pure but nontheless troubling "Voltairean Armchair." His uncle from Limoges was well satisfied.

Meanwhile Lady Burbury rounded out with the good works of the pastor. Let us hasten to say there was nothing in the conduct of either one or the other which had been contrary to honor, but Judith, enfolding herself in the bosom of her sister, had carried with her there the fruit, still in the state of promise, of her union with the reverend. Lady Burbury was brought to bed, not without a little moral uneasiness, with a well-shaped baby boy which the pastor baptized with indifference. The child was given the name of Antony, and there is nothing more to be said of it. At about the same time, the Begum of Gorisapour brought into the world a pair of twins owing nothing to the Maharajah himself. There was great rejoicing and the people, according to custom, offered to the newborn infants their weight in fine gold. On their parts, Barbara Cazzarini and Rosalie Valdez y Samaniego became mothers, one to a boy, the other a girl. There was rejoicing there too.

Mrs. Smithson, the wife of the millionaire, failed to follow the examples of her sisters and fell quite seriously ill. During her convalescence, which she passed in California, she began to read those dangerous novels which show you, on days too beautiful for words, infamous couples deep in sin.

Mrs. Smithson had the weakness of letting them take hold of her. At first she sighed, and then she thought. "I have," she told herself, "five husbands, and I have had as many as six at a time. I have had only one lover, and yet he gave me more joy in six months than all my husbands put together in a year. Still, he was unworthy of my love. I abandoned him in a qualm of conscience." (Here Mrs.

Smithson sighed and let the pages of her novel riffle under her thumb.) "Alas, the lovers in *Love Awakens Me* don't know what it is to have a qualm of conscience. They are as happy as bulls (she meant to say happy as gods). My scruples, to me, are unjustified, for what does the sin of adultery consist of? Adultery is simply doing unto others what only one should do unto you. . . . Well, from now on, nothing is going to stop me from having a lover, to keep me intact for Smithson."

Such reflections would not be long, of course, in bearing fruit. The worst of it was that she was not alone in this, since the poison, according to the laws of ubiquity, had insinuated itself at the same time into the souls of her sisters. Toward the end of her convalescence on the sands of California, Mrs. Smithson attended a concert. They played the "Moonlight Sonata" in hot jazz. The charm of Beethoven and his bedeviled music acted on her imagination in such a way that she became amorous of the percussionist who, two days later, embarked for the Philippines. Two weeks later, Mrs. Smithson despatched a double to Manila to pick up the musician on his arrival. At the same time Lady Burbury became enamored of a panther hunter upon seeing his photograph in a magazine, and delegated a double to Java. The wife of the tenor, upon leaving Stockholm, posted a double there to make the acquaintance of a young chorister she had noticed at the Opera, while Rosalie Valdez y Samaniego, whose husband had just been eaten by a Papuan tribe during a religious fête, multiplied herself by four for the love of as many handsome boys she had met in different ports of Oceana.

It was not long before the unfortunate ubiquitist was seized with a sort of frenzy and had lovers in all quarters of the globe. The number increased at a geometric ratio of 2.7. The dispersed phalanx was made up of men of every kind: sailors, planters, Chinese pirates, officials, cowboys, a champion chess player, Scandinavian athletes, pearl fishermen, a commissaire of the people's government, high school students, cattle drovers, a matador, a young butcher, fourteen movie fans, a porcelain mender, sixty-seven doctors, some marquises, four Russian princes, two employees of the state railway of France, a professor of geometry, a harness-maker, eleven lawyers, and the list might be extended. Let us note, finally, one member of the Academie Française, on a lecture tour in the Balkans, with all his beard. In one island of the Marquesa group, where the natives appear to be quite handsome, the insatiable sweetheart multiplied herself by thirty-nine. In three months time, she had come out into the society

of the world in nine hundred and fifty models. Six months later, this number attained in the neighborhood of eighteen thousand, which is considerable.

In the rue de l'Abreuvoir, Sabina Lemurier, with apparent calmness, continued to lead the life of an attentive wife and a good housekeeper, going to market, cooking a steak, sewing on buttons, seeing that her husband had clean linen, exchanging visits with the wives of his colleagues and writing punctually to an old uncle in Clermont-Ferrand. In contrast to her four sisters, she seemed not to have wished to follow the perfidious suggestions of Mrs. Smithson's novels and she had forbidden herself to multiply and chase after lovers. One would judge this caution specious, artificial and hypocritical, in view of the fact that Sabina and her innumberable sinner sisters were all one and the same person. But even the greatest sinners are never entirely abandoned by God, who maintains a tiny gleam of light in the shadows of these poor souls. Indeed, from the first, her attitude was always one of homage to Antoine Lemurier, as much as for his priority, as for his being her lawful husband. Her conduct in this regard was a constant witness to such an honorable attitude. When Lemurier was taken ill and fell heavily in debt, it happened that the household found itself in extreme difficulties, on the verge of misery itself. Quite often there was no money to pay the pharmacy, the baker or the rent. Sabina lived through agonizing days, but even when the sheriff rapped at the door and Antoine called for the priest, she steeled herself against the temptation of resorting to the millions of Lady Burbury or those of Mrs. Smithson. However, seated at the bedside of the sick man and watching his difficult breathing, she remained attentive to the diversions of her sisters (they were then 47,000) and, present at all their goings-on and listening to that immense lascivious rumor of sound, sometimes she had to sigh. Her complexion heightened, the pupils of her eyes slightly dilated, she sometimes resembled a telephone operator watching with passionate attention over an immense switchboard.

However a participant to (and a participant of) that voluptuous melée, Sabina herself remained unappeased. It was at this time she took up again her love of Théorème: Perhaps her forty-seven thousand lovers were nothing more than derivatives of that hopeless love. Sabina learned first from her milkwoman, then from the newspapers, of Théorème's success and at an exposition, fluttery at heart and misty-eyed, she admired his "Woman with Nine Heads," so tender and so tragically unreal and, for her, so allusive. Her one-

time lover appeared to her purified, atoned, redeemed, resilvered, brand new and shiny.

Théorème still had his black eyes, but his madness had left him, although he still employed the same arguments to test it. Philosophically, he told himself there were excellent reasons for many things, no matter what, and, while surely there must exist some reasons which would invalidate the proof of his madness, he had simply not taken the trouble to find them. Nevertheless, his life went on nearly the same, laborious and often solitary. True to Sabina's wish, his painting became more and more beautiful and the critics said very fine things on the spirituality of his canvases. One scarcely ever ran into him in the cafés, and among his friends he rarely spoke, his face and manner sad as that of a man who has espoused a great grief. What happened was he had conducted a real self-examination and could now judge his past conduct in regard to Sabina. Conscious of his baseness, he blushed with shame twenty times a day, regaling himself with such terms as churl, snout, bowlegged and poisonous toad, and stuck-up pig. He would have liked to accuse himself in front of Sabina, to implore her pardon, but he judged himself as too unworthy. Having made a pilgrimage to the beach in Brittany, he brought back two admirable canvases that would have made a grocer weep, and, also, a heightened remembrance of his piggishness. He took on so much humility in his suffering for Sabina that he regretted now ever having been loved at all.

Antoine Lemurier, who had failed to die, emerged happily out of his illness, resumed his work in his office and, as well as he could, dressed his wounds with money. During his ordeal, the neighbors had all rejoiced in the belief that the husband would kick off, the furniture be sold, and the wife turned out in the street. All were excellent people, of course, with hearts of gold, like everyone else, and wished nothing against the Lemurier menage, but, realizing a somber tragedy was unfolding under their eyes, with all sorts of reverberations, sudden shifts of the wind, bellowings of the landlord, the sheriff, and a mounting fever, they lived in the anxious expectation of a denouement worthy of the production. Then Lemurier had to knock it all into a cocked hat.

In retaliation, the neighbors began to commiserate with his wife and to praise her. "Madame Lemurier," they said, "what courage you've had." "We all think so highly of you and I wanted to tell you so," said one, "but Frederick said no, it would bother you, but let me tell you I know what goes on and I often said, and said it again yesterday to M. Brevet: 'Madame

Lemurier is extraordinary; admirable is the word for her'."

Such things were said as much as possible in front of Lemurier, or else repeated by the concierge or by the three-room apartment on the fifth floor or by the one on the third in front, and voiced with such feeling that the poor man came to consider the expression of his own gratitude insufficient. One evening, by the light of the dining room lamp, Sabina seemed worn out. She was with her fifty-six thousandth lover, a captain of gendarmes, a handsome fellow, who was unbuckling his swordbelt in a hotel in Casablanca and remarking that after having stuffed oneself well and smoked a good cigar, love was divine. Antoine Lemurier, who was regarding his wife with veneration, took her hand and let her lips rest upon it.

"My darling," he said, "you are a saint. The sweetest, the most beautiful. A true saint."

The unwitting mockery of such respect and his adoring gaze overwhelmed Sabina. She withdrew her hand, burst into tears, and, blaming her nerves, left for her room. On the following morning, in expiation of the life of deceit she had lived with her good husband, Antoine Lemurier, Sabina divided herself for the last time.

Under the name of Louise Megnin, she picked out one of the most miserable hovels of the Saint-Ouen quarter for a life of penance. Among the heaps of refuse, and foul odors of cinders and humanity, she found a shack of scrap lumber and tar paper. Its two rooms were separated by a partition of planks and one room sheltered a catarrhal, debilitated old man who was cared for by an idiot boy he abused day and night with the voice of one dying.

Louise Megnin was obliged to put in a long time getting used to the neighborhood, as well as to the vermin, rats, odors, noisy squabbles, the grossness of the denizens, and all the sordid inconveniences of this final circle of hell on earth. For several days Lady Burbury and her married sisters, as well as the fifty-six thousand inamoratas, lost their taste for food. Lord Burbury was astonished at times to notice his wife grow pale and shiver from head to foot, her eyes expressing a look of revulsion. "She is hiding something from me," he thought. The fact was that in her squalid hut, Louise Megnin was grimacing before a big-bellied rat, or battling the fleas for her miserable cot, but he could not know that.

One would perhaps suppose that this expiatory descent to the region of the damned, the ragpickers, stench, starvation, knives, sour wine and slaverings of sots, might have provided for the multi-corporal sinner an appreciable step on the road to virtue. But no; on the contrary. Her fifty-six thousand sisters and Louise Megnin tried to

deaden themselves to forget the zone of Saint-Ouen. Instead of delighting in her sufferings, as it would have been right and proper, Louise forced herself to see nothing, hear nothing, and dispersed herself over five continents to take in the spectacle of games of l'amour.

Happily, Providence was on the job. One evening, at dusk, the air was very soft; the exhalations from the shacks and the piles of rubbish were no stronger than usual; and over the zone floated a light fog, half veiling the bandy-legged huts and the alleys of clinkers. Louise Megnin was filling a water can at the public hydrant when she saw coming out of one of the hovels a monstrous-looking man making his way to the water tap. Built like a gorilla in the breadth of his shoulders and having the features and the knee-length arms of such a creature, he was shod in house slippers and socks which did not match. He rolled his shoulders as he walked and when he stopped near Louise he said nothing, his small eyes shining in his hairy face.

Some of the other men, hanging around, had already accosted her at the hydrant, a few had even prowled around her shack, but even the most hardened of them had always observed some ritual of approach. This one obviously thought nothing of such niceties and his attitude seemed as calm as if he was simply waiting for a street bus. Louise did not dare raise her eyes as she glimpsed with terror the enormous hanging hands, covered with a black and dirty mat of bristles. Her water bucket filled, she started back, the gorilla walking beside her with small steps, his knock-kneed legs short and disproportionate to his trunk, and from time to time he spat tobacco juice.

"Why are you following me?" asked Louise.

"My wound is beginning to open again," said the gorilla and as he walked he plucked at the cloth of his breeches which stuck to his thigh. They reached the shack. Chilled with fright, Louise stepped quickly ahead and slammed the door in his face. But before she had time to lock it, he pushed it open with one hand, pinning her behind it on the floor. In the room next door, the old man could be heard rattling off blasphemies in a moribund voice. Louise, terrified, looked up from the floor, her eyed fixed on the gorilla.

At Paris, London, Shanghai, Bamako, Baton Rouge, Vancouver, New York, Breslau, Warsaw, Rome, Pondichery, Sydney, Barcelona and other parts of the earth, Sabina holding her breath, followed the movements of the gorilla. Lady Burbury was just making her entry at a fashionable salon and the mistress of the place was advancing to meet her when she

saw her ladyship recoil, her nose twitching and her eyes full of horror, and fall back, suddenly, in the lap of an old colonel. At Napier, New Zealand, Ernestine dug her nails deep in the hands of a young bank employee who found himself asking what in the world had happened. Sabina would have been able to reabsorb Louise Megnin in one of her numerous bodies —she was not beyond considering it—but it seemed to her that she did not have the right to bypass this ordeal.

The gorilla violated Louise Megnin several times. In the intervals, he picked up the quid of tobacco he had calmly deposited on a chair, and later put it back on the chair. From the other side of the partition the old man continued his litanies and with one debilitated hand hurled his sabots across the room trying to brain his young companion who broke out each time with an imbecile laugh. It was almost dark. In the half-light, the movement of the gorilla stirred the heavy odors of the place, which seemed concentrated in his rags and skin. Finally having picked up his quid for good, he put a two-franc piece on the table (a man who knew how to live), and threw back over his shoulder as he left, "I'll be back."

That night not one of the sixty-five thousand sisters was able to find sleep and their tears seemed never to stop. They could see well enough now that the pleasures of love described in novels were deceitful illusions and that the handsomest man in the world, outside the sacred ties of wedlock, was not able to give anything other than, *au fond,* pretty much the same thing as the gorilla. Several thousand among them, starting quarrels with their lovers, who exasperated them to tears and disgust, broke their liaisons as soon as possible and sought an honorable livelihood.

One morning the gorilla arrived at Louise Megnin's with a huge gunny sack containing eight tins of *pâté de foie gras,* six of salmon, three of goat cheese, three boxes of camembert, six hard-boiled eggs, fifteen cents worth of pickles, a pot of minced pork, a sausage, four kilos of fresh bread, twelve bottles of red wine, one of rum, and also a phonograph made in 1912 with three cylinder records which, he made clear, he preferred in the following order: the *"Chanson des Blés d'Or,"* a broad monologue, and the duet from "Charlotte and Werther."

Arriving, then, with his sack on his shoulder, the gorilla shut himself in the hovel with Louise Megnin and never left it until five o'clock two days later. Of the horrors perpetrated during those two days of *tête-à-tête,* it is better to say nothing. What must be said, however, is that at the same time twenty thousand sweethearts, dis-

illusioned, abandoned their lovers in order to consecrate themselves to lowly tasks and the aid of the afflicted. It is also true that nine thousand, or nearly half of them, fell again into sin. But the benefits were good. From then on, the gains were nearly constant, in spite of all the slips and falls.

But the habits of existence, particularly the most everyday habits, the most lulling ones, the most apparently insignificant, cling to us like the soul clings to the skin. One saw this clearly with Sabina. Those of her sisters who led a life of indulgence—one lover today, another tomorrow—became the first to repent. Most of the others took their vice like an *apéritif* at a regular time, or like a comfortable apartment, or a smile from the doorman, a Siamese cat, a greyhound, a weekly hair-do, the radio, a dressmaker, an easy chair, or a partner at bridge, and, in short, adapted themselves almost completely to the regular presence of a man.

Each week the gorilla passed two or three days in a row with Louise and he was monstrous in the warmth of his heartiness. Thousands of sweethearts fought against sin, hurled themselves at purity and good works, went back to their degradation, hesitated, stumbling, losing themselves and finding themselves again until, in the end, most of them settled down in their own corners, snug in a life of chastity, work and abnegation.

Marveling, breathless, the angels leaned over the barricades of heaven to follow the glorious contest, and when they saw the gorilla go into Louise Megnin's place, they could not help intoning a canticle of joy. Now and then God himself glanced down. But He was far from sharing the enthusiasm of the angels. He rebuked them (but paternally): "Now then," He said, "That's just one soul like any other. I realize that the contest is quite spectacular, but what you are seeing there is only what takes place in all poor souls to whom I have not taken the trouble to give fifty-six thousand bodies."

Meanwhile, in the rue de l'Abreuvoir, Sabina led an anxious and meditative existence, watching over the movements of her soul and writing them down in figures on a household account pad. When her penitent sisters reached a total of forty thousand, her face took on a more serene expression, even though she remained on the *qui vive*. Often, in the evenings, in the dining room, she smiled, and from the luminous quality of her face, more than ever it seemed to Antoine that she spoke with the angels.

One Sunday morning she was shaking a bedside rug out the window and at her side Lemurier was dreaming over a difficult cross-

word puzzle when Théorème walked down the rue de l'Abreuvoir.

"Look," said Lemurier, "there's that crazy fellow. It's been a long time since we've seen him."

"You shouldn't say crazy," Sabina protested quietly. "M. Théorème is such a great painter."

Strolling along, Théorème went toward his destiny, which made him first descend the rue des Saules and follow it as far as the Flea Market outside the porte de Clignancourt. Paying no attention to the bargains, he walked idly on, finding himself, finally, in the village of the "zone." The zone-dwellers watched him pass with the discreet hostility of pariahs for a well-dressed stranger in whom they detect the idler nosing into their picturesque misery.

Théorème quickened his steps and, reaching the last hovel, came almost face to face with Louise Megnin who was carrying her bucket of water. Her feet were bare in her sabots and she was dressed in a thin black dress that was patched and mended. Without a word, he took the pail and went into the poverty-stricken shack behind her. The old man behind the partition had dragged himself out as far as the Flea Market to buy a second-hand soup plate and the place was quiet.

Théorème took Sabina's hands, and neither of them found words to ask forgiveness for the evil each thought he had done to the other. As he knelt at her feet, she tried to pull him up, but instead fell to her knees beside him and tears came to the eyes of them both. It was at that moment the gorilla made his entrance.

He was packing on his back a gunny sack of victuals, for he had come to install himself for a week with Louise. Without uttering a word, he set his sack down and, still saying nothing, took the two lovers by the throats—one neck in each hand—raised them up, shook them like medicine bottles, and strangled them. They died at the same time, face to face and eye to eye. Wedging each in a chair, the gorilla seated himself at the table with them, slit open a tin of *pâté de foie gras* and drank a bottle of red. He passed the day eating and drinking and winding up the phonograph to listen to the *"Chanson des Blés d'Or."* When night came, he tied one body to another and crammed them into his big sack.

Leaving the hovel with his burden on his shoulder, he experienced in the upper part of his chest a kind of shiver which resembled compassion and he took the trouble to open the sack and shove in a geranium blossom he picked from the window of one of the hovels.

Through the main streets he went down to the Seine, which he reached at about eleven o'clock that night. The whole adventure

had induced in the gorilla a faint touch of imagination. On the Quai de la Mégisserie, while he was dangling the two cadavers over the river, the idea struck him suddenly to end it all; but instead of throwing himself into the water, the gorilla had the delicacy to go and cut his throat under a portal in the rue des Lavandières-Sainte-Opportune.

At the same second that Louise Megnin was strangled, her sixty-some-odd thousand sisters also gave up their last breath, with a happy smile, their hands at their throats. Some, like Lady Burbury and Mrs. Smithson, repose in costly tombs, others under simple mounds of earth which time quickly effaces. Sabina was buried at Montmartre in the little cemetery of Saint-Vincent and from time to time her friends go to visit her. They believe that she is in paradise and on the Day of Judgment she will be resurrected like all the rest of us—for her a more than usual pleasure affecting as it will all her sixty-seven thousand bodies.

Through Time And Space With Ferdinand Feghoot: XXXVI

FERDINAND FEGHOOT WAS THE greatest irrigation engineer in all history. He brought water to Mars by diverting icebergs from the trans-Plutonian asteroid belts. He piped fresh ammonia to the deserts of Capella XIII, where valuable crystalline music-plants grow. He almost settled the water dispute between Northern and Southern Calfunya.

But his hardest task came on Lushmeadow Acres, a small planet sold to a colony of New Amish by Good-as-Gold Gaazreeb, a Vegan promoter. The arable land lay at over 10,000 feet; the water at sea-level. "Our religion forbids us machinery," the settlers explained. "We can afford only one more cargo from Earth. In six months, Good-as-Gold will foreclose. Save us, Ferdinand Feghoot!"

Feghoot took charge. He ordered the final cargo, and he started the colonists channelling and digging. When Gaazreeb came with his bailiffs, rivers were flowing uphill all over the planet, every field was loaded with crops, and the bank had refinanced.

"*How* did you do it?" screamed Gaazreeb, using every one of his voice-ducts. He pointed at the tide from the fresh-water sea, running into a river bed. "No machine! Water flows over *pickles*!"

"Naturally," smiled Ferdinand Feghoot. "That was our cargo. We've known it for centuries on Earth. Dill waters run steep."

—GRENDEL BRIARTON (*with thanks to Capt. E. D. Harris*)

A simple little saunter down a trail that Hemingway has walked before--with, however, science fiction scenery, and an unexpected turning. . . .

THE INTRUDER

by Theodore L. Thomas

MAX PULLED THE LAST LINE taut and stepped back to inspect his work. The rocket tubes were tightly capped and the ship was safely out of the beat of the wind and the rain. It should remain secure for the full ten days of his fishing trip. He dragged his duffle up the slight slope and turned to face the wind. He closed his eyes and waited, eager to look yet holding back a moment more. Then he opened them. It was as he expected.

A quarter of a mile away was the sea. The waves were white and frothy and sticky looking, and the tops were driven flat by the wind. Above them was the greyish blanket of sea-spray, thicker than usual, standing a good fifty feet above the water. The wind was strong, and the spray carried to Max. He tasted the salt of it, and smelled the rich, loamy smell of it, and his throat tightened. He looked out over the bare island of rock. There was nothing to spoil it.

Max struggled into his gear, took up his musette bag and fishing spear, and was ready. He was happy to be on the planet again.

The way was hard. Almost immediately Max felt the strain of the pack on his neck muscles, but he knew from experience that he could walk all day with it. Sometimes he used the fishing spear as a staff, but the pack was too heavy for him to raise his arm very often. After two hours of walking he stopped to rest.

He sat down and leaned back and stared up at the clouds. It had been as much of a thrill as always to come down through those clouds. The sun of the planet had disappeared as he dropped lower through the carbon dioxide-rich layers. The howling winds and the ice clouds closed in on him, folding him into a noisy world of his own, he and his good ship alone together. Down, then, to the lowermost layers where the

oxygen and the water were, and where the occasional islands of rock thrust through the giant waves.

Max smiled, enjoying the isolation. It was good to be alone, good not to have to worry about talking to people.

It was time to move. Max leaned forward into the straps, heaved himself erect, and began to walk. His muscles had stiffened while he had rested, but he knew they would limber up soon.

An hour later the rain hit him. Max flipped his helmet into place and sloshed through deep sheets of water. Visibility was only a few feet, so Max walked by his helmet compass. Again, he was closed into a tiny world all his own, and he felt strong and secure in it.

A half hour passed and Max judged that he must be near the turn-off point. Rather than risk missing it in the rain he sat down to wait for the rain to lift. He sat in perfect comfort while the deluge washed over him, throbbing on the helmet, roaring on the rocks. His tired muscles relaxed, and he stared contentedly at the grey wall of rain in front of him. Then he fell asleep.

The cessation of noise woke him; the rain had passed. He flipped back his helmet and breathed in the wet air. To his right was the sea, and there, a quarter of a mile away, was the flat-topped cylinder of black rock that was the marker he was looking for. Max was pleased, and he said aloud, "Perfect dead reckoning." The sound of his voice startled him, and he glanced around, then felt foolish, and grinned. The grin spread to a loud laugh, and this time he welcomed the sound. He scooped up the fishing spear and the musette bag and headed down toward the sea. In fifteen minutes he arrived at his campsite.

He entered the site from the upper rim. The campsite was shaped like a great, open pie-pan, twenty feet in diameter, five feet deep. On the western side a slab of the living rock rose higher than the rest and then curved in toward the center of the pie-pan, forming a shelter for the cooking stove. A dead flat area slightly off the center of the site seemed made for a tent; Max could see his old nail holes, splintered and widened at the top from the work of the wind and the water. At the south rim, facing the sea, was a three-foot gap in the wall that opened to a Z-shaped trail leading down to the sea.

Max put the heavy pack down and walked over to the southern rim, flexing his shoulders as he went. He looked down the fifty-foot bluff to the cove below. The trail led to a ledge that dipped gently beneath the surface of the sea. The waves washed softly up the ledge, their full fury broken

by a high, jagged wall of rock that curved out to sea from the west. The wind was full where he stood and he leaned into it.

Max realized he was hungry. And he ought to set up his camp. With a last reluctant look at the cove he reentered the campsite.

He untied the tent roll, pushed the stone-nails through the grommets in the bottom, and then drove them into the rock. He took a high-pressure air flask from the pack and bled some air into the double walls. He went around the fittings again and again, and, gradually and evenly, he brought the tent to its full taut position.

He set up the two-burner stove. Into a frying pan he put a good measure of dried eggs and dried, diced ham, and over the top he sprinkled a layer of dried green pepper strips. He scooped up some rainwater from a hollow in the rock and added it to the food in the pan. He put it over a low flame and soon the air filled with the smell of cooking ham and peppers. It brought water to Max's mouth.

When it was done he scraped it into a pie-pan, and put on a pot of water to boil for coffee. He buttered two slices of bread and carried the food to the place where he usually sat. From there he could look through the crack in in the south wall and see out over the cove to the wild ocean beyond.

He ate slowly, looking around the campsite. He grinned happily not a thing out of place. The trick was to make up the pack right. You packed it so that the things you needed first were on top, in the right order, and as you took them out you found a place for them.

The plate was empty, and the water was boiling so he measured the right amount of coffee into the boiling water. He let it boil for exactly eight seconds and then he took it from the fire. The fragrance of coffee rose from the pot, and Max breathed it in gratefully. He poured himself a big cup, put in two large spoonfuls of sugar, and stirred it well. Funny, he thought. Back home he always drank his coffee straight and bitter, with no sugar, but out in the open he liked it well sweetened.

He carried the coffee through the gap and sat down and lit a cigaret. He was full and comfortable, and the coffee was good, and the cigaret was just right. Max felt he could sit there forever, and he grinned as he thought it. He knew that a big part of his enjoyment of the moment was the certain knowledge that he had to get up soon and wash the dinner pans.

He finished, sighed, and went and collected the pans. He looked at the fishing spear, but reluctantly turned away. Not yet. He was tired and sleepy. Wash the pans, get some sleep, then he'd be fresh

for the fishing. Full as he was, Max licked his lips at the thought of some trilobite meat.

Max threaded his way down the Z-trail and walked out on the shelf that sloped down into the water. He rubbed sand into the pans until his fingers were sore. Time after time he rinsed the pans, checking the film of water for signs of grease. Finally satisfied he gave them a final rinse and climbed up the trail. He stowed the pans, and took up a towel and a piece of soap and a toothbrush. He walked to the east rim of the campsite and vaulted to the top.

About twenty feet away was an eight-foot wide depression in the rock, filled with water. Max stripped off his rainsuit and rinsed it and dried it. He worked fast as he brushed his teeth and soaped himself thoroughly. He did not want to be caught in a really heavy downpour—a man without a rainsuit could drown in a few minutes in the open.

He rinsed off the soap, but did not stop to dry himself there. Carrying the rainsuit he trotted back to the tent and dried himself standing at the door. Then he crawled through the door and into the bed-roll. Sitting up in it he checked the air vents by feel, and then he settled down and pulled the bed-roll up around him. "Man," said Max, and he took a deep breath and blew it out hard. He twisted his head into the pillow and listened to the distant roar of the crashing waves and to the sigh of the wind. "Man," he said again. Then he fell asleep.

Sometime later the rain came. The hard drumming of it on the tent woke him up, and he lay there and listened. Over the beat of the rain on the tent he could hear the swirl of the water as it raced through the campsite down to the sea. The wind was strong and gusty, and it changed the sound of the rain on the tent; now it was harsh and rasping, now soft and muted. The roar of the waves was louder too, with more of a booming sound.

Max lay snug and warm in the tent, while outside the storm raged. This was one of the best parts of it, the lying and the listening. Max forced himself to stay awake and listen. A row of gooseflesh sprang up along his spine and spread over his entire body, and he shuddered and pulled the roll closer, and felt good. He was still trying to stay awake when he drifted off to sleep again. It was ten hours before he awoke, feeling wide awake and refreshed.

He put on his rainsuit and looked up at the sky. There was no change in the gleaming greyness. The sun of the planet was never visible, not even as a bright spot in the sky.

Max breathed in the salty air, and stretched. He was hungry

again, not hard hungry the way he'd been before, but soft hungry with the kind of hunger fresh air brings. Max knew the feeling; he'd have it for most of the time from now on, starting about two hours after each meal. It was a sign that he was shaking down into outdoor life, and he was pleased.

He whipped up some applesauce and a thin pancake batter. He made four pancakes and used the last fragments to wipe the applesauce pot clean. Neither the frying pan nor the pot needed washing, so he put them away.

The eagerness was rising in him. He was ready now to go fishing. He inspected the trident end of the fishing spear, flexed the three blunt points, and checked the air flask in the suit. He hung a sack at his waist and took a final look around the campsite. The stove was still up, so he put it away. He looked back over the clean and lonely island of rock, and it looked good. There was nothing to spoil it. Then he walked through the gap and down the Z-trail to the water.

Max went right into the water. When it reached his waist he pulled the helmet into position, and kept going. When the water was halfway over his helmet he stopped. He stood at the dividing line between two worlds, and looked from one to the other. The upper world, storm-tossed and cleanly empty, yet preparing to receive the spill-over of life from below. The lower world, teeming with small creatures, subject to an ever-increasing pressure of life. It was pleasant to stand and contemplate the over-empty and the over-full in a single glance. Then Max stepped forward and moved beneath the water in a half crouch, spear poised.

The waving ferns seemed to beckon him on. Smooth, black rocks jutted from the bottom in his path. A great jelly fish hung in front of him, long pink streamers dangling from the white half-globe. He circled it. Brown siliceous sponges festooned the rocks.

A movement to the left caught his eye, and he slowly worked his way toward it. A group of nine trilobites nuzzled the sand at the edge of a patch of fern, but they were all *E. petti,* small ones. Max carefully swam to a protruding rock eight feet from the group, and leaned against it. Where the small kind gathered, the big ones often followed, so Max waited in relaxed readiness.

He saw the movement in the ferns before he saw the actual animal. It came out onto the sand and stopped. Max's heart leaped. It was a big one. It must be a good three feet long, bigger than any he had ever seen before. He gathered the muscles in his right arm and shifted his weight to his right leg as the trilobite began to graze on the bottom. Making a final esti-

mate of the distance, Max threw.

The trilobite saw the first movement of his arm. It spun in a circle and headed back for the fern. One of the blunt prongs glanced off the thick carapace, and the spear buried itself in the sand. Max flung himself toward it, but then slowed and cursed himself for his clumsiness in missing the throw. Being out of practice made a difference.

He began stalking again, keeping himself in better balance. Near a patch of waving green algae he saw the outline of a fair-sized trilobite. As he drew closer he saw that it was *P. metrobus,* the spiny trilobite. Max approached it, cautiously. There were no large animals—no predators—in the oceans, yet a trilobite would scoot to cover at any unusual motion. It had nothing to fear from anything, save a few Earth fishermen, yet it acted as if death lurked behind every rock. Max had a theory on the subject. A wayward gene caused the behavior, and that gene was to serve the trilobites well over the next 400 million years when danger would become very real for the species.

Max gauged the throw with more care than last time. The spear sped true and pinned the trilobite between two points. Max was on it, holding it aloft at the end of the spear, watching the twenty pairs of legs wave futily in the water. He put it in the sack. The creature froze into immobility in the unaccustomed surroundings. Max patted it through the sack, and it would not move. He continued the hunt.

In the next hour he got two more. He decided that that was enough for now, so he worked his way back to the water's edge.

Max could not be certain exactly when his helmet broached the surface of the water. It was raining, and the dividing line between air and sea was hard to find. He sat down on the bottom in five feet of water and drew his knife and worked one of the trilobites out of the sack. Holding it with one foot and a hand, he cut off the cephalon, turned the body over and split the thorax lengthwise along the underside. He opened the shell by twisting the knife blade in the cut, and he lifted out in one piece the thick, tapered cylinder of white meat. He put the meat on a rock and swiftly opened the other two. He wrapped the meat in the sack and stood up. It was still raining so he sat down again and stretched out with his helmet resting on a small rock. He stared at the surface and decided to barbecue the meat. He had his own barbecue sauce, all made up and ready to go. Just thinking about it made his mouth water.

Max lay and stared at the roiled surface. He began to get sleepy,

but just before he dozed off he saw that the surface had suddenly cleared. The rain had stopped.

He stood up. The wind had shifted, and it struck him hard. He waded to the shore, leaning back into the strong gusts. He flipped his helmet back, and took a step toward the Z-trail. The sack slipped from his fingers. Frowning in annoyance he stooped to pick it up. His eyes caught a tiny fleck of green, and he turned rigid.

He dropped the sack and fell to his knees to inspect the little fleck, checking to see if it had merely been tossed there by a wave. Half an inch in diameter it was, and as he stretched out full length to see it better, he saw that it was firmly affixed to a spot of sand. Minute tendrils reached sideways through the sand, now on the surface, now beneath.

Max glanced at the water's edge ten feet away. This speck of alga had been out of the water for fifteen days, and it lived and grew. *It lived.* Max's eyes widened. Here and now it had happened. It could have happened a million years from now, but it had happened now. This was the way it had been on Earth during Cambrian times 400 million years ago. A first plant, coming out of the water onto the land, and living there. The first fragile step on the road to man. There was no more to it than this, a bit of green growing on a speck of sand on an island of rock. An intrusion onto his clean and lonely rock. Max stared at the green spot six inches from his face, and his eyes watered in angry frustration.

He jumped to his feet and ground the little fleck under his foot, stamping on it and twisting his heel again and again, ripping the tiny cells to shreds, rubbing them against the rock and the sand until the spot was scarred and lacerated. He bent and brushed the muddy dust into a little pile and took it in his hands and strode to the water's edge and flung it out over the water. The wind surged in a wild gust and caught up the clumps of dust and drove them back into his face. He staggered backwards, driven by the fury of the wind, and he tripped and fell, and the fall knocked the breath from him. He lay gasping and breathless and helpless for several minutes. He finally got his wind back.

He climbed unsteadily to his feet and looked out over the sea. A long time he looked. Then he nodded and said, "All right. All right." He turned and gathered his equipment and went up the Z-trail to cook his dinner.

The Good Doctor reveals another facet of his angularly rounded character—fearlessness. Here he examines entropy, *a word everyone uses in this field and no one really defines. . . .*

ORDER! ORDER!

by Isaac Asimov

ONE OF THE BIG DRAMATIC words in science fiction (or, for that matter, in science) is *entropy*. It comes so trippingly and casually to the tongue, yet when the speaker is asked to explain the term, lockjaw generally sets in. Nor do I exonerate myself in this respect. I, too, have used the word with fine abandon and have learned to change the subject deftly when asked to explain its meaning.

Unfortunately, I have now placed myself in a position where I cannot change the subject forever. Since I hold forth from this rostrum as a kind of universal authority (which is exactly what I have persuaded the Kindly Editor I am, and I trust no one will disabuse his trusting soul and cause him pain), I know I must eventually face the issue of having to explain entropy. I suppose it might as well be now as later.

So, with lips set firmly and with face a little pale, here I go—

I will begin with the law of conservation of energy. This states that energy may be converted from one form to another but can neither be created nor destroyed.

This law is an expression of the common experience of mankind. That is, no one knows any reason *why* energy cannot be created or destroyed; it is just that so far neither the most ingenious experiment nor the most careful observation has ever unearthed a case

where energy was either created or destroyed.

The law of conservation of energy was established in the 1840's and it rocked along happily for half a century. It was completely adequate to meet all earthly problems that came up. To be sure, astronomers wondered whence came the giant floods of energy released by the Sun throughout the long history of the Solar system, and could find no answer which satisfactorily met the requirements of both astronomy and the law of conservation of energy.

However, that was the Sun. There were no problems on earth . . . until radioactivity was discovered.

In the 1890's arose the problem of discovering the source of the tremendous energy released by radioactive substances. For a decade or so, the law of conservation of energy looked sick indeed. Then, in 1905, Albert Einstein demonstrated (mathematically) that mass and energy had to be different forms of the same thing and that a very tiny bit of mass was equivalent to a great deal of energy. All the energy released by radioactivity was at the expense of the disappearance of an amount of mass too small to measure by ordinary methods. And in setting up this proposition, a source of energy was found which beautifully explained the radiation of the Sun and other stars.

In the years after 1905, Einstein's theory was demonstrated experimentally over and over again, with the first atom bomb of 1945 as the grand culmination. The law of conservation of energy is now more solidly enthroned than ever, and scientists do not seriously expect to see it upset at any time in the future under any but the most esoteric conceivable circumstances.

In fact, so solidly is the law enthroned that no patent office in its right mind would waste a split-second considering any device that purported to deliver more energy than it consumed. (This is called a "perpetual motion machine of the first class.")

The first machine which converted heat into mechanical work on a large scale was the steam engine invented at the beginning of the eighteenth century by Thomas Newcomen and made thoroughly practical at the end of that century by James Watt. Since the steam engine produced work through the movement of energy in the form of heat from a hot reservoir of steam to a cold reservoir of water, the study of the interconversion of energy and work was named "thermodynamics," from Greek words meaning "movement of heat." The law of conservation of energy is so fundamental to devices such as the steam engine, that the law is often

called the First Law of Thermodynamics.

The First Law tells us that if the reservoir of steam contains a certain amount of energy, you cannot get more work out of a steam engine than is equivalent to that much energy. That seems fair enough, perhaps—you can't get something for nothing.

But surely you can at least get out the full amount of work equivalent to the energy content of the steam, assuming you cut down altogether on waste and on friction.

Alas, you can't. Though you built the most perfect steam engine possible, one without friction and without waste, you still could not convert all the energy to work. In thermodynamics, you not only can't win, you can't even break even.

The first to point this out unequivocally was a French physicist named Sadi Carnot, in 1824. He stated that the fraction of the heat energy that could be converted to work even under ideal conditions depended upon the temperature difference between the hot reservoir and the cold reservoir. The equation he presented is:

$$\text{ideal efficiency} = \frac{T_2 - T_1}{T_2}$$

where T_2 is the temperature of the hot reservoir and T_1 the temperature of the cold. For the equation to make sense the temperatures should be given on the absolute scale. (I talked about the absolute scale of temperature in "The Height of Up," which appeared in the October 1959 F&SF, so you are spared further discussion here.)

If the hot reservoir is at a temperature of 400° absolute (127° C.) and the cold reservoir is at a temperature of 300° absolute (27° C.) then ideal efficiency is:

$$\frac{400-300}{400}$$

or exactly 0.25. In other words, one-quarter of the heat content of the steam, *at best,* can be converted into work, while the other three-quarters is unavailable.

Furthermore, if you had only a hot reservoir and nothing else so that it had to serve as hot and cold reservoir both, Carnot's equation would give the ideal efficiency as:

$$\frac{400-400}{400}$$

which is exactly zero. The steam has plenty of energy in it but none of that energy, none at all, can be converted to work unless somewhere in the device there is a temperature difference.

An analogous situation exists in other forms of energy, and the situation may be easier to understand in cases more mundane than the heat engine. A large rock at the edge of a cliff can do work, provided it moves from its posi-

tion of high gravitational potential to one of low gravitational potential, say at the bottom of the cliff. The smaller the difference in gravitational potentials (the lower the cliff) the less work the rock can be made to do in falling. If there is no cliff at all, but simply a plateau of indefinite extent, the rock cannot fall and can do no work, even though the plateau may be six miles high.

We can say then: No device can deliver work out of a system at a single energy potential level.

This is one way of stating what is called the Second Law of Thermodynamics.

A device that purports to get work out of a single energy potential level is a "perpetual motion machine of the second class." Actually almost all perpetual motion machines perpetrated by the army of misguided gadgeteers that inhabit the earth are of this type, and patent offices will waste no time on these either.

Given energy at two different potential levels, it is the common experience of mankind, that the energy will flow from one potential (which we can call the higher) to another (which we can call the lower) and never vice versa (unless it is pushed). In other words, heat will pass spontaneously from a hot body to a cold one; a boulder will fall spontaneously from a cliff top to a cliff bottom; an electric current will flow spontaneously from cathode to anode.

To say: "Energy will always flow from a high potential level to a low potential level" is another way of stating the Second Law of Thermodynamics. (It can be shown that an energy flow from high to low implies the fact that you cannot get work out of a one-potential system, and vice versa, so both are equivalent ways of stating the Second Law.)

Now work is never done instantaneously. It invariably occupies time. What happens during that time? Let's suppose, for simplicity's sake, that a steam engine is functioning as a "closed system"—that is, as a sort of walled-off portion of the universe into which no energy can enter and from which no energy can depart. In such a closed-system steam-engine, the Second Law states that heat must be flowing from the point of high energy potential (the hot reservoir in this case) to the point of low (the cold reservoir).

As this happens, the hot reservoir cools and the cold reservoir warms. The temperature difference between hot and cold therefore decreases during the time interval over which work is being extracted. But this means that the amount of energy which can be converted to work (an amount which depends on the size of the

temperature difference) must also decrease.

Conversely, the amount of energy which *cannot* be converted into work must increase. This increase in the amount of unavailable energy is the inevitable consequence of the heat flow predicted by the Second Law. Therefore to say that in any spontaneous process (one in which energy flows from high to low) the amount of unavailable energy increases with time, is just another way of stating the Second Law.

A German physicist, Rudolf Clausius, pointed all this out in 1865. His name for the unavailable energy was "entropy." (Ah, ha! Thought I'd never get to it, did you?) The trouble with that name, though, is that I don't know why it is what it is. It comes from Greek words meaning "a change in" but that doesn't seem at all clear to me. Perhaps the "change" refers to the change from available energy to unavailable energy, with the "en-" prefix simply designed to make the word similar to "energy." If the Gentle Reader knows the true story of the word, he will find in me a willing and grateful listener.

In every process involving energy change, something analogous happens. Even if the energy levels don't approach each other with time (the cliff top and cliff bottom don't approach each other appreciably while a rock is falling) there is always some sort of resistance to the change from one energy potential to another. The falling body must overcome the internal friction of the air it falls through, the flowing electric current must overcome the resistance of the wire it flows through. In every case, the amount of energy available for conversion to work decreases and the amount of energy unavailable for work (that is, entropy) increases.

To be sure, we can imagine ideal cases where this doesn't happen. A hot and cold reservoir may be separated by a perfect insulator, a rock may fall through a perfect vacuum, an electric current may flow through a perfect conductor, all surfaces may be perfectly frictionless, perfectly non-radiating. In all such cases there is no entropy increase; the entropy change is zero. However such cases exist only in imagination and in real life the zero change in entropy may be approached but never realized. And, of course, even in the ideal case, entropy change is never negative. There is never a *decrease* in entropy.

With all this in mind, the briefest way I know to state the First and Second Laws of Thermodynamics is this:

In any closed system the total energy content remains constant while the total entropy continually increases with time.

The main line of development of the First and Second Laws took place through a consideration of heat flow alone, without regard for the structure of matter. However, the atomic theory had been announced by John Dalton in 1803 and by the mid-nineteenth century it was well-enough established for a subsidiary line of development to arise in which energy changes were interpreted by way of the movement of atoms and molecules. This introduced a statistical interpretation of the Second Law which threw a clearer light on the question of entropy decrease.

Clausius himself had worked out some of the consequences of supposing gases to be made up of randomly moving molecules, but the mathematics of such a system was brought to a high pitch of excellence by the Scottish mathematician, Clerk Maxwell, and the Austrian physicist, Ludwig Boltzmann, in 1859 and the years immediately following.

As a result of the Maxwell-Boltzmann mathematics, gases (and matter generally) could be viewed as made up of molecules possessing a range of energies. This energy is expressed in gases as random motion, with consequent molecular collisions and rebounds, the rebounds being assumed as involving perfect elasticity so that no energy is lost in the collisions.

A particular molecule in a particular volume of gas might have, at some particular time, any amount of energy of motion ("kinetic energy") from very small amounts to very high amounts. However, over the entire volume of gas there would be some average kinetic energy of the constituent molecules and it is this average kinetic energy which we measure as temperature.

The average kinetic energy of the molecules of a gas at 500° absolute is twice that of the molecules of a gas at 250° absolute. The kinetic energy of a particular molecule in the hot gas may be lower at a given time than that of a particular molecule in the cold gas, but the average is in direct proportion to the temperature at all times. (This is analogous to the situation in which, although the standard of living in the United States is higher than that of Egypt, a particular American may be poorer than a particular Egyptian.)

Now suppose that a sample of hot gas is brought into contact with a sample of cold gas. The average kinetic energy of the molecules of the hot gas being higher than that of the molecules of the cold gas, we can safely suppose that in the typical case, a "hot" molecule will be moving more quickly than a "cold" molecule. (I must put "hot" and "cold" in quotation marks, because such concepts as heat and temperature

do not apply to individual molecules but only to systems containing large numbers of molecules.)

When the two rebound, the total energy of the two does not change but it may be distributed in a new way. Some varieties of redistribution will involve the "hot" molecule growing "hotter" while the "cold" molecule grows "colder" so that, in effect, the high-energy molecule gains further energy at the expense of the low-energy particle. There are many, many more ways of redistribution, however, in which the low-energy particle gains energy at the expense of the high-energy particle, so that both end up with intermediate energies. The "hot" molecule grows "cooler" while the "cold" molecule grows "warmer."

This means that if a very large number of collisions are considered, the vast majority of those collisions will result in a more even distribution of energy. The few cases in which the energy difference becomes more extreme will be completely swamped. On the whole, the hot gas will cool, the cold gas will warm and, eventually, the two gases will reach equilibrium at some single (and intermediate) temperature.

Of course, it *is* possible, in this statistical view, that through some quirk of coincidence, all the "hot" molecules (or almost all) will just happen to gain energy from all the "cold" molecules, so that heat will flow from the cold body to the hot body. This will increase the temperature difference and, consequently, the amount of energy available for conversion into work, and thus will *decrease* the unavailable energy, which we call entropy.

Statistically speaking, then, a kettle of water *might* freeze while the fire under it grows hotter. The chances of this (if worked out from Maxwell's mathematics) are so small, however, that if the entire known universe consisted of nothing but kettles of water over fires, then the probability that any single one of them would freeze during the entire known duration of the universe would be so small that we could not reasonably have hoped to witness even a single occurrence of this odd phenomenon if we had been watching every kettle every moment of time.

For that matter, the molecules of air in an empty stoppered bottle are moving in all directions randomly. It *is* possible that, by sheer chance, all molecules might happen to move upward simultaneously. The total kinetic energy would then be more than sufficient to overcome gravitational attraction and the bottle would spontaneously fall upward. Again the chances for this are so small that no one expects ever to see such a phenomenon.

Still it must be said that a truer way of putting the Second Law

would be: "In any closed system, entropy invariably increases with time—or, at least, *almost* invariably."

It is also possible to view entropy as having something to do with "order" and "disorder." These words are hard to define in any foolproof way, but intuitively, we picture "order" as characteristic of a collection of objects that are methodically arranged according to a logical system. Where no such logical arrangement exists, the collection of objects is in "disorder."

Another way of looking at it is to say that something which is "in order" is so arranged that one part can be distinguished from another part. The less clear the distinction, the less "orderly" it is, and the more "disorderly."

A deck of cards which is arranged in suits, and according to value within each suit, is in perfect order. Any part of the deck can be distinguished from any other part. Tell me the plan of the arrangement and mention the two of hearts, and I will know it is, for example, the fifteenth card in the deck.

If the deck of cards is arranged in suits, but not according to value within the suits, I am less well off. I know the two of hearts is somewhere between the fourteenth and twenty-sixth cards, but not exactly where within that range. The distinction between one part of a deck and another has become fuzzier so the deck is now less orderly.

If the cards are shuffled until there is no system that can be devised to predict which card is where, then I can tell nothing at all about the position of the two of hearts. One part of the deck cannot be distinguished from any other part and the deck is in complete disorder.

Another example of order is any array of objects in some kind of rank and file, whether it be atoms or molecules within a crystal, or soldiers marching smartly past a reviewing stand.

Suppose you were watching the marching soldiers from the reviewing stand. If they were marching with perfect precision, you would see a row of soldiers pass, then a blank space, then another row, then another blank space, and so on. You could distinguish between two kinds of volumes of space within the marching columns, soldier-full and soldier-empty in alternation.

If the soldiers fell somewhat out of step so that the lines grew ragged, the hitherto empty volumes would start containing a bit of soldier, while the soldier-filled volumes would be less soldier-filled. There would be less distinction possible between the two types of volumes and the situation would be less orderly. If the soldiers were completely out of step,

each walking forward at his own rate, all passing volumes would tend to be equally soldier-full, and the distinction would be even less and the disorder consequently more.

The disorder would not yet be complete, however. The soldiers would be marching in one particular direction so if you could not distinguish one part of the line from another, you could at least still distinguish your own position with respect to them. From one position you would see them march to your left, from another to your right, from still another they would be marching toward you, and so on.

But if soldiers moved randomly, at any speed and in any direction then, no matter what your position, some would be moving toward you, some away, some to your left, some to your right, and in all directions in between. You could make no distinctions among the soldiers or among your own possible positions and disorder would be that much more nearly complete.

Now let's go back to molecules, and consider a quantity of hot gas in contact with a quantity of cold. If you could see the molecules of each you could distinguish the first from the second by the fact that the molecules of the first are moving, on the average, more quickly than those of the second. Without seeing the molecules, you can achieve a similar distinction by watching the mercury thread of a thermometer.

As heat flows from the hot gas to the cold gas, the difference in average molecular motion, and hence in temperature, decreases, and the distinction between the two becomes fuzzier. Finally, when the two are at the same temperature, no distinction is possible. In other words, as heat has flowed in the direction made necessary by the Second Law, disorder has increased. Since entropy has also increased, we might wonder if entropy and disorder weren't analogous concepts.

Apparently, they are. In any spontaneous operation, entropy increases and so does disorder. If you shuffle an ordered deck of cards you get a disordered deck, but not vice versa. (To be sure, by a fiendish stroke of luck you might begin with a disordered deck and shuffle it into a perfect arrangement, but would you care to try it and see how long that takes you? And that task involves only 52 objects. Imagine the same thing with several quintillion quintillion and you will not be surprised that a kettle of water over a fire never grows cooler.)

Again, if soldiers in rank and file are told to break ranks, they will quickly become a disorderly mass of humans. It is extremely unlikely, on the other hand, that a disorderly mass of humans

should, by sheer luck, suddenly find themselves marching in perfect rank and file.

No, indeed. As nearly as can be told, all spontaneous processes involve an increase in disorder and an increase in entropy, the two being analogous.

It can be shown that of all forms of energy, heat is the most disorderly. Consequently, in all spontaneous processes involving types of energy other than heat, some non-heat energy is always converted to heat, this in itself involving an increase in disorder and hence in entropy.

Under no actual conditions, however, can all the heat in a system be converted to some form of non-heat energy, since that in itself would imply an increase in order and hence a decrease in entropy. Instead, if some of the heat undergoes an entropy decrease and is converted to another form of energy, the remaining heat must undergo an entropy increase that more than makes up for the first change. The net entropy change over the *entire* system is an increase.

It is, of course, easy to cite cases of entropy decrease as long as we consider only parts of a system and not all of it. For instance, we see mankind extract metals from ores and devise engines of fiendish complexity out of metal ingots. We see elevators moving upwards and automobiles driving uphill, and soldiers getting into marching formation and cards placed in order. All these and a very large number of other operations involve decreases in entropy brought about by the action of life. Consequently, the feeling arises that life can "reverse entropy."

However, there is more to consider. Human beings are eating food and supporting themselves on the energy gained from chemical changes within the body. They are burning coal and oil to power machinery. They use hydro-electric power to form aluminum. In short, all the entropy-decreasing activities of man are at the expense of the entropy-increasing activities involved in food and fuel consumption, and the entropy-increasing activities far outweigh the entropy-decreasing activities. The net change is an entropy increase.

No matter how we might bang our gavels and cry out, "Order! Order!" there is no order, there is only increasing disorder.

In fact, in considering entropy changes on earth, it is unfair to consider the earth alone since our planet is gaining energy constantly from the Sun. This influx of energy from the Sun powers all those processes on earth that represent local decreases in entropy: the formation of coal and oil from plant life, the circulation of atmosphere and ocean; the raising

of water in the form of vapor and so on. It is for that reason we can continue to extract energy by burning oil and coal, by making use of power from wind, river currents, waterfalls and so on. It is all at the expense, indirectly, of the Sun.

The entropy increase represented by the Sun's large-scale conversion of mass to energy simply swamps the comparatively tiny entropy decreases on earth. The net entropy change of the Solar system as a whole is that of a continuing huge increase with time.

Since this must be true of all the stars, nineteenth century physicists reasoned that entropy in the Universe as a whole must be increasing rapidly and that the time must come when the finite supply of energy in a finite Universe must be completely turned to entropy.

In such a condition, the Universe would no longer contain energy capable of being converted into useful work. It would be in a state of maximum disorder. It would be a homogeneous mass containing no temperature differences. There would be no changes by which to measure time and therefore time would not exist. There would be no way of distinguishing one point in space from another and so space would not exist. Such an entropy maximum has been referred to as the "heat-death" of the Universe.

But of course, this presupposes that the Universe is finite. If it were infinite, the supply of energy would be infinite and it would take all eternity for entropy to reach a maximum. Besides that, how can we be certain that the Laws of Thermodynamics worked out over small volumes of space in our laboratories and observed to be true (or to seem true) in the slightly larger volumes of our astronomic neighborhood, are true where the Universe as a whole is concerned?

Perhaps there are processes we know nothing about as yet, which decrease entropy as quickly as it is increased by stellar activity, so that the net entropy change in the Universe as a whole is zero. This might still be so even if we allow that small position of space, such as single galaxies, might undergo continuous entropy increases and might eventually be involved in a kind of local heat-death. The theory of continuous creation (see "Here It Comes; There It Goes" in the January 1961 F&SF) does, in fact, presuppose a constant entropy level in the Universe as a whole.

And even if the Universe were finite, and even if it were to reach "heat death", would that really be the end?

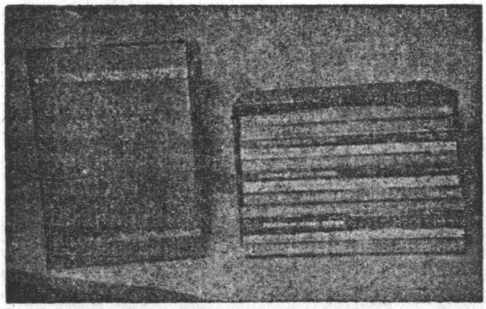
Once we have shuffled a deck of cards into complete randomness, there will come an *inevitable* time, *if we wait long enough,* when

continued shuffling will restore at least a partial order.

Well, waiting "long enough" is no problem in a Universe at heat-death since time no longer exists then. We can therefore be certain that after a timeless interval, the purely random motion of particles and the purely random flow of energy in a Universe at maximum entropy might, here and there, now and then, result in a partial restoration of order.

It is tempting to wonder if our present Universe, large as it is and complex though it seems, might not be merely the result of a very slight random increase in order over a very small portion of an unbelievably colossal Universe which is virtually entirely in heat-death.

Perhaps we are merely sliding down a gentle ripple that has been set up, accidentally and very temporarily, in a quiet pond, and it is only the limitation of our own infinitesimal range of viewpoint in space and time that makes it seem to us that we are hurtling down a cosmic waterfall of increasing entropy of colossal size and duration. . . .



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BOOKS

THE YEAR'S BEST SF, *edited by Judith Merril, Simon and Schuster, $3.95*

JUDITH MERRIL, WHOM WE'VE admired previously in this department, has put together the Fifth Annual of THE YEAR'S BEST SF. It's an engaging collection, including editorials, newspaper reports, poetry, and humor pieces as well as fiction. Among the stories are Damon Knight's biting "The Handler," Theodore Sturgeon's dreaming and heart-warming "The Man Who Lost The Sea," Daniel Keyes' superb "Flowers For Algernon," Fritz Leiber's deadly "Mariana," and Carol Emshwiller's frightening study of decadence in "Day At The Beach." There are many more, all equally fine.

This is a most catholic and sophisticated collection, and a tribute to Miss Merril's taste. Consequently it grieves us to cavil at one very small point. We realize that story-introductions are one of the most difficult jobs of the editor, but we wish that Miss Merril had not solved the problem with a gossipy and personal approach. Somehow it seemed out of place, introduced a jarring note.

The rest of the books sent in for review this month were so bad that we've decided to ignore them, rather than pan them, and turn our attention to a discussion of the reasons why the books are so bad. Almost everybody agrees that science fiction has fallen upon hard times—too many bad books and too few good books are being published today—and many people want to know why. Publishers, editors, and the public have been blamed. We disagree. We think authors are responsible.

The average quality of writing in the field today is extraordinarily low. We don't speak of style; it's astonishing how well amateurs and professionals alike can handle words. In this age of mass communications almost everybody can use a pen with some facility. The science fiction authors usually make themselves clearly understood, and if they rarely rise to

stylistic heights, they don't often sink to the depths of illiteracy.

No, we speak of content; of the thought, theme, and drama of the stories, which reflect the author himself. Many practicing science fiction authors reveal themselves in their works as very small people, disinterested in reality, inexperienced in life, incapable of relating science fiction to human beings, and withdrawing from the complexities of living into their make-believe worlds.

There are exceptions, of course, and we've praised them often in this department; but now we're speaking of the majority.

Their science is a mere repetition of what has been done before. They ring minuscule changes on played-out themes, concepts which were established and exhausted a decade ago. They play with odds and ends and left-overs. In past years this has had a paralyzing effect on their technique.

This department is exasperated with the science fiction author who seizes upon a trifle and turns it into a story by carefully concealing it from the reader. His characters behave inexplicably in a bewildering situation; little by little he lifts a corner here and a corner there, and leads the reader down the garden path of curiosity until at last he removes the cape with a flourish to reveal . . . nothing.

This is literary larceny, and it's being practiced more and more today. As a professional author, we're keenly aware of the fact that a good writer begins his story at the point where a mediocre writer ends his. As a critic we're angrily aware of the fact that many of today's science fiction writers end their stories at the point where a bad writer would begin.

Now it may be argued, so far as the trifles go, that we're in an in-between stage. Science fiction has caught up with most of the scientific concepts, and exhausted them, and must consequently mark time. This is debatable, but if the argument is accepted, then our answer is: Stop writing science fiction. For God's sake, have the courage to remain silent if you have nothing to say.

It may be asked, how is a writer to earn a living if he must remain silent? The answer is, science fiction is not a big enough or important enough field of literature to enable an author to support himself by writing for it exclusively. Science fiction is in a class with poetry and the Little Magazines. It supplies (or should supply) *avant-coureur* literature to interested readers; it provides (or should provide) an outlet, a safety valve for working authors who become fed up with the strangling taboos of bread-and-butter writing.

The appeal of science fiction has always been its iconoclasm.

It is the one field of fiction where no cows are sacred, and where all idols may be broken. It stimulates, entertains, and educates by daring to question the unquestionable, poke fun at the sacred, condemn the accepted, and advocate the unthinkable.

But in order to be an iconoclast, an author must be more than merely aware of the idol he wishes to destroy. He must be intimate with it and understand it in all its aspects. This means that he must have devoted serious thought to it, and have beliefs of his own which will stand up in the place of the broken idol. In other words, any child can complain, but it takes an adult to clash with accepted beliefs . . . an adult with ideas.

It's not enough to say: Democracy doesn't work; I believe in the Fascist system, period. Certainly this is iconoclastic enough (at least in America), but it's a mere shooting off of the mouth unless the author reveals in his story an intimate understanding of Democracy and Fascism, and offers valid reasons to support his position.

We're not merely shooting off our mouth when we say that it is the authors who are killing science fiction. We know how and why science fiction is written today, and are prepared to state a few hard truths. Outside of the exceptions mentioned above, science fiction is written by empty people who have failed as human beings.

As a class they are lazy, irresponsible, immature. They are incapable of producing contemporary fiction because they know nothing about life, cannot reflect life, and have no adult comment to make about life. They are silly, childish people who have taken refuge in science fiction where they can establish their own arbitrary rules about reality to suit their own inadequacy. And like most neurotics, they cherish the delusion that they're "special."

It's difficult for the ordinary reader to understand this. All of us, as readers, have a blessed willingness, almost an eagerness, to suspend disbelief. We meet authors far more than halfway, and given only half a chance we will plunge into the story with complete acceptance. This is why so many bad science fiction writers can still find an audience.

In baseball they have a comment to make about third basemen who are presented with so many hard chances that scorers are reluctant to pin an error on them when they bobble the ball. The chance is scored THTH, Too Hot To Handle, and everybody grumbles that third basemen ought to pay to get into the ballpark. In the light of reader co-operation, many authors ought to pay to get into print.

So it's the immature, the inade-

quate, the maladroit who are killing science fiction today. Most of the adult authors have moved on to other fields. The bright young people who might be expected to bring in fresh blood are living in days when there has never been a greater demand for promising young talent in television, movies, magazines and publishing houses. With the exception of an occasional spare time short story, they sensibly refuse to waste their time on science fiction. They can earn more, learn more, and fare farther in other fields.

To the patient, long-suffering public, our blessings. To the weary editors, sorting through the third-rate submissions for an acceptable MS, our sympathy. To those of our colleagues who have earned our respect and admiration, our apologies for this attack which was not directed against them. But to those who deserve this attack, our curse. Nobody understands a writer like a writer; nobody hates a bad writer as bitterly as a writer.

—Alfred Bester

Next Month

. . . an All Star Issue, featuring a long novelet by Philip José Farmer, and a new novelet of the People by Zenna Henderson.

A note from a six-legged chap whose heart was small, but nonetheless had room for both sorrow and the desire for an extraordinary revenge . . .

THE TUNNEL

by C. Brian Kelly

TODAY MY FRIEND WENT STARK raving mad.

So, while debating whether to laugh or cry, while not knowing what else to do, I thought it would be appropriate to make a note or two of my life these past few months, the slow months that have dragged on since the death of my beloved Theresa.

This, you might say, will be a statement, of sorts, for posterity. And, for Theresa.

First, I should explain about myself. I have six legs, and a mean set of choppers. My appetite is both vociferous and indiscriminate. I am slim as a crack, wide as a button—in short, a cockroach.

But, no ordinary cockroach. Since *it* happened, everything for me has changed. That night, when crawling about in our "friend's" home laboratory, Theresa and I were spotted by him, were doused by a liquid from a test tube of his, and were smitten by the fire that leaped from the solution—she to the death and I to the verge. And my world was changed. No more of the sink drains, the coffee grounds and fellow bugs, or the tired talk, the low goals, the drab life, thought I. In the succeeding dawn's light (which played fitfully upon her stark, stiff legs), the breath of life slipped back into me, and with it purpose, intent, reason! Revenge became my theme, my "friend" the target.

I opened my campaign that day, and thus a life of drama and adventure, capped by victory, began.

The first time was in a cafeteria. I jumped off his collar, danced crazily across his neck and raced down the spine. At the beltline, I slipped through a small hole in his shirt and retired to a side pocket of his jacket. The same day, in a bus, I ran up and down the calf of his leg five times. He howled in rage.

It took only a few days of this before he realized, and began

speaking aloud to me—as would a man chained to a hated enemy. It was fascinating, his growls and grumbles, his intimate, hateful asides. All of them sure signs of my progress, I knew.

Stepping up the campaign, I unnerved him further with tantalizing glimpses of me. The first time, while he was shaving before the mirror, I exposed myself upon his ear. By the time the hand came swooping up for me, I had dropped into a bathrobe pocket on the side. (Great things, side pockets!)

He countered with Turkish baths, quick trips to while-you-wait suit cleaners, dips at the Y, new clothes and similar tricks. Naturally, however, he never sent his shoes, or for that matter his wallet, to the cleaners.

Then, movies became a torture to him. The darkness was my friend. On dates with young women, I made him senseless with anger, a useless, tense wreck, by dancing through his hair in the moonlight. Finally, humming a song of Theresa, I disrupted his sleep by crawling on his nose or skipping along his eyelids.

His acquaintances remarked his pallor. Circles under his eyes caused comment. He developed the shakes, people talked behind his back. His best girl left him.

I added a colorful touch more recently. At the laboratory where he worked I crawled into a mess of green dye one day. Thereafter, I allowed him several times to see me with that green tint about me, that he might know he was dealing with one cockroach, and one alone. "Very clever," was his comment the first morning he saw me thus.

So life went, empty without my Theresa, but in a way completely new, dangerous and purposeful. True, there was less to eat. True, my own nerves became somewhat frayed. But I knew it was worth it.

And, I was getting quite an education. Peeping over his shoulder at work, at restaurants, in the bus or at home, I learned to read. I picked up phrases from the medical tracks he pursued in his work as a chemist and amateur anatomist. From his readings I became a bit of an expert myself in cranial studies. Also, I even learned the salient points in his research studies on anaesthetics.

In fact, it was when I realized that a combination of my already jazzed-up body fluids and some of his new compounds would make a fine anaesthetic that there came the idea for the finishing touch, the coup de grace. And none too soon at that!

I ate the chemicals one afternoon, and that night, while still assimilating, I went to work as he slept. It was slow and painstaking. A nibble here, a tiny gouge there. What with the secretion I

had worked up, he never felt a thing.

But, it's been exhausting. I had to take such care in the work! A slip would be fatal, I knew well. Most of the work had to be done at night. During the day I kept after him in the usual way, to avoid arousing his suspicions.

Every morning I dragged myself into position on his left ear as he shaved. Each time by a closer margin I managed to escape when he tried to clap his hand over my pale green body. At the office and lab, I dogged his arms, belly, back and neck. At night, the important work was continued.

And today, not a moment too soon, it was finished! What luck, for only last evening I learned of his plan to rid himself of me forever!

I heard him talking on the telephone. (He never did realize I might understand him.) He was talking with a chemist friend who apparently had agreed to fumigate my "friend's" total possessions. Oh, they had cooked up a thorough scheme! My "friend" had arranged to have himself completely shaved, knocked out and dipped into a vat of weak acid solution. He was to breath through a rubber hose while I drowned in the acid. That failing, he was to be placed several succeeding hours in an airtight room saturated by killing vapors. He was to wear an oxygen device while he waited for me to choke.

It was a fiendish scheme, but I fixed that!

This morning he began to shave as usual. He glanced into the mirror with a smart smirk, sure his plan would get rid of me today. As he expected, I was there—perched on his left ear lobe, a green and also secretly smiling spot.

I turned and ran. His hand came up in a mighty swat. Slap! He boxed his ear. But I was already inside. He shouted a wild thing when he saw me plunge into the ear.

A moment later, while he was still staring into the mirror, I pulled myself free from the far end of the tunnel I had so laboriously constructed. That's the moment he went mad, the instant he saw the green spot again.

Naturally, it was I—poised this time on the lobe of his *right* ear.

Two men and two women stranded, perhaps forever, on an unknown planet. . . . There were evidences that a high-level civilization had existed here quite recently—perhaps it still did, though you couldn't prove it by the dogs. . . .

STORM OVER SODOM

by Robert F. Young

FOR THE PAST HALF HOUR NINA had been sidling toward Collins, and now she was sitting so close to him that their shoulders touched. Joan, on his opposite side, had not been idle either, and was sitting equally close. Bedford, sitting on the other side of the campfire, kept his eyes fixed on the nervous flames and pretended not to notice.

Collins, his wits blunted by self-complacency, was turning the screw. "We could be a hell of a lot worse off," he was saying. "Suppose, for instance, that only three of us had survived—one man and two women, or two women and one man? Not that I'm trying to break everything down to sex, but just the same, we'd have a problem on our hands!"

"I'll say!" said Nina, her brown eyes regarding him reverently.

"I guess we would!" said Joan, not taking her blue eyes from his face.

It was a handsome face all right—even Bedford had to admit that. Clear gray eyes, good nose; a firm chin with a Cary Grant cleft. But Bedford knew that it wasn't Collins' handsomeness alone that made him irresistible to women. Bedford was handsome himself, as far as that went.

No, Collins' attractiveness stemmed from other qualities, too. He exuded camaraderie, whereas Bedford did not. He was warm and vital, whereas Bedford was cold and austere. His clear gray eyes revealed the peasant simplicity of his thought processes, whereas Bedford's cold blue ones were seldom drawn blinds concealing a storeroom filled with erudition, disillusionment and cynicism.

"When you come right down to it," Collins went on, giving the screw another turn, "what more could four survivors ask for? We've more than enough food to

last us till we can start growing our own. We've got good temporary shelters to live in while we're building permanent ones. Who knows? We may even found a colony of our own before we're done. Call it New Earth, maybe—or maybe New America!"

The fool! Bedford thought. Couldn't the man see the situation that was developing?

Abruptly Bedford stood up. "I'm going to take another look at the raft," he said, and walked off into the darkness.

He knew he was behaving jealously, and over two women at whom, forty-eight hours ago, he would not have looked at twice. But the same old pattern was manifesting itself again, and he had contended with it too many times in ordinary situations to be tolerant of it in this one. He had thought—or at least he had hoped—that under such an extraordinary set of circumstances it would not rear its ugly head.

Its appearance marked the apogee of irony. That four people in the same general age group should have climbed into the one life-raft to have gotten free from the *Anaxagoras* before the liner had gone critical was a miracle of no mean proportions; but that four people in the same general age group *and equally divided as to sex* should have done so was a miracle of such proportions that it predicated divine intervention, for if four people had to be stranded for the rest of their lives on an alien, presumably uninhabited planet, certainly the ideal solution would be to make two of them men and two of them women. That way there would be a woman for each man and a man for each woman, and the next generation would probably never need to face the problem of incest.

But the appearance of the old pattern turned the accomplishment into a tour de force, for with the pattern you got a totally different setup. You got two women for one man and none for the other.

Bedford knew that it wasn't really that bad. He knew that eventually he'd end up with one of the women. But that was no less painful because he knew perfectly well which one of them it would be.

It would be the one Collins got sick of first.

The stars had come out, and in the east a small yellow moon was rising. From the distance came scattered yelping sounds reminiscent of the barking of dogs. Fireflies winked in the deeper shadows, mottling the darkness with tiny multicolored lights, and unknown insects sang strange songs in the alien underbrush.

The life-raft lay on a hilltop, its anti-gray tanks stove in from the crash-landing. Repairing them was out of the question, and there

had been no reason for Bedford to climb the hill to look at them again. There was no reason for him to be standing in the starlight now, staring at them. No reason except his pride.

Go back to the campfire, his common sense told him. Try to be mature about the situation. It's bound to improve. And in the meantime, there's nothing you can do. Some men have it, others don't.

But his common sense had told him too many things before, and most of them had turned out to be false. If when he was a boy he had listened to his common sense instead of to his teacher, he would have believed that the earth was flat, that the clouds were cotton candy and that the stars were streetlights in the sky. And if he listened to it now he would believe that an astral body as huge as Equuleus VI could not possibly go undetected by a rescue ship for more than a few days—or, at the most, a week.

The hell it couldn't! The astrogator was dead, so it was useless to revile him for the error he had made; but it had been a booboo of Brobdingnagian proportions, and the odds against a rescue ship finding a planet as remote from the spaceways as Equuleus VI was, were a googol to one. And then there was the matter of the cosmic-radiation storm that had caused the *Anaxagoras* to go critical. The storm was still raging throughout the Equuleus system, and any rescue ship that materialized in its midst would be bound to go critical, too.

Without realizing it, Bedford had raised his eyes and was staring at the stars. His job as interstellar correspondent for *Galactic News* had taken him to many far-flung worlds, and alien constellations were by no means new to him. Nevertheless, he never tired of looking at them, and he had developed a little game in which he tried to identify each with the object it most resembled. A star-pattern rising in the east caught his eye. To him, more than anything else it suggested the profile of a woman's face. Quickly he sought another, found one high in the north. That one resembled a woman's leg.

He lowered his eyes, pulled out his cigarettes and lit one with trembling fingers. The night was mild, a little on the humid side. The sea was not far away, and the wind that blew constantly and gently over the forests and the meadows was undoubtedly a trade wind. It would probably die away soon, now that the sun had set; and cold air would creep down from the snow-crowned mountains that rose beyond the littoral. It would be a good night for sleeping—

Sleeping alone . . .

Angrily, he flung the cigarette into the darkness. His anger was

all the more annoying because its source was illogical. During trajectory, he had hardly known Joan and Nina were alive. He had noticed them, yes, but only vaguely. Not that they weren't attractive—far from it—but the *Anaxagoras,* to him, had represented nothing more than a space-borne fragment of Earth, and on Earth, attractive women were a dime a dozen and even when you had the pattern to contend with, you could always buy your love—

On Earth you could.

Here you had to fight for it.

But how did you fight when you had no weapons with which to fight? How did you fight when you had the physical presence of Cyrano and your opponent was Adonis? It was like trying to subdue a man armed with a submachine gun with your bare hands.

Well anyway, Bedford thought, there's always the city.

They had glimpsed it in the distance just before they crashed. It had looked dead, but there was a possibility that it was not. And if it wasn't, then it might contain humans like themselves. The dog-like creatures they had seen lurking just beyond the boundary of the camp that afternoon constituted a good argument in favor of the human factor. Unquestionably they were tame—or had been at one time—and the domestication of dogs was a practice strictly characteristic of humans.

But if the city were dead? What then? Bedford shrugged. He'd be no worse off than he was now.

He started back down the hill to the campfire, paused when he saw the tall figure ascending the slope toward him. Then he stood in the darkness, waiting.

Collins was breathing hard from the climb when he reached Bedford's side, and he waited a while before he spoke. Then: "Thought I'd get a breath of air before I turned in," he said.

"You didn't climb all the way up here just to get a breath of air," Bedford said coldly.

"As a matter of fact, I didn't. I wanted to talk to you."

"There's nothing to talk about as far as I can see. Everything's said and done. We're here, and we're going to stay here—for a long time, maybe forever. And that just about sums it up."

"I was thinking of arrangements," Collins said.

"Arrangements? What arrangements?"

Collins shifted his weight from one foot to the other. "I—I mean arrangements between the women . . . and us. The way the setup is now, it's not going to work."

"Well what do you know!" Bedford said. "The bell finally rang. The way you were running off at the mouth about the Utopia we're going to found, I was beginning to think it never would! Well, what do you propose to do?"

"There's only one thing we can do under the circumstances," Collins said. "Draw lots."

"The hell you say!" Bedford felt the tightness of his face, his pride pounded in his brain like a piston lubricated with blood. "Draw lots—and the loser wins me and hates me for the rest of her life!"

"But why should she hate you? Use your head, Bedford. Joan and Nina understand the situation. They—"

"They don't like me. Neither one of them. And you know it as well as I know it. If you didn't know it, you wouldn't be up here now, talking about 'arrangements.'"

"Well how in hell do you expect them to like you when you don't give them a chance to? When you sulk on your side of the fire and ignore them? When you haven't said so much as ten words to them since we crashed!"

"Shut up!" Bedford said. "I don't want to hear any more about it." His breath felt hot against his dry lips, and his heart was hammering. "Tomorrow morning I'm taking my share of the rations and heading for the city. You can keep your lousy goddamn harem. I don't want any part of it!"

Collins was taken aback. "You—you're going alone?" he asked.

"That's right," Bedford said. "Alone."

He strode down the hill toward the flickering red flower of the fire.

Bedford breasted the ridge, looked back the way he had come. Collins and the two girls were halfway up the slope. The two girls were staggering a little beneath the weight of their packs. Bedford shrugged. When Collins, apparently reluctant to be left alone with two predatory females, had suggested that the party should stick together, neither of them had demurred. So let them suffer.

He waited till they caught up to him, then started down the opposite side of the ridge. It was only midmorning, but the sun was already hot. In the valley below, a herd of the omnipresent dog-like creatures frolicked on the grassy bank of a brook. Every now and then one of them would break away from the group ahd head for a nearby coppice. Not long after, another would follow.

They both mystified and annoyed him. Mystified him because of the near-human conformation of their faces, annoyed him because there was a quality about their actions that was vaguely familiar. Then, too, he was dissatisfied with the term "dog-like." Certainly they resembled dogs as a group; but at least half of them had hoofs on their rear legs, and with their oddly pointed ears, resembled something else far more. But he could not put his finger on what that something was.

The creatures looked up as the party passed, and several of them gave a series of laughing barks. Despite himself, Bedford shuddered. Joan was just behind him, and glancing over his shoulder, he saw how white her oval face had become. Revulsion, he decided. That was what he felt, too. He extended his glance to Collins and Nina. Their faces told him nothing—well, not really nothing. Nina's swarthy Queen-of-Sheba face told him as plain as day that she was on the make for Collins.

But that wasn't exactly news.

There was nothing complicated about Nina. Bedford had needed to take but one look at her to spot her for what she was. He had seen her many times. She was the wife —or would have been, if events had followed their normal course —who supplements her husband's income with an income of her own and who insures that income, if possible, with an affair with her employer, but who in all other respects is faithful to her husband. She craved security the way a wino craves wine, and Collins, with his obvious masculinity, represented, in her peasant mind, the only source of security at present available.

At the base of the next ridge they made a brief halt for lunch, then went on. The terrain had been gradually rising, and presently it leveled off into a flat, creek-veined plateau, scattered with oasis-like clumps of verdant trees. Beyond the plain, the green foothills blended so flawlessly with the lower slopes of the mountains that the mountains seemed to rise abruptly from the plain itself.

The effect was breath-taking. Behind him, Bedford heard Joan gasp. "They look almost as though they were going to fall on us!" she said.

"An optical illusion," Collins said.

"What a spot for a honeymoon!" said Nina.

The dog-like creatures were more numerous than ever, running in pairs, sometimes, over the plain, but clustered for the most part in the vicinity of the oases. Apparently the oases were the source of their food supply; every so often one of them would climb into one of the trees, pluck something from the branches and then return to the ground and devour it.

The term "dog-like" was proving more inadequate by the minute.

Presently Bedford became aware that Joan was walking abreast of him. Resolutely, he kept his eyes straight ahead and said nothing.

The silence endured for some time, walking soundlessly between them. A less cynical person than Bedford might have admitted to a variation of the pattern, especially when Joan made the first conversational sally. "What do you think

we'll find in the city, Mr. Bedford?" she asked.

But Bedford admitted to nothing. "Dust," he said.

"Why not life?"

"You saw it before the life-raft crashed. Can you deny that it's as modern as most cities on Earth? And do you think that a race of people technically competent enough to build it would lack devices for the detection of alien craft in its skies, or the means of contacting such craft immediately? No, if the city contained life we'd have known about it two days ago."

"Then why did you insist on coming?"

"Because I dislike reality in common with all human beings," Bedford said. "Because I want to pretend right up to the last bitter moment that things aren't really the way they seem. Because I want to keep hoping that when we come within sight of the gate, a golden-robed race of Atlanteans will come streaming out to meet us."

She smiled. "It would be nice, wouldn't it? But while we're hoping, let's not confine ourselves to one perfect commonwealth. Perhaps we'll find The City of the Sun, Utopia, Oceana and the New Atlantis all rolled into one."

For the first time Bedford really looked at her. But he saw only what he had seen before: the oval, almost noble, face, framed with shoulder-length, dark-brown hair; the astonishingly clear complexion; the wide-apart blue eyes . . . the tall lithe body that successfully combined voluptuousness and grace . . . Aphrodyte. *La Belle Dame Sans Merci.* A twentieth century love goddess clad in twenty-second century emergency fatigues. . . . But what love goddess read More and Harrington? Bacon and Campanella?

And then he thought: It's a trick. She knows I'm an intellectual. Either she guessed it, or Collins told her. And Collins probably told her to walk ahead and keep me company. He wants to foist her on me temporarily while he makes a play for Nina.

His emotions froze, as they had so many times before. He did not even try to melt them. Even his voice was cold when he finally spoke:

"I've never been to any of those places," he said. "Are they Earth cities?"

Pink roses climbed invisible trellises and bloomed in her cheeks. She dropped her eyes. "I don't know," she said. "I've never been to them, either."

The conversation ended. He did not look at her again, and presently she dropped back and rejoined the others. Bedford forged ahead, increasing the pace. The pattern was always reoccurring, and he could never escape it. But he could show his contempt and indifference. He could prove that he was

unafraid of loneliness, that he was sufficient unto himself. And proud. Above all else, proud.

That night they camped in a small valley in the foothills, inflating their collapsible shelters and building a fire, confining the evening meal to condensed supper-tablets washed down with water taken from an adjacent spring. Bedford stood the first watch, sitting on a log some distance from the fire, his ray rifle resting across his knees. In addition to the dog-like creatures, the only animal life they had seen so far had consisted of Equuleus VI variants of the rodent and bird families; but there was the possibility that larger animals inhabited the area, and it was best to be prepared.

Sitting there, he listened to the stridulations of the alien insects in the shadows, comparing them to the stridulations of the Earth insects he had been familiar with during his boyhood. There was very little difference, really. For that matter, there was very little difference between the two planets. Both had seas and continents and forests; hills and dales and lakes; mountains and plains and rivers—Well, yes, there was one important difference:

Only one of them had intelligent life.

But that was a moot point, Bedford reminded himself. In his heart he believed that the argument he had given Joan was valid—that the race that had built the city would have contacted them upon their arrival if it still existed. But there might be other cities, primitive ones built by technically unskilled people, and the argument would not be valid in their case. He did not honestly believe that there were, but it was a possibility worth keeping in mind.

As he sat there, one of the girls said something in her sleep. They shared the same shelter, and he could not tell which one had spoken, but he could identify the single word: *David*. A husband? he wondered. No, not a husband: neither of them was married. A sweetheart, then? Or a brother? Apruptly he brought his thoughts to a halt. It simply hadn't occurred to him that either Nina or Joan might have someone on Earth whom she loved, who loved her in return; such an idea was too remote from the center of his universe, from the personal planet around which his ego orbited.

He had been on the verge of pitving someone other than himself; instinctively he shied away.

Had she spoken the name aloud?

She sat up on her pneumatic pallet in the unrelieved blackness of the shelter. Nina's breathing came rhythmically from the pallet beside her. Insects sang in the world without, and from the dis-

tance came a series of whining barks. There was no other sound.

She lay back on the pallet and closed her eyes again. Again, sleep came to her . . . sleep, and the dream-that-was-not-a-dream.

For the hundredth time she watched David walk toward her across the terminal-floor. David carrying candy and a dozen roses and the world. The same abject plea was in his eyes when he came up to her, in his voice when he spoke. "Please don't go, Joan. Please."

She felt her body stiffen, felt the coldness come into her eyes. She heard her cold irrevocable words: "Don't beg. You remind me of a dog."

In the oval terminal-window the shuttle ship was framed, sun-bright and building-tall. Over the P.A. a relentless voice was intoning: "All passengers for the *Anaxagoras* report to section C immediately. All passengers for the *Anaxagoras* report to section C immediately."

"Please don't go," David said again. "Please."

And she heard herself say, "Good by, David. Have fun on your exurban treadmill."

She watched herself walk away. She tried to make herself turn her head for one final look at the man who worshipped her, who would have showered her with security for the rest of her life. But she went right on walking, eyes straight ahead, hating the peasant who could see her body but who could not hear her voice . . .

When she awoke again, the grayness of dawn was filtering through the walls of the shelter. This time it was not the dream-that-was-not-a-dream that had disturbed her, but something else. Listening, she heard the sound again, and this time she traced it to the pallet beside her. Nina was whimpering in her sleep.

Joan turned on her side and closed her eyes again. It was reassuring to know that the past was not her province alone.

It had been a bad dream, and even the warm fingertips of the rising sun could not loosen its grip upon her mind. Nina shuddered. She saw the sewing-room again, and the superintendent standing by her machine, leaning over her shoulder. Then she saw him look up, and following his eyes, she saw the new girl standing in the doorway. She saw the new girl blush, and then she saw the expression in the superintendent's eyes and knew that the after-hours rendezvous in the stockroom were over . . . and she had a sudden impulse to run out of the shelter and find Collins and throw herself into his arms before it was too late.

She fought the impulse back and forced herself to get up calmly and slip into the gray, one-piece garment that had been a part of the

life-raft's supplies. Joan was still asleep, her dark-brown hair spread out around her classic face, the filmy pallet-sheet adorning her long, full-breasted body like a Grecian robe. Nina bestowed a glance of purest hatred upon her and stepped out into the morning.

She washed in a nearby creek. When she returned, Bedford was stirring the fire and Joan was combing her hair in front of the shelter. Presently Collins appeared, and Nina put on her best smile. During breakfast she sat beside him by the fire, admiring his muscular arms, the strong column of his neck; the poise of his handsome head. Collins was a real man, for her money. Beside him, Bedford looked like a boy not quite out of his teens.

And yet there was a drive about Bedford that Collins lacked. He was a pusher, Bedford was. Not the foreman or the superintendent, but the— She shook her head, trying to straighten out her thoughts. Not the leader—that was what she meant. Bedford wasn't the leader: Collins was. Collins was the one you went to when things weren't going right, the one who covered up for you when you made mistakes, the one who recommended you for a raise. . . .

Desperately she pressed the heel of her hand against her forehead, quickly camouflaged the gesture by patting the waves of her black hair into place with her fingers. She glanced sideways at Collins to see if he had noticed. He had not. He was talking to Joan.

Panic touched her. She fought it back. There was plenty of time, she reassured herself. And she had weapons Joan had probably never dreamed of. Tonight she would go to him, when Bedford was on watch. Once she'd slept with him, he'd have no eyes for another woman. Not for a long time, anyway.

Tonight, then. Tonight . . .

They broke camp and started out, Bedford again taking the lead. The plain rose gently into the first green wave of the foothills. Outbursts of trees became more and more frequent, blended finally into a park-like forest.

The forest teemed with the dog-like creatures. They were behind almost every tree. And they were eternally chasing after one another as though their lives depended on it. Bedford began to notice details about them that had escaped his attention before. Their humanoid faces were not, as he had first thought, identical. Each had characteristics of its own, and some were decidedly female while others were decidedly male. Logical enough, certainly.

Moreover, the male creatures were the ones with hoofs, the ones with the pointed ears . . .

The hills were gentle ones, but they kept rising higher and higher,

and when the party made camp late in the afternoon, there was a pronounced chill in the air. Collins had the first watch, Bedford the second. He could see his breath when he took over at 0200, and he added more wood to the fire and moved as close to the flames as he could get.

The heat was soporific, and presently he dozed. Suddenly he heard the faint susurrus of a zipper, and opening his eyes he saw Nina slipping out of the shelter she shared with Joan. There was another faint susurrus, and then she was running, naked, her black hair swirling round her face, toward the shelter where Collins slept alone. Bedford watched her unzip the doorway and disappear within. He watched the doorway close.

He made a grimace. One, he thought.

They came within sight of the city early the next morning. It lay far below them, a macrocosmic dewdrop cupped in the green palm of an idyllic valley. Beyond it, the last of the foothills rolled verdantly away to the slopes of the nearer mountains.

Joan tilted her head, listening. All of them heard it then—the sound of music, wafted up from the valley on the morning wind.

Bedford took a deep, incredulous breath. "So there is life after all! . . . But why didn't they contact us? They *must* have an advanced technology, a communications system. Why, look at those transmission towers on the outskirts. And that long strip over there—that must be an airport of some kind."

"And those little specks along the edges must be grounded aircraft," Nina said.

Joan said, "All flights must be cancelled—otherwise we'd have spotted some of them by now."

"Couldn't be because of the weather," Collins said.

"Or at least not because of the weather locally," said Nina.

A sudden updraft of wind heightened the sound of the music. There was a certain wild gaiety about it, a sense of abandon. "A holiday!" Bedford said abruptly. "A three- or four-day holiday. That would explain it."

Joan nodded. "A holiday—or a festival of some kind. Celebrating the birth of their civilization, maybe, or—" She broke off as one of the dog-like creatures appeared on the slope below, running furiously. A moment later its pursuer came into view, tongue lolling, eyes glazed, and presently the two of them disappeared into the underbrush.

Two spots of pink kindled in her cheeks. "I hope they prove to be more civilized than their pets," she said.

"Those dogs don't act like pets to me," Collins said. "If they are

dogs." He turned to Bedford. "What's your opinion?"

Bedford found himself curiously reluctant to discuss the subject. "It's hard to say," he said. Then: "Come on. If we hurry we can get there before nightfall."

He started down the wooded slope. Joan followed, then Nina. Collins brought up the rear, watching the provocative sway of Nina's buttocks. He felt his fingertips begin to tremble, his temples begin to throb.

God! he thought. He'd never known a woman could be like that, and he'd known lots of women. He wanted to talk about the way she had been, to brag; but he couldn't very well brag to Bedford, and he certainly wouldn't be stupid enough to brag to Joan. It was all very frustrating. Half of the thrill in getting something out of the ordinary was in telling about it the next day. Well, he could be a lot worse off, he supposed. Look at Bedford there, depending on self-pity for his sex-kicks. What would someone like that do in bed with a red-hot item like Nina? Collins almost laughed aloud.

He shifted his gaze to Joan. She was some distance ahead, walking just behind Bedford. Nina or no Nina, Collins thought, Joan was the one he wanted. The Ninas were the ones you slept with in cheap skytels, but the Joans were the ones you hungered for all your life, dreamed of having and never quite got. This one was going to be the exception to the rule, though. She had been giving him the cold shoulder ever since yesterday, why, he did not know—unless it was because of the disparaging remark he'd made about classical music. She'd seemed kind of offended at the time, though she hadn't said anything. Well, it didn't matter: she was still going to be the exception to the rule. Bedford no longer counted. When he had refused to draw lots, he had merely expedited the inevitable.

Suddenly Collins realized that Joan was no longer walking behind Bedford, but beside him. Momentarily, jealousy stung him; then he thought: *They're probably talking about the moon. Or the stars. She's as quixotic as he is.*

He returned his eyes to Nina's callipygian posterior. Again, his temples began to throb. Again, his fingertips began to tremble. Maybe if the two of them dropped behind a little more . . . There was plenty of concealment available . . . Take those bushes over there . . . He hurried ahead to overtake her.

That was when he noticed that he was walking on all fours.

Again, Bedford kept his eyes straight ahead and said nothing. Again, the silence walked soundlessly between them. This time, however, Joan made no attempt to drive it away, and finally, unable any longer to endure its presence,

Bedford performed the task himself. "If the city is a dependable criterion," he said, "we should find evidence of a race of people like ourselves. Some of the buildings struck me as being works of art."

Joan said, "Architecture isn't art—at least not in the strict sense of the word. It's too tangible. In their purest sense, the words 'art' and 'artist' are inapplicable to buildings and engineers. But we've milked the words of their original meaning by applying them to too many inferior occupations. Probably if there were still such an occupation as manual ditch-digging we'd call it 'Pick-and-Shovel Sculpturing.' "

"Or 'Practical Archaeology.' "

She laughed. *Thy teeth are like a flock of ewes that are newly shorn,* he thought, *which are come up from the washing; whereof every one hath twins, and none is bereaved among them.*

"You—" he began, and stopped. He wanted to know what she had been on Earth, what she had done, believed in, sought after; but knowing would be the beginning of intellectual intimacy and it was but one short step from intellectual intimacy to physical and emotional intimacy, and he was reluctant to make the step possible because he believed in his heart that she would not take it, that their relationship would continue on an intellectual level only, and that she would seek physical and emotional intimacy elsewhere in order to abet it.

But she divined his question and parted the curtain of her own accord, and he had no recourse save to look. He caught a glimpse of rich meadowland, of distant stately trees. "I was an operatic soprano," she said, a curious tenseness in her voice. "In the process of pursuing such an anachronistic profession, one is bound, sooner or later, to take a rather dim view of the petty deceits of the peasantry."

The wide, full chest, the noble column of her neck; the goddess-mien . . . "Wagnerian?" he asked.

She nodded. "Freia. Brünnhilde. Isolde . . ."

God! he thought. She must have sung the *Liebestod.* And he remembered the first time he had heard it; the night he had stood drunkenly in the little bar in Old York and listened to the tape which the eccentric owner had surreptitiously substituted for the usual anemic concatenation of modern medleys, and he remembered how the aria, with its wrenching background of interblending themes, had washed away his drunkenness and left him standing there, half-sobbing, overwhelmed with pain that was not pain, but apotheosis.

He realized presently that Joan was still talking, that her voice was no longer tense. At first, only part of what she was saying got through

to him: ". . . establishing a new Bayreuth on Thule . . . a revival of Wagner in the colonies . . ." Then: "That's how I happened to be on the *Anaxagoras*. Being a respected Brünnhilde in a wilderness is better than being a neglected Brünnhilde in a civilization addicted to play-it-yourself electric organs."

"Would you sing it for me sometime?"

"Sing what for you?"

"The *Liebestod*," he said, and the second he said it, a new expression settled upon her face and a warmth he had never known before came into her eyes, and he knew that he had stumbled upon the key, the password—the open sesame to her heart.

"Yes," she said, after a long while, her voice soft, her gaze gentle upon his face. "The *Liebestod*. I'd like to sing it to you."

It was not until they stopped in a grassy clearing to eat that they noticed that Collins and Nina were no longer following them. After finishing their midday rations, they lingered in the clearing for nearly an hour, watching their back-trail. But except for an occasional glimpse of a dog-like creature, they saw nothing.

Finally Joan said, "Should we look for them or go on?"

Bedford said, "If we backtrack, we'll never make the city before nightfall."

"Yes, but—"

It had to be faced. "Do you think they *want* us to find them?"

She stood up. "The peasant mentality," she said. "It always brings out my naïveté. Come on. They can join us in the city if they want to."

They walked in silence for the most part, moving into the wind, into the sound of the music. Birds daubed the foliage above them with evanescent streaks of color. The dog-like creatures, more numerous than ever, darted back and forth across their path.

"I thought—" Bedford began once.

"I know you did," she said, again divining his question. "And I did find Collins amusing at first, for a peasant. And then—"

"Then what?"

She evaded his eyes. "He betrayed himself. All peasants do, sooner or later."

"They have a happy facility for it," Bedford said.

The tree-shadows were long when at last they reached the walls of the city, and the sun had set by the time they found the gate. Beyond the gate, a wide avenue flowed between two delicate banks of buildings. High above the avenue, interlaced walkways hung like streamers caught in the city's hair.

The gate was open. The music was wild and carefree, and the avenue should have been filled with laughing, gaily caparisoned

people. It was not. It was filled with shadows.

As they stood there, one of the dog-like creatures emerged from the forest and ran past them through the gate. A moment later it disappeared into the shadows. Another followed in its wake, tongue lolling, eyes glazed. It, too, disappeared into the shadows.

Bedford was shocked, not because of the vague sense of familiarity which the two humanoid faces had evoked, but because of the parallel with which his mind had finally supplied him. In this case, as in all the others he had witnessed, the female was being pursued by the male; but now he knew that she wasn't being pursued simply because she was a female—

She was being pursued because she was a bitch in heat.

"Should we go in?" Joan asked.

Bedford shook his head. "I think we'd better wait till morning. It's too dark to see anything now."

"No it isn't. Look!"

One by one the city's lights were coming on. They were of various hues, and suspended in a thousand unexpected places. Some of them weren't suspended at all, or didn't seem to be, and floated like gaudy balloons high above the buildings. A mist had risen with the setting of the sun, and now it transmuted subtly into a motionless rainfall, the drops of which were gold and blue and violet; yellow, red, pink, scarlet; amber, mauve, turquoise; silver, lavender and gray.

Joan gave a delighted laugh. "Why, it's like a carnival," she said. "Let's go look for the hot-dog stand!"

Bedford took her arm, and together they walked into the multicolored mist. It *was* like a carnival, Bedford thought. But with a difference. Real carnivals were attended by thousands of people. This one had an attendance of only two.

Why was the city empty? he wondered. What had happened to its populace? The avenue vibrated faintly from the rhythm of subterranean machines and the crystalline flagstones were immaculate; but the buildings stared sightlessly at one another with lightless, empty eyes, and the walkways were deserted.

The architecture, while alien, had a basic similarity to that of most Earth cities—probably because it had been influenced by the same hereditary drive. There were the usual ithyphallic structures, unexpected as to décor but not surprising otherwise. On Equuleus VI, though, the feminine breast must have played an important role in the original fertility rites, for dome-like structures abounded, and the pap was interpreted in a thousand different roofpeaks.

They left the avenue and turned down a sidestreet. Choosing a building at random, they explored it from top to bottom, riding up and down on pneumatic lifts, entering apartment after apartment. Once, they surprised mechanical sweepers at work, and everywhere they saw signs of recent habitation; but nowhere did they find life.

In the street, Bedford said, "We've got a thousand places we can live in. If we can find their food warehouses, I'd say we had it made."

"Speaking of food—" Joan said.

They broke out supper-rations and ate, sitting on their packs in the middle of the street. After they finished, they went on.

The street debouched into another avenue, and they turned up it, walking hand in hand now, the mist and the music swirling softly around them. This avenue was different from the first: its portals were wide open, and beyond them, muted lights changed from hue to hue. Curious, they walked over to the nearest portal and stepped inside.

They found themselves in a large circular chamber. In its center a white, waist-high dais, fringed with petals of the same hue, revolved almost imperceptibly on a hidden shaft. Suspended above the middle of the dais was a transparent cylinder filled with moving images. The floor was a flawless mirror, and on the concave wall, doors were spaced at even intervals. Mood music supplanted the music of the streets, and concealed lights accompanied it, changing from hue to hue to match each variation.

Joan was staring at the dais. "It—it looks almost like an altar."

"Or a bar," Bedford said.

It was Joan who discovered that the petals were bar-stools. Laughing, she slid onto one of them and placed her elbows on the dais. Instantly, a sphincteral opening appeared on the surface before her, and a glass brimming with reddish-gold liquid emerged. She picked it up, but Bedford, coming up behind her, took it from her hand. "Let me be the guinea pig," he said.

He held the glass under his nose and sniffed its contents. Wine. Wine—and something else. He touched the glass to his lips, intending only to taste the wine, but the taste was more than he had bargained for. Before he knew what had happened he had drunk every drop.

He set the empty glass on the dais with trembling fingers. It sank into the surface, was replaced by a full one. He let that one sit where it was.

Joan was looking at him. "It might have been poisoned."

He shook his head. "No. Not poisoned. Doped."

He raised his eyes to the transparent cylinder. Blue fire was blazing in him now. Even forewarned, he was shocked by what he saw. The city's inhabitants had been human all right—human enough for him to be able to tell what their taped images were doing. Suddenly he realized that Joan was watching, too, and despite the aphrodisiac in his bloodstream, he blushed.

He turned his back on the cylinder and stared at the doors that were evenly spaced along the concave wall—each opening, he knew now, into a room with bed but without view. His temples pounded, his throat felt dry. Abruptly he faced Joan. He moved the second glass closer to her hand. "Drink it," he said.

She regarded him steadily with blue clear eyes. "Is that the way you want me? Drugged, defenseless, willing to take on any man?"

The room seemed to shift, to blur. He swayed slightly, steadied himself against the dais. Slowly, he shook his head. "No, that's not the way I want you," he said.

She stood up, took his arm. "Come on, let's get some air."

He accompanied her into the street.

There was an eeriness about the multi-colored lights now, and a certain obscenity. Walking through their vacillating patterns, it was easy to picture the city as it had once been. He saw the people swarming the streets, chasing from bar to bar, from bed to bed. Satyrs . . . nymphomaniacs . . .

He could think, now, with the chill night air pressing against his face and throat. A few moments ago he had been about to rip his cloak of culture from his shoulders and give rein to the animal chafing within him. He had been on the verge of behaving like a Collins or a Nina, on the verge of behaving like a peasant. He and Joan lived on a much higher plane. When it came time for them to make love, they would not make love like animals, but like humans.

They were ascending a wide, spiraling ramp now, Joan leading the way, her hand warm in his. Light-patterns played over her body, giving her one-piece garment a harlequin effect. Higher they climbed, and higher. The avenue became a chasm beneath them. Around them light-bubbles drifted and swirled, as insubstantial as air. The mist thinned out and the starlight broke through and fell like gentle rain.

"Here. We're high enough above the music now."

He followed her over a high-flung walkway to the roof of a lofty building. He heard the silence now. He saw the starlight on her face, her hair. Presently he heard her voice.

Isolde . . .

The magnificent columns of

sound, compounded of note on poignant note, rose ever higher above the carnival city till they reached the very stars. And the stars themselves took cognizance when the climactic note broke forth, and paused in their awesome courses. And then the slow, sad dying away into death and transfiguration . . .

He had sunk to the roof, and now he sat there, staring at the trembling stars. She knelt beside him, and when he turned his head she locked her fingers behind his neck and pressed his face against her breast. "Now," she whispered, *"now!"*, and pressed ever harder, burying him deeper and deeper in soft darkness, shutting off his breath till he felt as though he were dying and wanted nothing more than to die. And then, when he was on the very brink of death, she released him and caught his lips with hers and blew the first life-giving breath into his starving lungs.

Morning washed the gaudy lights away and scrubbed the shadows from the streets. Joan and Bedford walked hand in hand down the avenue of bars.

The avenue debouched presently into an idyllic park, and they chose a path at random and wandered among the trees. When they reached the shore of an artificial lake, they paused and gazed out over the sparkling water. A series of laughing barks sounded behind them, and turning, Bedford saw two of the dog-like creatures frolicking among the trees.

There was a vague familiarity about their faces, and suddenly he realized why. The two creatures were the same ones that had preceded him and Joan into the city.

Something about them fascinated him, and he continued to watch their antics. Joan had turned and was watching, too. Presently one of the creatures broke free from the trees and started running along the shore. The other followed. The sunlight caught both faces, eliciting every detail.

Bedford heard Joan gasp behind him. He heard his own hoarse breath. The faces were narrow and the features were exaggerated. Nevertheless, there was no mistaking whose they were. The first was Nina's, the second, Collins'.

Caricatures, Bedford thought. That was what they were. And all the other faces he had seen had been caricatures, too—caricatures emphasizing the sensual characteristics of the originals.

A simultaneous realization struck him. He had been right all along: both the sexes unquestionably resembled dogs, especially the female sex; but Greek mythology supplied much more appropriate terms.

Satyrs and wood nymphs!

Bedford understood everything

then: the emptiness of the city; the aphrodisiac wine; the sensuous music. For by the same token that a race of people could acquire godlike qualities by rising above itself and sublimating its sexual drive, a race of people could acquire animal-like qualities by stooping beneath itself and giving free rein to its sexual drive. And a cosmic storm containing unclassified particles capable of creating instability in an atomic pile could just as easily contain other unclassified particles capable of effecting chromosomatic transformations in individuals whose physical qualities were incompatible with their basic natures.

There were other cities, of course, but it was unlikely that their inhabitants had been any different from the inhabitants of this one. The absence of any aircraft in the skies indicated that the same fate had overtaken them, too. They, too, had probably been practicing universal birth-control and living like animals in civilized clothing long before the storm arrived. And when the storm arrived and the particle-bombardment began, metamorphosis in all cases had probably been instantaneous.

It hadn't been instantaneous in the case of Nina and Collins because neither of them, until their animal love-making had destroyed the last remnants of their decency, had been sufficiently incompatible. Once sufficient incompatibility had been attained, however, metamorphosis had followed inevitably.

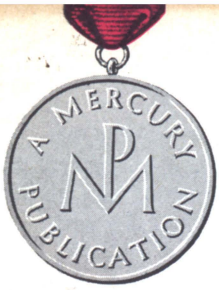
Why, then, hadn't metamorphosis occurred in Joan and himself? They had made love, too.

The answer pounded in Bedford's brain, sent his blood coursing exultantly through his veins. Metamorphosis had not occurred —and would not occur—because there was no disharmony between their love-making and their physical qualities. Thanks to their loftier intellectual plane, their love-making had been noble, not base. They had not made love the way animals make love, or even the way humans make love—

They had made love in the manner of gods . . .

He turned eagerly to Joan to tell her of his insight. As he did so, she left his side and started running after Collins and Nina, tearing off her clothes. For some reason her behavior did not seem illogical, and after a moment he followed suit. When she dropped down on all fours, he did likewise.

A thought stirred in the back of his mind. He had had something he wanted to tell her, hadn't he? Something terribly important. He tried to concentrate, but just then he caught her scent, and his mind went blank. Deliciously blank. When she veered away from the shore and slipped among the trees, he followed eagerly, tongue lolling.



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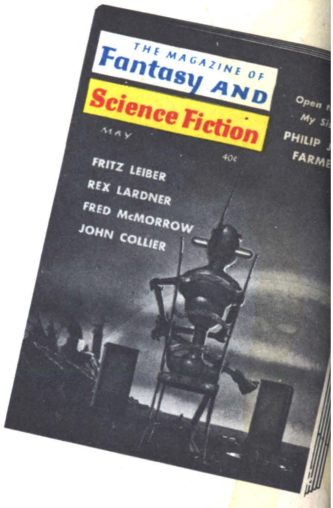

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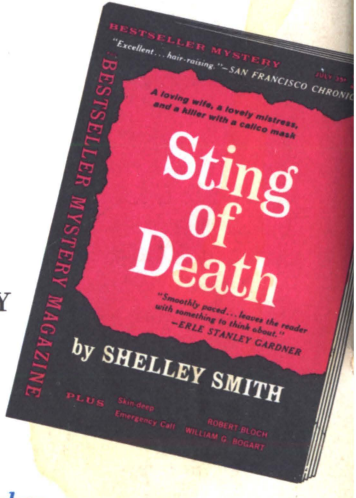

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