



COMPACT
SF

3/6

sf impulse

FREDERIK POHL

day million



sf impulse

Editor in Chief: Harry Harrison

Managing Editor: Keith Roberts

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Published every month by ROBERTS & VINTER LTD., 42/44 Dock Street, London, E.1. Subscriptions 48/- (\$7.00) post free per year.

All Communications (sender's risk) to The Editor, sf Impulse, 42/44 Dock Street, London, E.1. All terrestrial characters and places are fictitious. © 1966 by sf IMPULSE.

PICKING UP THE REINS

An introductory editorial
by Harry Harrison

Many years ago, during one of those late-night discussions, the conversation turned to the then-current spate of sf anthologies and the desperate lengths some editors went to, to find yet one more excuse for putting together a batch of stories. Phil Klass—better known to the reading public as William Tenn—suggested that we might soon be seeing an anthology of stories beginning with the words, “Had I but known . . .”

As far as I know this particular anthology has yet to be published. But I can hear that deadly phrase echoing hollowly in my ears. Had *I* but known . . .

Some months ago I was invited to write a guest editorial for this magazine. I responded with pleasure since I count myself lucky to have Kyril Bonfiglioli as a friend. Within a short time I found myself responsible for a regular monthly column of comments, and a little while later I discovered myself occupying the editorial chair.

I’ll say this much—I do not intend to go it alone. Kyril Bonfiglioli, now freed of a monthly deadline to enable him to attend his ever-increasing commitments, has passed on an aura of editorial good-will that I hope will continue. Equally important, he has passed on Keith Roberts who is now Managing Editor.

This is the new team, and that is all I am going to say about it. The magazine is here for you to judge, and we hope that you will tell us just how you feel: there will be a monthly letter column in which you can air your views.

Our hope is to shape an international, or better, trans-

atlantic magazine. Kingsley Amis once went on record—in a review in the *Observer* if I remember correctly—stating that good sf was written only by Britons and Americans, and not by women or foreigners. I won't go into *all* of that, but the first part can not be argued with. A good percentage of the sf books put out by British publishers are by American authors, and the way that British authors win Hugo awards in America shows that the traffic is not one way. Keith Roberts, and I intend to regularize this traffic. It has been rather haphazard up until now.

Though resident at this moment in Britain, I am an American. Keith is Anglo-Saxon-Norman, or whatever you call it, all six feet of him. While he only paints himself with woad once a year, and I chew 18 sticks of chewing gum at a time only once a year, we are still undeniably products of our particular environment. Our tastes and enthusiasms have been shaped by different cultural backgrounds and is evidenced in both our writing and editing.

If you want a statement of policy, it is a simple one: we like good stories. You'll find them in sf **IMPULSE**.

We feel that a magazine should be liberal and print the best examples of the entire spectrum, from hard science to gentle fantasy. We feel that taboos are a limitation, not an aid, and we intend to use any story, irrespective of current taboos, that falls within the brackets of what might be called good taste.

I intend to be brief because this magazine should speak for itself. You will find new stories here, and new features, and new departments.

May you enjoy them.

— HARRY HARRISON

Starting next month we intend to run a letter column, a feature frequently requested by our readers. To help get the ball rolling we have posed a problem; what *is* science fiction? We're giving a twelve month free subscription to sf **IMPULSE** for the best and most concise answer. We shall be waiting to hear from you!

Frederik Pohl started young, editing a science fiction magazine while still in his teens. That magazine has long since vanished into crumbled pulp oblivion, but Pohl carries on as a novelist and short story writer of importance—and editor of three new sf magazines. We wonder at times where he gets the energy from, but are thankful that he is still able to write stories like DAY MILLION, his first appearance in sf IMPULSE. Here is a picture of the future that may look very brash and American at first glance, but merits a long second glance. Here is a smooth and cool entertainment that conceals a wicked barb of truth.

DAY MILLION

by Frederik Pohl

On this day I want to tell you about, which will be about ten thousand years from now, there were a boy, a girl and a love story.

Now, although I haven't said much so far, none of it is true. The boy was not what you and I would normally think of as a boy, because he was a hundred and eighty-seven years old. Nor was the girl a girl, for other reasons. And the love story did not entail that sublimation of the urge to rape, and concurrent postponement of the instinct to submit, which we at present understand in such matters. You won't care much for this story if you don't grasp these facts at once. If, however, you will make the effort you'll likely enough find it jam-packed, chockful and tip-top-crammed with laughter, tears and poignant sentiment which may, or may not, be worthwhile. The reason the girl was not a girl was that she was a boy.

How angrily you recoil from the page! You say, who the hell wants to read about a pair of queers? Calm yourself. Here are no hot-breathing secrets of perversion for the coterie trade. In fact, if you were to see this girl you

would not guess that she was in any sense a boy. Breasts, two ; reproductive organs, female. Hips, callipygean ; face hairless, supra-orbital lobes non-existent. You would term her female on sight, although it is true that you might wonder just what species she was a female of, being confused by the tail, the silky pelt and the gill slits behind each ear.

Now you recoil again. Cripes, man, take my word for it. This is a sweet kid, and if you, as a normal male, spent as much as an hour in a room with her you would bend heaven and Earth to get her in the sack. Dora—We will call her that ; her “name” was omicron-Dibase seven-group-totter-oot S Doradus 5314, the last part of which is a colour specification corresponding to a shade of green—Dora, I say, was feminine, charming and cute. I admit she doesn’t sound that way. She was, as you might put it, a dancer. Her art involved qualities of intellection and expertise of a very high order, requiring both tremendous natural capacities and endless practice ; it was performed in null-gravity and I can best describe it by saying that it was something like the performance of a contortionist and something like classical ballet, maybe resembling Danilova’s dying swan. It was also pretty damned sexy. In a symbolic way, to be sure ; but face it, most of the things we call “sexy” are symbolic, you know, except perhaps an exhibitionist’s open clothing. On Day Million when Dora danced, the people who saw her panted, and you would too.

About this business of her being a boy. It didn’t matter to her audiences that genetically she was male. It wouldn’t matter to you, if you were among them, because you wouldn’t know it—not unless you took a biopsy cutting of her flesh and put it under an electron-microscope to find the XY chromosome—and it didn’t matter to them because they didn’t care. Through techniques which are not only complex but haven’t yet been discovered, these people were able to determine a great deal about the aptitudes and easements of babies quite a long time before they were born—at about the second horizon of cell-division, to be exact, when the segmenting egg is becoming a free blastocyst—and then they naturally helped those aptitudes along. Wouldn’t we? If we find a child with an aptitude for music

we give him a scholarship to Juillard. If they found a child whose aptitudes were for being a woman, they made him one. As sex had long been dissociated from reproduction this was relatively easy to do and caused no trouble and no, or at least very little, comment.

How much is "very little"? Oh, about as much as would be caused by our own tampering with Divine Will by filling a tooth. Less than would be caused by wearing a hearing aid. Does it still sound awful? Then look closely at the next busty babe you meet and reflect that she may be a Dora, for adults who are genetically male but somatically female are far from unknown even in our own time. An accident of environment in the womb overwhelms the blueprints of heredity. The difference is that with us it happens only by accident and we don't know about it except rarely, after close study ; whereas the people of Day Million did it often, on purpose, because they wanted to.

Well, that's enough to tell you about Dora. It would only confuse you to add that she was seven feet tall and smelled of peanut butter. Let us begin our story.

On Day Million, Dora swam out of her house, entered a transportation tube, was sucked briskly to the surface in its flow of water and ejected in its plume of spray to an elastic platform in front of her—ah—call it her rehearsal hall.

"Oh, hell!" she cried in pretty confusion, reaching out to catch her balance and finding herself tumbled against a total stranger, whom we will call Don.

They met cute. Don was on his way to have his legs renewed. Love was the farthest thing from his mind. But when, absent-mindedly taking a shortcut across the landing platform for submarinites and finding himself drenched, he discovered his arms full of the loveliest girl he had ever seen, he knew at once they were meant for each other. "Will you marry me?" he asked. She said softly, "Wednesday," and the promise was like a caress.

Don was tall, muscular, bronze and exciting. His name was no more Don than Dora's was Dora, but the personal part of it was Adonis in tribute to his vibrant maleness, and so we will call him Don for short. His personality colour-

code, in Angstrom units, was 5,290, or only a few degrees bluer than Dora's 5,314—a measure of what they had intuitively discovered at first sight; that they possessed many affinities of taste and interest.

I despair of telling you exactly what it was that Don did for a living—I don't mean for the sake of making money, I mean for the sake of giving purpose and meaning to his life, to keep him from going off his nut with boredom—except to say that it involved a lot of travelling. He travelled in interstellar spaceships. In order to make a spaceship go really fast, about thirty-one male and seven genetically female human beings had to do certain things, and Don was one of the thirty-one. Actually, he contemplated options. This involved a lot of exposure to radiation flux—not so much from his own station in the propulsive system as in the spillover from the next stage, where a genetic female preferred selections, and the sub-nuclear particles making the selections she preferred demolished themselves in a shower of quanta. Well, you don't give a rat's ass for that, but it meant that Don had to be clad at all times in a skin of light, resilient, extremely strong copper-coloured metal. I have already mentioned this, but you probably thought I meant he was sunburned.

More than that, he was a cybernetic man. Most of his ruder parts had been long since replaced with mechanisms of vastly more permanence and use. A cadmium centrifuge, not a heart, pumped his blood. His lungs moved only when he wanted to speak out loud, for a cascade of osmotic filters rebreathed oxygen out of his own wastes. In a way, he probably would have looked peculiar to a man from the 20th century, with his glowing eyes and seven-fingered hands. But to himself, and of course to Dora, he looked mighty manly and grand. In the course of his voyages Don had circled Proxima Centauri, Procyon and the puzzling worlds of Mira Ceti; he had carried agricultural templates to the planets of Canopus and brought back warm, witty pets from the pale companion of Aldebaran. Blue-hot or red-cool, he had seen a thousand stars and their ten thousand planets. He had, in fact, been travelling the starlanes, with only brief leaves on Earth, for pushing two centuries. But you don't care about that, either. It is people who make stories, not the circumstances they find

themselves in, and you want to hear about these two people. Well, they made it. The great thing they had for each other grew and flowered and burst into fruition on Wednesday, just as Dora had promised. They met at the encoding room, with a couple of well-wishing friends apiece to cheer them on, and while their identities were being taped and stored they smiled and whispered to each other and bore the jokes of their friends with blushing repartee. Then they exchanged their mathematical analogues and went away, Dora to her dwelling beneath the surface of the sea and Don to his ship.

It was an idyll, really. They lived happily ever after—or anyway, until they decided not to bother any more and died.

Of course, they never set eyes on each other again.

Oh, I can see you now, you eaters of charcoal-broiled steak, scratching an incipient bunion with one hand and holding this story with the other, while the stereo plays d'Indy or Monk. You don't believe a word of it, do you? Not for one minute. People wouldn't live like that, you say with a grunt as you get up to put fresh ice in a drink.

And yet there's Dora, hurrying back through the flushing commuter pipes toward her underwater home (she prefers it there; has had herself somatically altered to breathe the stuff). If I tell you with what sweet fulfilment she fits the recorded analogue of Don into the symbol manipulator, hooks herself in and turns herself on . . . if I try to tell you any of that you will simply stare. Or glare; and grumble, what the hell kind of love-making is this? And yet I assure you, friend, I really do assure you that Dora's ecstasies are as creamy and passionate as any of James Bond's lady spies', and one hell of a lot more so than anything you are going to find in "real life". Go ahead, glare and grumble. Dora doesn't care. If she thinks of you at all, her thirty-times-great-great-grandfather, she thinks you're a pretty primordial sort of brute. You are. Why, Dora is farther removed from you than you are from the australopithecines of five thousand centuries ago. You could not swim a second in the strong currents of her life. You don't think progress goes in a straight line, do you? Do you recognize that it is an ascending,

accelerating, maybe even exponential curve? It takes hell's own time to get started, but when it goes it goes like a bomb. And you, you Scotch-drinking steak-eater in your relaxacizing chair, you've just barely lighted the primacord of the fuse. What is it now, the six or seven hundred thousandth day after Christ? Dora lives in Day Million, the millionth day of the Christian Era. Ten thousand years from now. Her body fats are polyunsaturated, like Crisco. Her wastes are haemodialysed out of her bloodstream while she sleeps—that means she doesn't have to go to the bathroom. On whim, to pass a slow half-hour, she can command more energy than the entire nation of Portugal can spend today, and use it to launch a weekend satellite or remould a crater on the Moon. She loves Don very much. She keeps his every gesture, mannerism, nuance, touch of hand, thrill of intercourse, passion of kiss stored in symbolic-mathematical form. And when she wants him, all she has to do is turn the machine on and she has him.

And Don, of course, has Dora. Adrift on a sponson city a few hundred yards over her head, or orbiting Arcturus fifty light-years away, Don has only to command his own symbol-manipulator to rescue Dora from the ferrite files and bring her to life for him, and there she is; and rapturously, tirelessly they love all night. Not in the flesh, of course; but then his flesh has been extensively altered and it wouldn't really be much fun. He doesn't need the flesh for pleasure. Genital organs feel nothing. Neither do hands, nor breasts, nor lips; they are only receptors, accepting and transmitting impulses. It is the brain that feels; it is the interpretation of those impulses that makes agony or orgasm, and Don's symbol manipulator gives him the analogue of cuddling, the analogue of kissing, the analogue of wild, ardent hours with the eternal, exquisite and incorruptible analogue of Dora. Or Diane. Or sweet Rose, or laughing Alicia; for to be sure, they have each of them exchanged analogues before, and will again.

Rats, you say, it looks crazy to me. And you—with your aftershave lotion and your little red car, pushing papers across a desk all day and chasing tail all night—tell me, just how the hell do you think you would look to Tiglath-Pileser, say, or Attila the Hun?

—FREDERIK POHL

They were the product of generations of technological development. They were . . .

THE INHERITORS

by Ernest Hill

Click! Click! Click!

"I hate you!" He shouted. "Do you hear? Hate you! Hate you!"

The sun shone brightly through the transparent panels of the roof celestia and the floor was patterned with the diffused shadows of the conditioning fans, the impedimenta of temperature, humidity and barometric pressure control. There was one now-obsolete pollen-counter. It was a pleasant room, long windows sliding partially open under the direction of the acclimatizator mechanism, looking out over the interminable lines of factory disappearing over the horizon in every direction. There was not a cloud in the sky. No rain was due for another two weeks and then they would channel it mostly over the agraria.

Click! Click! Click!

"I can stop you any time I want!" he shouted. "Don't think you control me! I control you!"

The delivery lines spouted from the roofs of the factory like fountains. Some travelling overhead connecting area with area, some disappearing underground to join the main network to the commutaria. A stray seagull drifted by on an unscheduled wind and a pest control cannon fired. The seagull vanished in a puff of grey vapour. Hoses were playing on the roofs and roads between. Everything was clean and bright and uniform. Concrete. As though all the mud in the world had been dredged to make it. The factory and of course, somewhere, the city—the commutaria.

Click! Click! Click!

"I'm in charge here," he shouted. "I can stop you any time I want to. There's only one button and it's a big red

button. One press and you're dead and the factory dies with you, all ten million square kilometres of it."

Click! Click! Click!

"You can hear me, can't you? You can hear every word I say through that little box of yours. I know what you're doing. You're reporting me all down the line. 'Management neurotic', you're saying. So I'm neurotic! I don't care. Do you hear me? I don't care! I'm still the management. I can stop you whenever I want to and there'll be no more click, click, clicking. Look at this! Look at it with your hundred eyes without a blink or a flicker between them! The red button! Death to all the length and breadth of you! I'll press it if I want to!"

The hum of the air conditioning plant rose half a semitone and the fans swivelled imperceptibly in his direction. The air cooled and the windows slid slightly wider open in their grooves. The medicovector focused. A scentless narcotic vapour spread downwards, soothing as a mother's smile. He sank into the reclining chair. Slowly he took a cigar from the drawer of the chromium desk that opened as he reached toward it. He blew out a cloud of smoke scented with the simulation of Havana. It wreathed and coiled over the title board, black-lettered on a white background on the desk top. "Manager".

"Of course I don't want to," he said. "I won't really press it."

The fans purred approvingly. The medicovector hinged itself back into a neutral corner. Nothing, of course, must halt production.

Click! Click! Click!

A long white screen slipped noiselessly down the wall facing his desk. His eyes were somehow drawn to it and held there.

"I am looking at it," he thought, "because I want to."

There was no shadow on the screen but he knew that the sub-liminal projector was flashing. Whenever the screen came down the sub-liminal projector flashed. He had installed it himself. Or his predecessor had. Or someone. A long time ago.

There was no need to look at the screen. If he wanted to revolt, he could turn his back on it. No mechanism to hold him. No compulsion. No one, not right from the begin-

ning, had ever used compulsion for anything. Only these damned insidious cybernetic persuaders.

"Why don't you go home?" appeared at regular intervals of 1/20th second duration on the screen. Too fast for the eye, of course. The visual centres perceived nothing at all, but the optic nerve transmitted the pulsations to the region of instantaneous acuity and some inner relay in the illusory mechanism of free will operated in the verisimilitude of decision.

"I think I'll go home," he said.

Click! Click! Click!

"That's a good boy! That's a good boy! That's a good boy! That's a good..." But he had already climbed into the capsule in the "Management Disposal" tube. Ten seconds later, he was decelerating into the manager's parking berth in his concrete block-house in commutaria. Collecting his hat and umbrella, he pressed the button marked "Disencapsulate" and was levitated in an upright position into his own receptacle. His wife was pleased to see him home soon.

"Had a hard day, dear?" she asked.

"I hate them!" he shouted. "Hate! Hate! Hate! Do you hear!"

"I know what we'll have for evendine," she said. "Your favourite. Steak and kidney pie. In aspic."

She pressed the locator keys and the pie exploded through the alimentary tube with plastic spoons, sliced starch-bread and a bottle of pig's blood and rosemary ketchup.

"It's never seen a pig," he grumbled. "Who remembers what a pig looked like? Do you know there are no animals left? But they never change the labels. Oh no! It's a hydro-carbon sludge with taste-bud stimulants."

"And very nice too," she soothed.

"It's them!" he shouted. "They're in control! They're the real bosses! We have to eat what they give us."

"Darling," she said, "you've had a hard day."

"I never do anything," he sobbed. "All my life, as far as I remember, I've never done a thing. They do it all."

"A nice cup of tea!" she said. The paper containers emerged piping hot with exactly the right proportion of tea simulation. On the tray beside them were two paper

twirls with cyclamates in one and tea strength additives in the other. Instead of soothing him, the excellent service infuriated him still more. He put his mouth to the delivery pipe.

"I hate you! Hate you! Hate you!" he shouted.

There was an echo in the tube. When it had died away, a packet emerged marked *Placidex. Take three times a day after meals.*

He threw the packet into the waste disposal fundibulum, followed it with the steak and kidney pie and poured the tea on top. It vanished down the expurgation tube with a loud gurgle. Almost a laugh. A germicide spray sterilized the receptacle, leaving it shining, sweet-scented and sanitary.

"There!" he said. "That's independence!"

She sighed. She was very concerned for his mental state and the illogicality of his outbursts.

"They run our lives," he said. "I won't have it."

"No dear," she explained. "You've got it all wrong. We are in control and you are the manager. They do everything you say. They have never refused us anything. You didn't have to eat the pie and you needed the tablets. It was thoughtful of them."

He sat on the reclinacouch and sobbed.

"You don't understand," he whispered. "You don't understand at all."

"Yes I do." She held out her hand and led him through the self-opening sliding doors into the connubium. There were soft golden lights and an electronic rod humming a primal response rhythm. She pressed the keys marked "GSCI" for gland stimulant and conception inhibitors.

"We must take our pills first," she said.

"No! No! No!" He broke away from her and beat with his fists on the mechanical sense simulation panel. The connubiaticouch rocked rhythmically and a husky voice whispered "One, two, three—up! One, two, three—down!"

"I won't!" he shouted. "Won't! Won't! Won't!"

"You do need the doctor," she said.

The doctor's eyes swivelled in his direction and his sensors sought him out, registering heart beats, bodily temperature, electrical skin resistance, rate of metabolism, endro-chemical analysis of bloodstream and corpuscle

count. The diagnosis was completed and the prescription puffed out in .01 seconds. He inhaled the vapour. Under its influence, he became calmer and relaxed on the connubia-couch. She brought him his stimulant and steak and kidney pie.

"Let's go away," he whispered, drowsy with the couch's rocking. "Away! Away! Away!"

"Away?" she asked, incredulously. "Where? What are you talking about?"

"Anywhere. To the sea!"

"But darling—there's nothing by the sea. Only the final walls of the factory. You've seen it often on the screen. We have a much better simulated seaside here. Beaches, warm waves, animated tribal dances, the sensation of swimming, diving, the scent of seaweed, the taste of salt. Who ever would want the real sea? Cold and wet and raining. Even if we could get there."

"That's just the point," he said. "Who ever would want anything? Who is there left to want? Do you know, sometimes I think we are the only people left in the world."

"How ridiculous you are!" She laughed. "We see lots of people every day."

"On the screens, yes. We can see anyone we want to see. The naked beach girls. The bronze Tarzan types. The conversationalists. The informants. The titivators. The card players, the manipulators of chance games, the puzzle mongers. They aren't real people—when did we last see a real person?"

"I don't know what you mean," she said. "Of course they're real people."

"They were once, I suppose. Now they've been taped and stored. I mean real people—like you and me. People you can feel and touch. Really feel with the hands, not simulated by the screen-waves."

"If you mean someone who comes in a tube like you every day, of course not. We're married. Only a husband really comes into a room out of a tube."

"What about the Street then? Just walking along the Street, passing by?"

"I never go into the Street," she said. "What would anyone go into the Street for?"

A further frightening thought occurred to him.

"Do you know if the Street is still there?" he asked.

"What are you talking about? Of course it's there."

"When did you last see it?"

She was very patient with him. The doctor's prescription had affected her too and she was calm but a little drowsy. She fanned herself with a pep-o-pad tissue.

"We must have gone into the Street sometime. When we were younger, I expect."

"How old are we?"

"I don't know. I suppose we must be quite old now. We must be. I've never thought about it."

"You see!" he said. "You haven't any idea at all. We've been taking Longevitum as long as we can remember. And every day I have gone to the office in my capsule and every day I have come back. What do I go for? No one needs me. I'm the manager but I can't remember if there ever was a time when I managed anything. If there was it must have been centuries ago, and it's centuries since either of us went into Street. I don't think we should find anything there if we did. Even if there were a Street to find. There is no one else left in all the world. Just you and me and—them."

"Does it matter?" she asked.

"Of course it matters!" His inner turmoil was more intense than the endro-chemical analysis of his blood stream had shown. "It matters to me. Do you know what I'm going to do?"

"No," she said, moving cautiously towards the doctor panel.

"I'm going out in to the Street!"

Before she could activate the "doctor recall" panel he had climbed into the egress capsule and rocketed down the tube to the Main Gateway. She sighed and returned to the leisury and a woodland dance idyll with Tarzan titivation.

The capsule came to rest in a small, trough-like appendage outside the high demarcation pillars of the house. There was a Street. As far as the eye could see it stretched in both directions between two vast concrete walls, broken only at intervals by pillars and similar troughs to his own. He disencapsulated and began to walk. The sun was setting and as the shadows became deeper the street lighting

blazed suddenly from concealed lamps and from horizon to horizon there was a line of unbroken white brilliance. He was elated to find the Street still there.

"I'm here," he shouted. "In the Street! The manager is here!" There was no answer and no one anywhere in sight. Silence. And then a distant sound, drawing rapidly nearer. A whirring, whistling, clattering sound. An approaching, rotating cloud of dust. Just in time, he recognized it for what it was. A street cleaner rattling along, covering both the roadway and the walls with a flexible array of brushes and suction hoses. He was forced to jump and manoeuvre rapidly to avoid being swept into its incinerator.

"You missed me!" he shouted. "You tried to kill me but you couldn't. You weren't quick enough. You're stupid and brainless like all machines!"

"Go away!" he shouted. "I'm in charge here. I'm the manager!"

The cleaner trundled away and was soon lost in the haze of its dust cloud in the distance. He began to run down the Street.

"Come out of your tombs!" he shouted. "If there is anyone there, come out and show yourselves!"

High above him, suspended at intervals from wires across the Street, the telecameras of the police beamed their eyes downward.

"Machines!" he shouted. "I hate machines!"

He ran faster. The beat of his feet on the hard road echoed from wall to wall and as he shouted again "I hate you! I hate you," the words came back to him in the jumbled superimposition of echoes. He thought the machines were mocking him.

There was another sound, like the whistle of a transporter capsule in its tube; a police float flashed from over the horizon and scooping him up, pinioned him in the coils of its restraining tendrils. He struggled valiantly and was rendered inert by an injection of Inactovon from the police doctor concealed in the seat. The float brought him before the magistrate. Once in the Law Court he quickly revived under the influence of the truth vapour that was the best assurance of any, including mechanical, justice.

The magistrate scanned him closely from ten separate view points.

"What is the charge?" the magistrate asked.

"Apprehended for his own safety," the police float announced, still holding him firmly in its restraining scoop. "Running alone in the Street and shouting."

"It is not a crime to run in the Street nor to shout," the magistrate admonished. "We must guard against any overzealous restriction of individual liberties."

"What have you to say for yourself?" he asked the prisoner.

"Machine!" he shouted. "I won't be tried by a machine!"

"Well, now," the magistrate explained kindly. "Of course I am a machine. But I was built by men to enforce the laws that men themselves made. You can hardly quibble at that, can you?"

"Where are the men who made you now? I appeal to the men. Where are all the men who made you?"

"It is not my function to know. You as a man must be aware of the limitation of the machine. My function is to try offenders according to the man-made code in my original programming."

"There are no offenders left to try. There are no men left in the world."

"That again is a thing which it is not my function to know."

"One thing you must know. When did you last try an offender?"

"I have no time awareness in my programming."

"I was right! I knew I was right! There are no men left! The machines have withheld the Longevitum and dispensed only the conception inhibitor!"

"You appear to be alive."

"Because I was the manager. The machines thought me necessary."

"This is quite nonsense, you know," the magistrate pointed out. "Machines are only the things men made them to be. Or made the machines to make the machines to make the machines to be. If men have in fact ceased to exist, it must be through their own volition."

"They have all died from boredom or from other causes,

sterile in womb and soul. And the world goes on and on with only the machines left. The machines have inherited the earth!"

"If that were true, the world be no worse for it!"

"Let me go!" he shouted. "This thing has no right to hold me here. I am a man. I am alive!"

"Of course," the magistrate conceded. "You have transgressed no law and my programming demands that I release you. You are perfectly free to go, although where you will go to seems to me at least somewhat obscure. I think the police doctor should examine you before we release you. You appear to be in need of treatment."

The doctor examined him with probes, scanners and tentacles. It placed the tips of its tentacles together with professional deliberation.

"A little overwrought," it said. "No paranoic tendencies. My programming does not extend beyond the moderately anti-social. Relaxatabs three times a day, and transport home."

"Where do you live?" the magistrate asked.

"I've no idea," he said. "I suppose I knew once. Now all places look alike to me."

"The police float will return you. The telecameras recorded the hole from which you emerged. I advise you against further excursions into the Street. Case dismissed! Next please!"

"There are no other offenders!"

"Good," said the magistrate, and dimmed out into its normal state of quiescence.

The police float returned him to the capsule and depressed the ingress button. He was blown out into the receivory of the manager's house.

"How nice to see you back," his wife said.

"We're alone in the world," he told her. "There is no one in the Street. The machines have inherited the earth."

"Never mind . . ." She led him into the liesury. "We can watch the beach girls and play hallucigenic water polo. Afterwards we can slip into the connubium for a while."

"All right!" he said.

"We must go to bed early," she reminded him. "You mustn't be late for the office."

— ERNEST HILL

Book Review

BRIAN W. ALDISS

discusses

THE CLONE

by Theodore L. Thomas and Kate Wilhelm

In June, Marghanita Laski, the science fiction critic of *The Observer*, announced that she found the current state of sf so depressing that she was resigning.

Poor Miss Laski! Anyone who has a regular reviewing stint will sympathize with her. But a stouter heart might have tried to analyse the reasons why sf was at present "uncreative, repetitive, moribund", instead of just throwing in the sponge.

I have my own ideas about why sf is as it is at present. I also perceive that two writers have solved the problems of this admittedly transitional period in a traditional way, so reactionary as to be almost daring. Mr. Thomas and Miss Wilhelm (Mrs. Damon Knight) have evidently decided that the times are unripe for anything positive in the way of experimental or forward-looking work and have returned to one of the oldest formulas in the business—taking care to make it over well.

"The Clone" works on the old horror formula of the vile something that grows and takes over a city. I say *works* advisedly; for the whole mechanism—one can't pretend is much more—works like one o'clock. It is very simply constructed, plainly written and without subplots. The chief protagonist and all other characters are shadowy, there either to avoid ingestion or to be ingested by the loathesome clone. In the language of higher criticism, this is a novel with Process as Hero: but the language of higher criticism is scarcely appropriate here; "The Clone"

adheres to the lines of, and is about as intellectual as, a thousand "B" feature horror movies. Where it scores is in credibility.

The novel opens in admirable documentary fashion. We are in Chicago: the time 12.33 a.m. "The city glittered, unsuspecting in the night". We sink below the level of the sidewalks, to the bowels and arteries of the city, where water pipes run to every building and sewer pipes run from them.

In the sewerage system, all sorts of chemicals and waste products of every kind are carried. A block from the city hospital, there is a faulty collector box under the road, where an air bubble was trapped during the pouring of the concrete. This forms a sort of concrete womb, where the clone can come into being. In the ensuing hours, various nutrients flow into the collector box—a bit of chopped meat from a hamburger joint, dirty water containing trisodium phosphate, some cleaning fluid, and other matter. Fragile chains of molecules build up. The clone is born. After an hour, the growing matter is almost large enough to be seen by the naked eye. It is like a parody of the creation of life on Earth, with all the inaccurate glories of Genesis boiled down into this foul little pit below the Chicago sidewalk.

By dawn, the organism is sending tissues along the radial feed pipes. By morning, one of these tentacles has thrust its way right up a waste pipe below a sink in one of the nearby apartments. It is ready to make its first contact with human beings.

The contact, as you may guess, is not pleasant. The clone is a greedy feeder. It devours any organic stuff with which it comes in contact. Its rapid evolution to the status of a series of unrelated scares and then to an identified menace capable of bursting out and dealing destruction at widely separated points is entirely fascinating. Later, there is an extremely exciting sequence in which the central character, Mark, goes down with skin divers into a flooded subway, which is now full of clone tissue.

It all makes a good read. Chicago is slowly consumed, and the perspectives of the menace widen again: will the clone work its way into Lake Michigan, full of organic life on which it can feed and grow, and from thence to

the ocean, where nothing could stop it consuming the world?

Well, it is hardly letting any secrets out of the bag to say that the clone is stopped in the final pages. This little novel never departs from the old formula by a hair's-breadth. It so happens that there is just one chemical that the clone can't bear, and in the nick of time they are spraying it over the heaving mass of tissue that has enveloped all Chicago. You will have met the situation before.

The relentlessness of the book carried me over all the cliché characters and situations and the unlikelinesses—such as the way the clone can penetrate almost anything except cotton. One thing that particularly pleased me was the way in which the process of being digested by the clone was represented as not being painful to the people concerned; for once, here were authors not out to wring the last drop of agony from their readers.

Presumably poor Miss Laski would find this book "uncreative, repetitive, moribund". It is to be hoped that some British publisher will be bright enough to bring out an English edition of Theodore Thomas and Kate Wilhelm's little machine, so that readers over here will have a chance to form their own judgments.

My own verdict is summed up in the words of two schoolboys in a *Punch* cartoon, some years ago. They were blasé lads of eight or nine, strolling away from a Punch and Judy show. One was saying to the other, "Hokum maybe, Wilkinson, but dashed good theatre."

— BRIAN W. ALDISS

*THE CLONE is published by Berkley Books, Inc., at 50 cents.

They would repair anything at Turnpike Garage, anything in the world. Or out of it . . . Alistair Bevan contributes a motoring fantasy, a genre he has made peculiarly his own.

BREAKDOWN

by Alistair Bevan

I knew I'd got trouble when I saw old Billy Caswell driving in.

My name's Fredericks. Bill Fredericks. I run a garage in a little town called King's Warrington. Warrington isn't much of a place; you might have passed through it sometime on a trip across the Midlands but if you have I doubt if you'd remember it. There's nothing much there but we don't think it's too bad; we get along in our own queer sort of way.

I've owned Turnpike Garage a good few years now. Ever since Pop died. I've had my smooth times and I've had my rough but by and large it's a fair sort of living. I try and turn out a good job; and that's more than you can say for a lot of the motor business these days. I know it's my racket and all that but I still don't like the way things are heading. We're a replacement trade now whether you like it or not; all this taking bits off the shelf, slapping 'em in and handing the can back to the makers, it isn't my idea of engineering. Never has been, never will be.

That's what causes most of my headaches. I could have a nice easy life if I wanted, believe you me, but it isn't my way. It wasn't Pop's either, I reckon we were both as thickheaded as the other. But the thing was, Pop had a sort of name in the district. If you'd got something with wheels inside it and it wouldn't run you took it along to Old Man Fredericks. And somehow or other the bloody thing would run. Mangles, sewing machines, vintage typewriters; he never could turn a job away, whatever it was. I remember one time he rebuilt Stoughton village clock. That was just

after the war, it hadn't worked in years but things had been let to slide. Well, Pop took a fancy one night to make it go. And he did. God alone knows how old it was ; it hadn't got a screw or a bolt in the whole frame, everything was rammed together with bits and pieces of wedges. Pop fixed it ; he took it apart and he put it back together, just like it had been. No fancy stuff, no welding or bolting or anything like that ; just the wedges, the same way it was built. The parts that were rotten, eaten through with rust, he forged new ones to replace 'em. It took him months, and I don't think he ever got properly paid. But that didn't matter to Pop once he got the bit between his teeth. That was the way he was.

When I got myself sorted out and took the business over the first thing I told everybody was there was going to be a different system. My word yes. No more of the village blacksmith stuff ; I was an auto engineer, I'd trained as an auto engineer and cars were all I was going to work on. I gave it out round Warrington we were a repair shop now, not a tinkers and tailors and candlestick makers. (Pop had made those too in his time). I behaved like a right so-and-so to start with but I couldn't make it stick. There were Pop's old cronies, with their old cars that Pop had kept running for years, and the local kids with their first Rubys and Morris Eights ; there always seemed to be a solid reason for messing with an old crock and not charging the earth. I knew things were getting on top of me when I got landed with a grandfather clock that belonged to an old biddy called Hollis down in the village. It had shown the phases of the sun and moon once and the state of some far-off tide. It was really my wife's fault I'd got lumbered ; I told her one night, "Sheila," I said, "that heap of junk's going straight back where it came from. I'm not putting a screwdriver on it, what the hell do they think I am?" She didn't answer, not directly ; but it was still the end of Frederick's Modern Carwash and Comfort Station.

Billy was one of the clients Pop had looked after ; I inherited him along with things like leaks in the roof. He was a nice old boy, lived along at the other end of the village. Widower, cottage with a garden full of roses, brewed his own wine, read a lot and generally pottered.

Oh, he collected pipes too. He'd been something in insurance, I don't quite know what ; I don't think he was too badly off, he'd got a good pension coming in, but these are expensive times for anybody. He'd got this big old heap of a car ; she'd been a good motor in her day, but she was shot. Tired out. Maybe you didn't know cars can get tired like their owners, just want to lay down and die. Take it from me, they can.

I'd tried a few times to get him to trade her in for something nearer his weight but he wouldn't have any. He always kept her smart, I'll grant him that ; she'd trundle through the village a couple of times a week on his shopping round, Sundays she'd wheeze up to the golf course and back and that was about the extent of her travels. He reckoned she'd see him out, there wasn't any sense chopping and changing at his time of life.

Now Billy was about the most unpractical man I ever met. As far as I was concerned that was his major trouble ; a dozen times he'd pulled critical bits off that motor looking for some imaginary knock or squeak and it was me that had to go up and repair the bomb damage. He took the steering box adrift once, tightened it back up with the cross-shaft all adrift ; that time he nearly did join the angel band.

Anyway when I saw him coming in I heaved a long deep sigh and considered for a minute taking refuge in the john while the boy got rid of him. But that was only putting off the evil hour, I had to cope with him sooner or later. I went out to him. "Morning, Billy," I said. "How's the roses?"

The roses were fine. He was fine, the motor was fine. Running as well as she ever had. Everything was great.

I started to get fidgety. I'd got a heavy day ahead, I couldn't spend half the morning chewing the fat with elderly gentlemen. He'd got something on his mind of course. I took him back to the office, sat while he filled a meerschaum and puffed the thing alight. Half a dozen matches later he got round to what was bothering him. Could I slow his car down a bit? She was running too well, he wasn't as young as he used to be. Couldn't stand the pace.

I let my chair down sort of gentle onto its all four

legs and stared at him. I thought he was kidding ; but he was straight as a die.

Now I've been asked to do some funny things in my time. I've had sick motors brought in, dead motors, motors in every state of natural and unnatural collapse ; I've put the go back into everything from roller skates to musical boxes, I've worked in petrol, I've worked in diesel, I've worked in steam. But never, not before or since, have I been asked to do a thing like that.

To slow something down.

I took a cigarette out and lit up, watching Billy under my eyebrows. "Look, Mr. Caswell," I said, "I'm just not sure I'm with you. What exactly's wrong with your motor?"

He got a bit annoyed at that. Fanned the air with his pipestem and jetted a rank cloud of smoke. "That's just it," he said. "Just what I'm trying to get across." He puffed again, vigorously. "*There's nothing wrong*, Bill. Nothing at all. She's just going too well, that's all. I want you to slow her down."

We didn't seem to be getting very far. "Look Billy," I said, "better put me in the picture a bit. When did she start . . . er . . . running well?"

"Oh," he said, "quite suddenly. After that little chap fixed her up. Don't know what he did, haven't got a clue. But it's too much for me . . ."

"What little chap?"

"Had a bit o' trouble the other night," he said. "Forgot to say. Coming back from Bampton I was, been over to see m' sister. Always go once a month. Lives on her own. Expects it . . ."

I steered him back as gently as I could. "Billy the . . . er . . . car . . ."

"Mmm," he said. Puffing hard. "Comin' to that. Well, it was lateish. Round about eleven. Never late back from the sister's. Not as young as we used to be y'know. . ."

I sighed again and let him get on with it in his own way.

It seemed a couple of miles out of Warrington he'd broken down. Sounded like a plain petrol shortage to me. He'd had that happen before. He was insistent he'd nearly got a full tank. He'd filled up at Turnpike the day before.

"OK," I said. "So it was a blockage maybe. What'd you do?"

"Well, I thought of ringing you. But it meant walking into Warrington of course. 'No' I thought, 'can't be dragging the chap out all hours. Have a look at it m'self.'"

I shuddered. I'd have much preferred to be dragged out.

It had been raining steadily. He played round under the bonnet for half an hour without getting anywhere. Then the chap, whoever he might have been, had come along. "Little chappie," said Billy. "Shorter than me." He was a bare five-six himself.

"What'd he do?"

"Ah, now that's the funny part. Damn all as far as I could tell. Only took a minute. He took the torch, d'ye see, and asked me to sit inside out of the wet. Nice of him. Then he said. . . . I remember just what he said, sounded foreign . . . 'Is right' he said. 'I have completed.'"

"Had he . . . completed?"

"Oh yes." Billy beamed at me. "Very well too, very well indeed. But my word, the drive home. I didn't think I was going to get there. Just like a racing car. You know, one of these Jaguars . . ."

I had a quick vision of Billy trying to come to terms with an XK, and shoved it to the back of my mind.

"Well," I said. "Sounds a bit queer all round from what you say. Got me foxed. You say it's still . . . er . . . doing it?"

"Oh, yes. I drove down very carefully. 'I'll take this to Mr. Fredericks' I said to m'self. 'Only thing to do . . .'"

I got up. The sooner I sorted the old boy out the sooner I could get on with some paying jobs. "Well," I said, "better have a look, Mr. Caswell. Don't expect it's anything much."

"You drive," he said. "And be careful. Oh, my word . . ."

I got into the car and hitched the seat back three or four notches. Billy climbed in the other side. I started her. She fired on the first spark. Certainly ran better than I remembered. Looked as if I'd got some competition in the district. I dropped into second and let the clutch out.

Next thing I remember was the blur of the pumps going past. My lad shouted something, God knows what. That

old wreck had gone off like a freshly scalded cat. Left two long black snakes of rubber across the forecourt.

I managed to haul up just before the main road. I sat and looked at Billy for a minute then I got out. The only thing in my mind was I was the victim of a singularly complicated gag in some candid camera show. I yanked the bonnet open. I don't know quite what I was expecting to see. XK unit maybe. There wasn't one. Just the old weary straight six, leaking oil a little at the seams. The unit ticked away quietly. I pulled at the throttle linkage. It bellowed like a tank.

I got in again and drove, very carefully. I'd never had power like that under my foot before and I've driven some hairy motors. I headed away from King's Warrington. About three miles out there is a stretch of dual carriageway. It leads up over a pretty hefty hill, a long pull of a mile or more. Beacon Hill we call it. As I hit the bottom a Zodiac passed me at the run. I tapped the throttle. It felt like I'd been kicked in the back.

I passed the Ford in about a hundred yards. The surprised blur of the driver's face just registered. Near the top of the hill an MGB was doing stern battle with an Alvis. I blew for room and hummed by the pair of them.

Over the top of the Beacon the road narrows and there's half a dozen tightish bends. I started to slow for them. Halfway through the first corner the seat of my pants was telling me I was wasting time. The motor was going round on rails.

I started to get the feel of her. I'd forgotten Billy; I think he was just sitting there paralysed. The car was clocking nearly eighty when I came out of the last of the bends and she didn't sound strained. Engine note was high, way over peak revs, but that was all. I wondered vaguely what was keeping her from flying apart. Somehow I knew she just wouldn't.

I put twenty miles behind me before I turned back. Regretfully. I was on a good stretch of road. I decided to find out what she'd really do.

I'd flicked by the patrol car before I even saw the flasher on the roof. Or rather I'd seen it but it hadn't registered. By the time I was wise to them the boys were in full cry astern. A long way astern admittedly but coming on well.

I remembered belatedly the latest Governmental lunacy ; we live, breathe and have our being in the shadow of a blanket limit.

There wasn't really any answer. Except one. I put my foot down, the heap responded ; a scandalously short time later I was back on Turnpike forecourt. I'd been round the houses a bit first of course. There was no sign of the prowler car. I drove into the workshop just to be on the safe side, parked at the back and let Billy out. It was only when I saw his face I remembered I hadn't the faintest idea what I'd been playing with.

I had time then to be scared. .

I took him home. In one of the garage cars. I can't remember how I passed the thing off, I wasn't listening to myself at the time. I got away eventually. When I got back the car was sitting grinning at me in the daft way these things have. All set to go again.

I couldn't touch her till the evening. We had a hell of a day. At six I phoned Sheila to tell her I was going to be late. There was a little cafe just down the road, I used it sometimes when I was working on through. I went across for a meal. I didn't sit over it. I just had to get to grips with that insane motor.

I was forestalled again. When I got back in sight of the garage I groaned. Two cars sat on the forecourt. One racing-green Mark Two Spitfire. One blue-lamp-embellished Wolseley.

I might have known the boys would be around.

The Spitfire was a slight problem too. The bird was one Philadelphia Prescott. I knew her father pretty well. Only chap I've ever seen loading sacks of meat offal in a Rolls Bentley. I think he was in glue ; whatever it was, his top tax rate was fifteen bob in the pound. Fond daughter was just back from Switzerland, been spending a few weeks with friends. The car was her mother's bright idea. Philadelphia wanted a Stage Two tune. Now you take one of those little bundles of fun, smack on a high-compression head, spatter the block with goodies and she'll knock a hole in a hundred and twenty. Phil thought that might be amusing. I'd already had words with her Dad about the sort of things that would happen to me if I obliged.

She was going over well with the patrol boys. She sat in

the Spit in dark glasses, skinny sweater and eighteen inches of skirt and they'd got her pretty well surrounded. All two of them. They didn't waste quite so much of their excess charm on me. They wanted to know, to the point and in a word, who'd been ruddy well mucking about.

Now I don't know why if anything funny happens within twenty miles of Turnpike people come straight round and lay it at my door but that's the way it goes. I told them no, I hadn't got any specials in. What, do a ton and a half down Beacon Hill? I wouldn't dream of it. They'd better have a look round, if they could find anything that'd touch the half of that I'd like to see it. What was I supposed to have been driving?

They exchanged funny looks. That seemed to be a major problem.

There are such things as registration numbers. I was a bit worried about that. As it turned out I had a right to be. They walked straight across the workshop floor to Billy's jalopy, stood looking at it. I went over with them. Philadelphia followed us in for kicks.

"You know," I said, "I'd clean forgotten this one. Gave her a decoke last week, she might do a couple of ton on the straight. Hop in, I'll give you a burn." I leaned in and switched on. Pulled the choke and started up. "Got a bit of a blow in the exhaust," I said, "but it doesn't seem to hold her back. Haven't finished the tune yet but she's better than she was. Used to be a bit sticky over a hundred and fifty. No git-up-and-go."

For a nasty minute I thought they were going to take me up on the offer of a run. I opened the bonnet. "I thought I might have to plane the head," I said, "but we got by without." I peered inside, wits maybe sharpened a little by crisis, and saw something I hadn't noticed before. Along the offside of the block, under the inlet manifold, ran a thin bar of metal. It had a sort of dull silver glint to it and at one end was a rounded housing that looked as if it might about hold an ignition coil. I certainly hadn't put it there; it didn't look like any part of any engine I'd ever seen. "That's the secret of course," I said. I pointed to it. "The Fredericks Accelerator. Fitted in a flash, no bolts, no drilling. Guarantees a genuine two hundred. Saves on the juice too. We haven't ironed all the bugs out yet but

we're hoping for the land speed record later on. We're working up to it; standing mile, stuff like that. Nothing too spectacular. You know."

The driver—Pete Timms, his name was—shoved his hat up on the back of his head. "Look, Bill," he said, "have you been bloody well playing about or haven't you? Were you up on Beacon this morning or not?"

I looked annoyed. "I just told you, didn't I?" I banged the side of the car's bonnet. It rattled dismally. "Gotta test out somewhere fellers, have a heart . . ."

We walked back toward the door. On the way he told me a few things. Like what happens to people with multiple endorsements and how they deal with falsification of numberplates and stuff like that. Interesting. It's nice to be in; I always like hearing about other people's jobs.

I watched them prowl off. Phil watched too, thoughtfully. "Bill" she said finally, "you were joking with them, weren't you?"

"What?" I said. "Me, joke? You never heard me do a thing like that now did you? Be fair . . ."

She gave me a dirty look. "That's Mr. Caswell's old car," she said. "And you can make it do two hundred. But you won't do a single thing for me."

I thought of a funny little remark Sheila had made a few days back. She's broadminded, as broadminded as they come, but I suppose everybody's got their limits. "You missed a right little giggle," I said. "Archimedes Fredericks rushing forth from his place of gainful employment, naked save for oilstains, shouting Eureka . . ."

"Bill," she said, "if I brought the motor in toward the end of the week——"

"I'd send it straight back again. "Phil, we are just too busy. It isn't the sort of job you can do in a hurry——"

"You've been talking to my father," she said. "I know what's going on."

"Move that lamp will you?" I said. "I want this motor over the pit."

She kicked the handlamp cable away disconsolately, hands rammed in the pockets of her skirt.

I started Billy's jalopy and drove forward carefully. Got the lamp and climbed down underneath. I don't know what I was looking for. Sticky bombs maybe. Anyway,

there weren't any. I got back out. We had an Alpine GT in for decoke and general service ; Philadelphia was sitting on the bonnet swinging her legs. "Where were they?" she asked interestedly.

"Where were what?"

"The oilstains."

"Look Phil," I said, "I've got a hell of a lot to do. Go home, will you? Curl up with a good book."

She slid off the Alpine, brushed at her skirt and looked haughty. "I'll take it to old Charlie," she said viciously. "He'll do it for me. I'll see you still get the blame."

The workshop door banged behind her. I heard her rev the Spit and drive away.

I don't like chucking people out but I wasn't going to start playing with that thing on Billy's car while she was anywhere in range. I went over to the toolbench, fetched a screwdriver. Held my breath and pushed the blade between the block and the bar of metal. Nothing exploded. The goody came away easily ; seemed it was fixed by magnetic clamps. I started the motor again, revved her. She clattered.

If that heap got above fifty it would be by the grace of a following tornado.

I took the bar back to the bench and stood and looked at it. I tapped it. It rang with a faint, bell-like note. I examined it inch by inch, one end to the other. The metal wasn't like anything I'd ever seen. It looked nearly like pewter only it was about ten times too light. I nipped one end in the big vice. Nothing happened. I squeezed some more. Steel would have bruised ; a dural tube would have flattened. The whatever-it-was did neither. I had the feeling it would cut grooves in the vice jaws first.

I didn't clout it with a lumphammer but I suppose I did things damn near as silly. I put a pair of Stilsens on the coil part and tried to unscrew it. There was nothing to undo. I tried drilling. The bit skidded, didn't leave a mark. It didn't mind neat acid or a torch. The torch heated it up a bit but it didn't discolour.

Just for a laugh I clamped it alongside the block of the Alpine. When I revved the tacho needle hit the stop that fast I was surprised it didn't wrap itself round it like a coilspring. I didn't try to drive that one.

I put the widget back on the bench and lit a cigarette. It was late, nearly dark ; I'd been playing with the thing for hours. And I was hopping mad. I'd never been defeated by a chunk of metal before. This oddment had me on my knees.

I never lock the front doors when I'm working. I've got pretty good ears, I can always tell if somebody's mooching about. This particular customer managed to cross a crowded workshop in the dark without making a squeak. First I knew was when he coughed by my elbow. Sort of a polite, throat-clearing noise.

I don't know why I was expecting something like that but it didn't come as any particular shock. I turned round slowly and looked him up and down. It didn't take long ; like Billy had said, he was very short. Nearly a midget. He was wearing a dark suit, trilby pulled well down ; he had a little bland round face, tiny feet and hands. Looked like a bank clerk who'd lost his way. Except there was something . . . I don't know, something not quite right about him somewhere. Like he'd just got dressed up in the clothes and they fitted where they touched. He looked . . . wrong, is all I can say. Out of place in an offbeat sort of way.

"Wishing forgiveness," he said, "for intrusion maybe inopportune."

I looked at the widget lying on the bench then back to him. "Is this," I said, "your idea of a joke?"

He looked concerned. "Comprehension is difficult," he said after a bit of a pause. "No joking was required."

"That's all right," I said. "No joking was achieved. This is yours, isn't it?"

He frowned. As if he was trying to come to some epoch-making decision. "No," he said finally. "Not being mine . . ."

"You put it there though." I was starting to get annoyed over again. "On my customer's car."

He nodded at that, looking more worried than ever. "Not requiring offensiveness," he said. "Considerable apologies."

Now here's a funny thing. There I was at night on my own with this character ; he was certainly a mile from being normal, for all I knew he was crazy as a coot but do you know, I liked him. Something instinctive, no

reason for it. He was standing twiddling his thumbs and looking at the widget like he was ready to burst into tears. I thought perhaps it wasn't his after all, I'd just confused him. Maybe there were two foreign midgets wandering round Turnpike and only one of them was a mechanical genius. "Look," I said, "it's late and I'm not open for business. What's your problem?"

"Not wishing offensiveness," he said. "Firmly regretful . . ." He looked round the shop a bit helplessly. "This is for mechanicals?" he said. "A place of working and repairs?"

"Look," I said, "have you broken down? If so, what in and where?"

"Ah . . ." He pulled at his lip and frowned. "A vehicle, yes," he said. "Most malfunctioning." He seemed to have trouble with the hard vowels, like Mr. Jorrocks. "Requiring mechanicals," he said. "Assistance very grateful. Please . . .?"

I'll admit I was about ready to shy a spanner at his head. I'd had a long hard day; I'd got a problem that frightened me cold, something I couldn't even get to grips with let alone crack, and here was this little wog mumbling and bumbling and spraying his much apologies right left and centre. Where he'd broken down I didn't know; what the trouble was I didn't know; I was considering advising him to try in hell but like I said I'm just as thickheaded as Pop was. His vehicle was most malfunctioning. Requiring mechanicals. Well, Pop never turned a job away. And he never refused to go out to somebody in trouble, not in all the years I knew him. It wasn't my place to start.

"All right," I said. "I'll have a look. You far up the road? Far enough to take a car?"

The look he gave me, I don't think I shall ever forget it. Sort of pure gratitude. Childish. Like a kid who's just been given a huge new present, something he'd never even guessed about. People just don't look at other people like that. Not unless they want to be misunderstood.

I got my jacket and backed the pickup onto the apron. Locked the doors and left the lights burning. He sat in the cab, all tensed up on the edge of the seat. "Where is it?" I said. "Where'd you leave your car?"

He looked confused.

"Right, or left?" I said. "Which way?"

"Forward," he said. "Forward to here." Holding up his right hand.

I turned right on the road.

We climbed Beacon Hill. It was a fine night. Warm, with a high full moon. Either side of the road the woods looked like black velvet. There wasn't much traffic; moths scuttered through the headlight beams, once an owl dipped across in front of us. I was wondering how far this character proposed to take me when he touched my shoulder.

There's a layby at the top of the hill. I pulled into it expecting to see a stranded motor. There was nothing. I turned to him but he was already out of the truck, hopping from one foot to the other and waving me.

I keep a bit of hose in the dash cubby. Loaded, you know. Not that I'm essentially a suspicious type but I do get called out on some funny jobs at some funny times and you can't be too careful. I took it out and slipped it in my pocket. But I didn't need it. I never needed it, not with him.

He was looking panicky again. When I got out he pulled my arm. "Having the mechanicals," he said. "To repair . . ."

I presumed he meant my toolkit.

I squinted at him. "Where is it?" I said. "Where's your car?"

He pointed to the woods.

I shook my head. "No thanks friend," I said. "Not in there. Just what's the ruddy game anyway?"

I thought he was going to get down on his knees. "Please," he said, "for assistance. Is being no other. Great trouble . . ."

"Yeah," I said. "Great trouble. Not for me though." I started to walk back to the pickup.

He just stood there looking miserable. Shoulders drooping, like Chaplin playing a sad scene. And of all things, wringing his hands. People don't wring their hands except on the stage. Then, you laugh.

I opened the truck door and got in. Switched the ignition on, turned it off again and groped in the cubby for the

torch. "All right," I said, "let's get on with it shall we? Before I change my mind?"

He bounced off into the undergrowth like a puppy.

I made heavy going of it. The bushes were waist high in places and well laced with nettles. If I hadn't had a crazy day already I wouldn't have kept going. As it was, well . . . I've never decided whether I'm glad I went along or not.

Right at the top of the hill was a sort of clearing. There was a depression in the ground, a little dell. Screened round with the bushes, maybe a quarter mile from the road. Not the sort of place a picnic party would get to. Or anybody else for that matter. Maybe keepers or bailiffs. If there were any.

In the clearing was the vehicle.

I stood and looked at it. I walked round it. Then I stood and stared again. And now maybe you're in for a let-down; because I'm not going to tell you what I saw. I'm not even going to describe it. I don't think I could, not adequately; and if I tried you'd say I needed putting away.

I felt I was crazy myself. I sat on a little bank and grinned and lit a fag and laughed. While he waited there at my elbow and dithered and wrung his silly little hands.

This was the machine he wanted me to repair.

There was an . . . opening into it. He got hold of me again finally and pulled me toward it. I was still dazed, I didn't argue. I walked forward and put my foot on the sill of the . . . door, port, you choose a word. As I touched it the whole thing reacted. Trembled, sort of shook like a leaf in the breeze. Shivered, like it was alive. As though it could feel me, and see.

Don't get me wrong. It was a machine all right. It was a machine like half a thousand great watches all ticking and whirring one inside the other. It was a machine that quivered and trembled and maybe sang a little; I don't know, my ears were buzzing anyway. It was a machine made of gold and steel and rubies and pulsing light.

It was beautiful.

He was showing me what I had to do. Twittering, touching and pointing. I couldn't make sense of the things he was handling. There was no sense. Not my sort of sense

anyway. There were ingots and rods, crystals and carved shapes, lumps and chunks of preciousness. I remember I started to sweat just looking at them. "You're crazy," I said. "I can't do work like this. None of us can . . ."

But there he was still touching and pointing, smoothing at the bits with his little pale paws, showing me that and this. Cracks and discolourings, this to be renewed, that to be turned and milled, made good. There'd been a smash-up somewhere you see. In some part that never broke, couldn't break. I nearly started to see the funny side. We've got machines that can't break too. Rolls-Royce halfshafts, they never crack. But there's a funny story about one all the same. I expect you know it.

I hauled all the spare metal and broken bits up together. There was an armful. Some of the shapes were too heavy, some were too light. I backed out of the . . . thing, the machine, with him following me. Bouncing along, holding the torch. Halfway back to the truck he dropped it, left me floundering in the dark. I rammed my head against a tree. I knew what he was now. Or rather what he wasn't. It didn't stop me swearing blue fire at him.

Walking blind in a dark wood, it's bad to hear breathing in front of you. Worse to trip over something soft that squeaks. I went down in a heap, with a musical clanking. The thing wriggled and heaved. It had fur, or hair. I shoved myself away, violently.

"If you do that again," said Philadelphia furiously, "I'll yell the bloody place down . . ."

"Oh my God," I said. "What the hell are you doing here?"

"Look who's asking," she said bitterly. There was a scrabbling and a torch came on. Hers. "Phil," I said, "are you hurt?"

"Oh no . . ." She was scraping at twigs in her hair. "You only jump on me with half a ton of blasted scrap iron first. You are a rotten swine Bill, there wasn't any need for that . . ."

"Look girl," I said, "this isn't funny. "For God's sake clear off. Go home . . ."

"Try again," she said. "I don't know what you're up to Bill Fredericks, but whatever it is I'm up to it as well . . ."

I gave in. I was too tired to argue. This just made disaster complete.

We heaved the junk in the pickup and the Spitfire conveyed me back down. I drove into the shop, locked the doors and started one of the lathes. I didn't have too clear an idea what I expected to do. I just had this thought of maybe a jury rig, a lashup. Something that might just get him . . . home. I started working.

Pop trained me on a lathe. And he was good. He'd do things with a four inch Myford most people wouldn't try with an engineering works backing them. I wanted him there then. Badly.

I tapped threads through stuff that looked like luminous ruby. Twisted Mobius strips and weird shapes, welded them and riveted, annealed. I turned square shafts from gold. Yes, turned 'em, with the work in the toolrest and the tool in the chuck. All the time with the little creature pawing and touching, explaining. He knew what he wanted, to the last detail. It's just he wasn't . . . mechanical. Phil made coffee, cup after cup of it ; I banged and swore and sweated.

Dawn was in the sky before I'd finished. Or I thought I'd finished. I looked at my customer. And he nodded his head. Slowly, up and down, up and down. Yes, it was done. It was good.

I shoved the bits into a heap and stared at them. I don't know ; somehow I had this feeling what I'd done wasn't . . . engineering. Not what we mean by engineering. I can't explain this too well ; but once I helped an artist character knock up some stuff out of old junk he'd found, old gear-wheels and rods and bars. He was staying in the village, I gave him the run of the shop. I've seen his work in the papers since, some of it fetches good money. I got the same feeling then, watching him hammer his scrap iron and burnish and weld. He had a sort of feeling for the stuff he was using, for the metal. It wasn't art, not how I think of art anyway ; and it certainly wasn't engineering. Just a new . . . activity. This was the same.

Maybe they know about that sort of thing where my customer hailed from. Maybe they don't think like we do in little tight compartments, everything neat and labelled and in its place ; maybe if we told how we put

art on one side and the sciences on the other, they wouldn't understand. Because when they want to fly they don't set to and build a plane, they make a wish. And the wish gets cladded in metal and jewels, and it flies. I don't know, it's just a feeling I've got. I'd like to know more, sometime. Maybe I will.

I'm not making too much sense there. I didn't make much sense at the time. I was too damn tired.

We loaded the gear back in the truck and covered it with a square of tarp. Drove up to Beacon and lugged it through the woods. And I got it hooked together, and the inside of that golden scryptip looked just the same as it had before I started. Only it was finished now. Ready to go.

My customer was . . . well, I suppose you might say pleased. Then we got to the awkward bit. He couldn't pay.

You see he hadn't brought his trade goods with him.

Phil took hold of my arm. I could feel her shivering. He waved at us and gave us his much thankings again. The port slid closed and the . . . vehicle moved away. With a flash and a bound, a soundless jolt that sort of seared the eardrums. Rose like a dream till it was a spot of light that turned and dwindled, streaked away to nothing, winked and went out. And there were the silent woods, the silent iron-grey sky.

I don't know what I felt like. I'd seen something that night that none of us ever saw before ; maybe we'll never see it again. Something that outclassed anything we've ever done like an ocean liner outclasses a dugout canoe. And I'd let it go.

So what was I supposed to do? Clip him over the ear, tie him up, drag him off, send for the Civil Defence? I told myself, it was late and he'd broken down and he was a long, long way from home. He was in trouble, with a machine. He came along to Turnpike ; and I did him a middling fair job.

We walked back the way we'd come. Phil was looking tired and white. "I'm sorry," she said. "There's going to be trouble over this, isn't there?"

"Yes," I said, "I think maybe there is." She didn't speak again and neither did I. I was too busy thinking.

It's logical, when you work it out.

Say you're an . . . observer. Anthropologist might be a

better word. You've trained for the job, spent years graduating, turning yourself into a specialist. Learning more and more about less and less. And you get sent out on a tour. There's nothing much to it. People think it's a glamorous sort of job but it isn't. It's run-of-the-mill stuff mostly; you've got reports to file, data to send back for evaluation. In between you while the time away thinking what you're going to do on your next furlough. The tales you'll tell, the back pay you'll draw and spend. It's easy, nearly boring. You can't go wrong.

Only one day something does go wrong. Maybe there's a crack and a sputtering, a hatful of yellow sparks. A part breaks that can't break, a wheel busts that was built to run for ever. And down you come. You're stranded, in enemy ground. With a broken-down machine. What can you do? Nothing. You're not a scientist, you're not a practical engineer. You opted for the humanities, remember? That's why you're here.

You sit and brood and think. You can't yell for help because help's too far away. And you can't advertise. There's a big black book somewhere that lays it all on the line, tell you what'll happen if you ever break the rules.

So you get an idea. It's a crazy way-out chance but it's the best you can think of. You take a piece out of your machine. A neat little widget that messes with gravity, plays about with mass, cancels friction. You go sit by a road and wait. You fix it on an old busted-down car.

Why'd you do it? Because you know sometime that . . . part, that widget, is going to get to an engineer. Somebody who'll know it for what it is. Or isn't. Is he going to be the right sort of engineer? Is he going to help you, get you away? You don't know. That's the chance you take.

And it pays off.

Well that's the way I see it anyhow. Maybe there's other explanations. I expect there are. Maybe I was conned somehow. But I say this. If I was conned, then it wasn't by the sons of men. I'm an engineer; I might not be too bright but I know enough for that.

When I got back to the garage the widget had gone. I hadn't seen the little guy take it. I shrugged it off. Or tried to. I reckoned I'd run into what people call Dramatic Inevitability.

There was trouble, of a sort ; not exactly the sort I was expecting.

I spun Sheila a yarn. I think she swallowed it. You can't ever be too sure about that of course ; but she didn't make a big production out of it and that was all I was asking. I do a lot of breakdowns and crashes for the police anyway, it wasn't the first time I'd been out all night and I don't expect it'll be the last. How Philadelphia got away with her evening on the tiles I couldn't say. I didn't enquire.

I didn't see her for a month. In its way that was a pleasant relief. I'd half forgotten the whole crazy business when I ran into her again. Nearly literally.

I was fetching a Mark Ten in for servicing. I was coming down over Beacon Hill, moving well. And I was passed. The thing that went by was squatting down between its wheels and travelling like a dark green streak. I put my toe on the floor but there wasn't a chance, by the time I was off the Beacon the motor was nearly out of sight. When I got back to Turnpike it was sitting on the forecourt with Phil narrowing her eyes and daring me to say just one word. I thought of a lot ; but they all stuck on the way up. Because if I grass, so will she ; and I can just imagine her old man's face while I try to explain how I spent the night in Beacon Woods with his daughter helping patch up a fl—— no thanks, not for Fredericks.

The thing that's sitting under her bonnet? She tells me the power's wearing thin. I can't say I'm sorry. I don't think anyway even if I could get it back from her it would be any good to us. If there was a hope of our understanding, it wouldn't have been left here. Like the man says somewhere, when it's time to steamboat we'll steamboat. Not before.

There's just one other thing. If in the next few months your XKE happens to be buzzed by a pint-sized scrap of a racing-green Spitfire, don't bother to try a dice. You wouldn't get anywhere ; and death lasts a bloody long time.

—ALISTAIR BEVAN

Students of science fiction will be aware of a pungent little magazine named SF HORIZONS, which presents itself as a "magazine of criticism and comment." It appears to be all of that and, after some difficulty in tracking down the editors, we obtained the services of Mr. Doherty, one of the original contributors to this magazine, and prevailed upon him to write a critical article for us. There is a special pleasure in reading his copy since he reveals a number of hidden meanings in this branch of literature.

FANTASY AND THE NIGHTMARE

by G. D. Doherty

Jim Ballard recently suggested that the most valuable elements in sf were derived from fantasy, not science¹: an interesting point of view entirely opposed to the argument developed by James Blish.

"These writers (of *fantasy*) have adopted Wells' despairing view of the uses humanity would probably make of science (and I certainly cannot insist that any of them are wrong); but they have utterly rejected Wells' respect for the facts themselves, and so are systematically forfeiting any claim they might have had on the respect of the reader."²

Ballard later went on to contradict himself, it seemed, by implying that good sf must concern itself with this world,—the world of "inner" not "outer" space—if it was to speak with that authority of experience so essential to significant writing of any kind. The contradiction is, per-

¹Book review in *The Guardian*.

²Is This Thinking? James Blish: Science Fiction Horizons.

haps, more apparent than real, and is intimately connected with the function of fantasy in fiction—science or otherwise.

The difficulty with this sort of argument is that the words we use are each capable of bearing several different meanings. The word *fantasy*, for instance, might be taken merely to mean: the ability to make mental images of external objects: or it might mean the ability to make bizarre, eccentric or exaggerated mental images (which is probably the most usual connotation at the present time): or, again, the meaning, particularly when used in relation to literature, may have been influenced by late eighteenth century aesthetics and S. T. Coleridge's distinction between *imagination* and *fancy*, whereby it would be argued that *imagination* is a truly creative mental capacity giving new life to externals whereas *fancy* merely re-assembles elements from the memory according to the laws of free association—thus *fancy* might produce a bizarre or fascinating tale whereas *imagination* would lead to something more profound, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, say, in comparison to *King Lear*.

Speculation along these lines will indicate how "fantasy" has acquired a derogatory meaning, but it seems unlikely that this was what was in Jim Ballard's mind when he used the word in connection with sf. It is as well to remember, too, that Coleridge's discussion of *imagination* and *fancy* was based on Hartley's associative theories of psychology which are now largely discredited, although the distinction is still made in literary argument, is still to some extent valid, and is certainly relevant to what both Blish and Ballard are saying.

In fact, it is more helpful to pursue a psychological line in considering this problem than to fall back on the standard literary approach to fantasy. In contemporary psychology we find that *fantasy* is used simply to mean the ability to create mental images of external objects—it would be useful if psychologists would preserve a distinction in meaning between "fantasy" and "phantasy": unfortunately, they do not.

However, the distinction between *controlled thinking*—the purposive and more or less logical application of the mind to the solution of problems involved, for instance, in

argument or in the object environment—and *phantasy thinking* is clear:

"The characteristic features of *phantasy thinking* are its relative detachment from the environment and from any tendency to result in action, the absence of voluntary control over the course of thought, and the tendency to a relative predominance of concrete over verbal imagery in the actual content of thought."¹

Equally clear, is the compensatory function of this mental activity: our inner needs, frustrations, wish-fulfilments and so on, can be indulged in the imagination. One, if not the main function of the artist, is to create objects which enrich the phantasy life of his less-imaginative fellows:

"The production of a work of art—a poem, picture, statue or musical composition—may be regarded as the putting into concrete form what is in its origins a mental phantasy."²

One very good reason, therefore, why the creative artist can sell his wares, is that he possesses the faculty of bodying forth his mental phantasies in forms which by some process of empathy acquire a significance for, or create pleasurable mental experiences in his audience. The greater the equivalence between the phantasy needs of the artist and his audiences, the more popular, successful, and rewarded he is likely to be. Of course, the sensitivity of the creative artist is an uncommon thing so his inner tensions may well be ahead of or different from those of his time (Shelley's "unacknowledged legislators of mankind") or quite unpalatable to the majority (like William Burroughs, for instance), so that in our time general acclaim may mean nothing more than a clever assessment of what will make a commercial success, than which there is no better example than the exotically compensatory world of James Bond! In this sense, therefore, all stories are derived from phantasy thinking and the differences of opinion between Blish and Ballard expressed at the beginning of this article are chiefly interesting from an autobiographical point of view—that is, they reveal personal needs for different kinds of compensation. Blish's need for "hard

¹General and Social Psychology: Thouless: University Tutorial Press.

²Thouless: *Op. cit.*

copy" is only superficially more connected with reality than Ballard's predilection for fantasy.

This, of course, has been recognised in literature, and especially in the theatre, from time to time. Indeed, we talk about going to a *play*—something "acted out", "unreal", "recreational"—altogether a delightfully ambiguous word. Unfortunately, it is a word which is sometimes used in a critical or derogatory sense: "Oh, it's *only* a play!", or, of a child, "I don't know when he's going to do any *work*: they only seem to *play* at his school." Yet we know from Child Development Theory that play is essential to the healthy maturation of a child, mentally, morally and physically. We know, too, that in most forms of play, children *learn from*, or *test out* new experiences in the security of a totally safe environment. Such characteristics are abundantly clear in the enjoyment of works of art—a sophisticated, adult form of play. It is salutary to stand back and look at literature from this point of view from time to time, in order to keep critical evaluations in perspective, and to help to resist the temptation to regard art as a substitute for life. To develop exclusive or puritanical attitudes towards what kinds of play are going to be allowed (F. R. Leavis, the patriarch of early twentieth century literature?) may sometimes be necessary, but it can equally become introverted, narrow-minded and ultimately deadening to creative effort.

Shakespeare, Dickens, Blish, E. R. Burroughs or even Ethel M. Dell clearly *all* enjoyed a rich phantasy life and since, at the moment, we are examining the function of phantasy, or fantasy, not attempting to establish aesthetic judgments or criteria, it might be profitable to give further consideration to the nature of fantasy in the light of what can be learned from psychiatry as well as psychology.

There is an obvious connection between *phantasy thinking*—whether in the form of fairly logically connected ideas or the more bizarre images associated with the "fantastic"—and day-dreaming. An analysis of day-dreams shows them to be largely concerned with heroes—or heroines, of course.

These heroes and heroines are usually either triumphant or suffering—sometimes both. They pursue their adventures in search of power, kudos, riches, or the love of

woman according to the inner needs and frustrations of the dreamer, often indulging in hair-raising alarms, excursions and escapes in the process. We might, for instance, take "Common Time" as a very nice example of a highly complex story of this kind. Blish has a need to clothe his fantasy (surely the events are unusual and bizarre) in the trappings of controlled thinking and an intricately organised background of "hard copy" scientific ideas. What makes the story memorable, however, is the sympathy he develops for the hopes, fears and nostalgias of his hero.

There is fantasy here which arises from the inner needs of the writer and surely it is this to which Ballard was referring. The images in which such needs are brought to life are frequently far more profound and disturbing than the relatively superficial wish-fulfilments and compensations of the rationalised day-dream. This can be seen if the content of the kind of literature which might be immediately accepted as "fantastic" is examined: in sf, the Bug-Eyed aliens of Space Opera, the betentacled horrors from the Nether Deep, the man-eating plants, the disembodied brains and so on. They are part of a well-defined literary tradition which reaches back through the Gothic excesses of the nineteenth century, the superstitions of the Middle Ages, to the primitive myths of Western European culture found in Norse, Anglo-Saxon and Greek legend. Significantly, they are repeated in the primitive mythology of other civilisations and in the tribal beliefs of primitive peoples today.

Stories of this sort nearly always deal with *nightmares* of some kind or another. Frequently, they contain nightmarish creatures: Hydra and Medusa, Grendel and his fearful mother, the dragons of myth and romance (how often did they carry off delectable young virgins?), the Night Mare itself, the dreaded incubus which came by night, witches and warlocks (with their train of familiars—spiders, crabs, cats, and toads), lycanthropists and vampires and all those black, subterranean horrors that inhabited the limbo of P. H. Lovecraft's subconscious mind! Then there is Frankenstein, a new type of nightmare—the man-made non-man!—followed by the experiments of Dr. Moreau and, subsequently, a long line of "mad scientists".

Repetitions of this sort demonstrate the fact that once a particular fantasy has been established people tend to re-

turn to it with a kind of horrible fascination—Bradbury, for instance, who keeps on writing the same story about depraved children. They may equally demonstrate that certain themes are winners and provide easy money, but even if this is so, the repeated readiness of the reading public to consume the same dish with slightly altered garnishings is significant in itself.

The psychologists have some interesting and relevant material on the phenomenon of the nightmare. Its physiological manifestations are: palpitations, sweating and a sense of unbearable suffocation, which are also associated with fear and masochistic sex. There is plenty of evidence that infantile sexual experience such as long-forgotten, self-induced orgasms, are accompanied by traumatic emotional and physiological reactions. This is similarly true of birth experiences. These feelings of fear are deeply imprinted in the subconscious mind and find expression only in the form of "analogues" or "symbols" which are characteristic of childish—and primitive—modes of thought:

"Strong emotions, especially of fear and sex, have very disturbing effects on the viscera by means of the widespread influence of the sympathetic nervous system. These emotions themselves, as we have seen, may present themselves in the form of monsters and raging animals, or they may express themselves *in the visceral disturbances they produce*, such as palpitations, sweating, and changes in the abdominal viscera. It is these which are objectified, personified and projected into the forms of spiders, crabs, vampires and other such creatures."¹

Hadfield goes on to point out that dreams perform an important function in our emotional life by attempting (though by no means always succeeding) to produce a relaxation of tension, thus we dream about what is "on our minds", whether it be an unresolved neurosis or a mathematical problem. "The Island of Dr. Moreau", for instance, is this sort of dream: always on the edge of nightmare, it explores the post-Darwinian neurosis which has resulted from our difficulty in adjusting to the theory of evolution—the justifications which Wells gives to Moreau are worth careful examination in this respect. Like a dream, he clothes the neurotic feelings in analogous images, and, like some

¹Dreams and Nightmares: Hadfield; Pelican Books.

dreams, he presents the problem but does not succeed in resolving it. Hadfield's psychobiological theory of dreams, as he calls it, would help to explain the nature and the attraction of many of the images as well as some of the more outlandish horrors of fantastic fiction.

This, however, is not the whole story, and there are a good many psychologists who would regard this explanation of Hadfield's as being dangerously over-simplified. Both Freud and Jung are most interesting on dreams and nightmares. Of the two, Jung is much the more attractive to the artist, partly because he rates the function of the artist much higher than Freud and so writes with greater sympathy about art in general and literature in particular, and partly because of his theories about *archetypal imagery*:

"Just as our bodies still keep the reminders of old functions and conditions in many old-fashioned organs, so our minds, which apparently have outgrown archaic tendencies, nevertheless bear the marks of the evolution passed through and the very ancient re-echoes, at least dreamily, in phantasies."¹

Such a concept is very attractive, to readers of literature at least, as it has so much to say which is relevant and illuminating about the constantly recurring symbols and themes of myths, legends and literature in general:

"The conclusion results almost from itself, that the age which created the myths thought childishly—that is to say phantastically, as in our age is still done, to a very great extent (associatively or analogically) in dreams."²

There is no space to even begin to do justice to the complexities of Jung's theories here, but a brief account of some of the more outstanding archetypes will show how they are reflected in stories.³ The most universally recognisable of the archetypes is the "shadow", one's other self, the *dark* side of one's nature, feared but fascinating, primitive, animal and uncontrolled. "The Figure" in Brian Aldiss' "Earthworks" is a perfect literary manifestation of this personification of powers with which his hero, as all of us,

¹Psychology of the Unconscious: Jung: Kegan Paul.

²Jung: *Op. cit.*

³Readers of sf are referred to "Modern Man in Search of a Soul": Jung: Kegan Paul.

must try to come to terms. It helps to explain, too, why the notorious villains of history and literature are so attractive as well as so hateful—Bosola, say, or Iago or Edmund. Just as there is a *dark* side, so there is a *light* side of one's nature, symbolised for a man by the female *anima*, and for a woman by the male *animus*. Since literature has been predominantly masculine, we find the *Eternal Eve*, the *femme fatale*, appears more frequently than her opposite, *Old Adam*, although there are plenty of examples of both to be found: for instance, Rochester, and consider how clearly Jane Eyre's attitudes towards him reveal the peculiar maladjustments of Charlotte Brontë. As we all know, if writers are weak on sex, female characters of any depth or power are unusual and the very omission is itself significant. I suppose José Farmer's "The Lovers", is interesting in this respect.

The integrated self is frequently symbolised as a *child*, in Christian imagery, for instance, and what about Bradbury's preoccupations? or the ending of *Greybeard*? The *Judas myth*, or betrayal by a close friend is a recurring theme which received interesting treatment in Harry Harrison's "Ethical Engineer": and there are many others, for instance, the *abducted female*: the *orphaned or abandoned child*—Romulus and Remus, Oedipus, Moses and Cinderella. Any book of nursery rhymes and fairy tales will yield plenty of interesting material, which explains their universal attraction for children whose modes of thought are still phantastical not conceptual.

There are various more objectified recurring images, such as phallic symbols for sexual intercourse like the bird, fish or snake; watery images such as the mere, sea or lake symbolising the depths of the unconscious mind or the uterine waters, perhaps both; the darkened room, tunnel or passage associated with feelings of claustrophobia or agrophobia which are analogues for the experiences and fears of birth.

Well handled, these images never fail to move us. In terms of astronomical time, we are not so very far removed from our primitive forbears. Only a small proportion of our mental activity is governed by the relatively recently developed, higher cortical layers of the brain:

"Only a few individuals succeed in throwing off

mythology in a time of certain intellectual supremacy the mass never frees itself. Explanations are of no avail; they merely destroy a transitory form of manifestation but not the creating impulse."¹

We cannot escape the need to express and communicate our feelings, emotional perceptions and intuitions, which is perhaps why these images so readily provoke those feelings which "lie too deep for tears".

How far considerations of this kind are connected with literary merit, the reader must sort out for himself. The aesthetic value of a work of art cannot be expressed merely in terms of its content. One might say, however, that the crudest forms of phantasy—for instance, the day dreamer's compensatory conquering hero or analogues of sexual nightmare like the long-toothed werewolf of "weird" stories are clearly only satisfying at the most childish level. On the other hand we cannot deny the need to indulge our phantasy life:

"... if slackening of the attention increases, then we lose by degrees the consciousness of the present, and the phantasy enters."²

Writers like Jim Ballard and Brian Aldiss are seriously attempting to reformulate, or re-express in terms of modern themes, the phantasy images which Jung describes. Aldiss seems much concerned with images of disenchantment, devitalisation and guilt, at the moment, and it looks as though the rest of the "Earthworks" series, if it materialises, will continue in the same vein. Ballard, too, is obsessed with guilt feelings—witness "Terminal Beach"—and in "Doomed World" he deliberately exploits the emotional possibilities of a second flood, the waters of which carry overtones of uterine symbolism and a feeling for the profound depths of the unconscious mind. These elements in the story are the most powerfully felt and far the most impressively realised.

Naturally, the reader, as an individual, will be most attracted to the kind of phantasy for which he has most personal need (the unsophisticated reader, that is: obviously it is quite possible to acquire a variety of literary tastes), so

¹Jung: *Op. cit.*

²Jung: *Op. cit.*

over exclusiveness of any kind should be suspected: it is probably symptomatic of compulsive narrow mindedness. It may well be, however, that the "factual" school of sf writers will be found less profoundly satisfying, less universal in their appeal, in the long run, than those who have affinities with the mythmakers of bygone ages.

— G. D. DOHERTY

In the coming months it will be our policy to present a series of great fantasy stories of the past. Fantasy after all has been with us in one form or another through all human history; we hope you will enjoy the broadening of horizons offered by these excursions into the weird and bizarre.

Our first story is by an American author of the last century, C. F. Hoffman. Hoffman was born in 1806 and for some time was well known as a New York journalist. His present tale, originally called Ben Blower's Story, might not be classical science fiction but a fantasy it is without doubt, an exploration of the strange and terrible obsession of claustrophobia.

THE BOILER

by C. F. HOFFMAN

"Are you sure that's the *Flame* over by the shore?"

"Certing, manny! I could tell her pipes acrost the Mazoura."

"And you will overhaul her?"

"Won't we though! I tell ye, strannger, so sure as my name's Ben Blower, that that last tar-bar'l I hove in the furnace has put jist the smart chance of go-ahead into us to cut off the *Flame* from yonder pin, or send our boat to kingdom come."

"The devil!" exclaimed a bystander who, intensely interested in the race, was leaning the while against the partitions of the boiler-room. "I've chosen a nice place to see the sun, near this infernal powder-barrel."

"Not so bad as if you were in it," coolly observed Ben as the other walked rapidly away.

"As if he were in it! In what? In the boiler?"

"Certing! Don't folks sometimes go into bilers, manny?"

"I should think there'd be other parts of the boat more comfortable."

"That's right; poking fun at me at once't: but wait till

we get through this brush with the old *Flame* and I'll tell ye of a regular fixin' scrape that a man may get into. It's true, too, every word of it, as sure as my name's Ben Blower . . ."

"You have seen the *Flame* then afore, strannger? Six-year ago, when new upon the river, she was a raal out and outer, I tell ye. I was at that time a hand aboard of her. Yes, I belonged to her at the time of her great race with the *Go-liar*. You've heern, mahap, of the blow-up by which we lost it. They made a great fuss about it; but it was nothing but a mere fiz of hot water after all. Only the springing of a few rivets, which loosened a biler-plate or two, and let out a thin spirting upon some niggers that hadn't sense enough to get out of the way. Well, the *Go-liar* took off our passengers, and we ran into Smasher's Landing to repair damages, and bury the poor fools that were killed. Here we laid for a matter of thirty hours or so, and got things to rights on board for a bran new start. There was some carpenters' work yet to be done, but the captain said that that might be fixed off jist as well when we were under way—we had worked hard—the weather was sour, and we needn't do anything more jist now—we might take that afternoon to ourselves, but the next morning he'd get up steam bright and airy, and we'd all come out *new*. There was no temperance society at Smasher's Landing, and I went ashore upon a lark with some of the hands."

I omit the worthy Benjamin's adventures upon land, and, despairing of fully conveying his language in its original Doric force, will not hesitate to give the rest of his singular narrative in my own words, save where, in a few instances, I can recall in his precise phraseology, which the reader will easily recognise.

"The night was raw and sleety when I regained the deck of our boat. The officers, instead of leaving a watch above, had closed up everything, and shut themselves in the cabin. The fire-room only was open. The boards dashed from the outside by the explosion had not yet been replaced. The floor of the room was wet, and there was scarcely a corner which afforded a shelter from the driving storm. I was about leaving the room, resigned to sleep in the open air, and now bent only upon getting under the lee of some bulkhead that would protect me against the wind. In pass-

ing out I kept my arms stretched forward to feel my way in the dark, but my feet came in contact with a heavy iron lid ; I stumbled and, as I fell, struck one of my hands into the 'manhole' (I think this was the name he gave to the oval-shaped opening in the head of the boiler), through which the smith had entered to make his repairs. I fell with my arm thrust so far into the aperture that I received a pretty smart blow in the face as it came in contact with the head of the boiler, and I did not hesitate to drag my body after it the moment I recovered from this stunning effect, and ascertained my whereabouts. In a word, I crept into the boiler, resolved to pass the rest of the night there. The place was dry and sheltered. Had my bed been softer I would have had all that man could desire ; as it was, I slept, and slept soundly.

"I should mention though, that, before closing my eyes, I several times shifted my position. I had gone first to the farthest end of the boiler, then again I had crawled back to the manhole, to put my hand out and feel that it was really still open. The warmest place was at the farther end, where I finally established myself, and that I knew from the first. It was foolish in me to think that the opening through which I had just entered could be closed without my hearing it, and that, too, when no one was astir but myself ; but the blow on the side of the face made me a little nervous perhaps ; besides, I could never bear to be shut up in any place—it always gives me a wild-like feeling about the head.

"You may laugh, stranger, but I believe I should suffocate in an empty church if I once felt that I was shut up in it that I could not get out. I have met men afore now just like me, or worse rather, much worse—men that it made sort of furious to be tied down to anything, yet so soft-like and contradictory in their natures that you might lead them anywhere so long as they didn't feel the string. Stranger, it takes all sorts of people to make a world ; and we may have a good many of the worst kind of white men here out west. But I have seen folks upon this river—quiet-looking chaps, too, as ever you see—who were so teetotally *carankterankterous* that they'd shoot the doctor who'd tell them they couldn't live when ailing, and make a die of it, just out of spite, when told they *must* get well. Yes, fellows

as fond of the good things of earth as you and I, yet who'd rush like mad right over the gang-plank of life if once brought to believe that they had to stay in this world whether they wanted to leave it or not. Thunder and bees! if such a fellow as that had heard the cocks crow as I did—awakened to find darkness about him—darkness so thick you might cut it with a knife—heard other sounds, too, to tell that it was morning, and scrambling to fumble for that manhole, found it, too, black—closed—black and even as the rest of the iron coffin round him, closed, with not a rivet-hole to let God's light and air in—why—why—he'd a *swounded* right down on the spot, as I did, and I ain't ashamed to own it to no white man."

The big drops actually stood upon the poor fellow's brow, as he now paused for a moment in the recital of his terrible story. He passed his hand over his rough features, and resumed it with less agitation of manner.

"How long I may have remained there senseless I don't know. The doctors have since told me it must have been a sort of fit—more like an apoplexy than a swoon, for the attack finally passed off in sleep. Yes, I slept; I know *that*, for I dreamed—dreamed a heap o' things afore I woke: there is but one dream, however, that I have ever been able to recall distinctly, and that must have come on shortly before I recovered my consciousness. My resting-place through the night had been, as I have told you, at the far end of the boiler. Well, I now dreamed that the manhole was still open, and, what seems curious, rather than laughable, if you take it in connection with other things, I fancied that my legs had been so stretched in the long walk I had taken the evening before that they now reached the whole length of the boiler, and extended through the opening.

"At first (in my dreaming reflections) it was a comfortable thought, that no one could now shut up the manhole without awakening me. But soon it seemed as if my feet, which were on the outside, were becoming drenched in the storm which had originally driven me to seek this shelter. I felt the chilling rain upon my extremities. They grew colder and colder, and their numbness gradually extended upward to other parts of my body. It seemed, however, that it was only the under side of my person that was thus strangely visited. I lay upon my back, and it must have

been a species of nightmare that afflicted me, for I knew at last that I was dreaming, yet felt it impossible to rouse myself. A violent fit of coughing restored at last my powers of volition. The water, which had been slowly rising round me, had rushed into my mouth ; I awoke to hear the rapid strokes of the pump which was driving it into the boiler!

"My whole condition—no—not all of it—not yet—my *present* condition flashed with new horror upon me. But I did not again swoon. The choking sensation which had made me faint when I first discovered how I was entombed gave way to a livelier though less overpowering emotion. I shrieked even as I started from my slumber. The previous discovery of the closed aperture, with the instant oblivion that followed, seemed only a part of my dream, and I threw my arms about and looked eagerly for the opening by which I had entered the horrid place—yes, looked for it, and felt for it, though it was the terrible conviction that it was closed—a second time brought home to me—which prompted my frenzied cry. Every sense seemed to have tenfold acuteness, yet not one to act in unison with another. I shrieked again and again—imploringly—desperately—savagely. I filled the hollow chamber with my cries, till its iron walls seemed to tingle around me. The dull strokes of the accursed pump seemed only to mock at, while they deadened, my screams.

"At last I gave myself up. It is the struggle against our fate which frenzies the mind. We cease to fear when we cease to hope. I gave myself up, and then I grew calm!

"I was resigned to die—resigned even to my mode of death. It was not, I thought, so very new after all, as to awaken unwonted horror in a man. Thousands have been sunk to the bottom of the ocean shut up in the holds of vessels—beating themselves against the battened hatches—dragged down from the upper world shrieking, not for life, but for death only beneath the eye and amid the breath of heaven. Thousands have endured that appalling kind of suffocation. I would die only as many a better man had died before me. I *could* meet such a death. I said so—I thought so—I felt so—felt so, I mean, for a minute—or more ; ten minutes it may have been—or but an instant of time. I know not, nor does it matter if I could compute it. There *was* a time, then, when I was resigned to my fate.

But, Heaven! was I resigned to it in the shape in which next it came to appal? Stranger, I felt that water growing hot about my limbs, though it was yet mid-leg deep. I felt it, and in the same moment heard the roar of the furnace that was to turn it into steam before it could get deep enough to drown one!

"You shudder. It was hideous. But did I shrink and shrivel, and crumble down upon that iron floor, and lose my senses in that horrid agony of fear? No! Though my brain swam and the life-blood that curdled at my heart seemed about to stagnate there forever, still *I knew!* I was too hoarse—too hopeless—from my previous efforts, to cry out more. But I struck—feebly at first, and then strongly—frantically with my clenched fist against the sides of the boiler. There were people moving near who *must* hear my blows! Could not I hear the grating of chains, the shuffling of feet, the very rustle of a rope—hear them all, within a few inches of me? I did; but the gurgling water that was growing hotter and hotter around my extremities made more noise within the steaming cauldron than did my frenzied blows against its sides.

"Latterly I had hardly changed my position, but now the growing heat of the water made me splash to and fro; lifting myself wholly out of it was impossible, but I could not remain quiet. I stumbled upon something; it was a mallet!—a chance tool the smith had left there by accident. With what wild joy did I seize it—with what eager confidence did I now deal my first blows with it against the walls of my prison! But scarce had I intermitted them for a moment when I heard the clang of the iron door as the fireman flung it wide to feed the flames that were to torture me. My knocking was unheard, though I could hear him toss the sticks into the furnace beneath me, and drive to the door when his infernal oven was fully crammed.

"Had I yet a hope? I had; but it rose in my mind side by side with the fear that I might now become the agent of preparing myself a more frightful death. Yes; when I thought of that furnace with its fresh-fed flames curling beneath the iron upon which I stood—a more frightful death even than that of being boiled alive! Had I discovered that mallet but a short time sooner—but no matter, I would by its aid resort to the only expedient now left.

"It was this. I remembered having a marline-spike in my pocket, and in less time than I have taken in hinting at the consequences of thus using it, I had made an impression upon the side of the boiler, and soon succeeded in driving it through. The water gushed through the aperture—would they see it? No; the jet could only play against a wooden partition which must hide the stream from view; it must trickle down upon the decks before the leakage would be discovered. Should I drive another hole to make that leakage greater? Why, the water within seemed already to be sensibly diminished, so hot had become that which remained; should more escape, would I not hear it bubble and hiss upon the fiery plates of iron that were already scorching the soles of my feet? . . .

"Ah! there is a movement—voices—I hear them calling for a crowbar. The bulkhead cracks as they pry off the planking. They have seen the leak—they are trying to get at it! Good God! why do they not first dampen the fire? why do they call for the—the——

"Stranger, look at that finger: it can never regain its natural size; but it has already done all the service that man could expect from so humble a member. *Sir, that hole would have been plugged up on the instant unless I had jammed my finger through!*

"I heard the cry of horror as they saw it without—the shout to drown the fire—the first stroke of the cold-water pump. They say, too, that I was conscious when they took me out—but I—I remember nothing more till they brought a julep to my bedside afterwards, **AND that julep!——**"

"Cooling, was it?"

"STRANGER! ! !"

Ben turned away his head and wept—he could no more.

— C. F. HOFFMAN

There was no doubt the aliens had changed him. The only question was, what had they done? A new and pungent treatment of a classic sf theme, by a bright new talent.

THE MAN WHO CAME BACK

by Brian M. Stableford

There was a pool of light above him, and he was staring straight into it. His eyes refused to focus, and the pool seemed to eddy and swirl gently. The light seemed to emanate from a brighter but still indistinct patch, which he thought was a light bulb. There was something wrong with his eyes, as though he couldn't use them properly.

A round object appeared at the side of the pool. He couldn't make it out but he knew it was a human face, looking down on him. A second dark blob eclipsed another section of the light.

Oh God! They're here again . . .

"Can you hear me?"

Don't answer. Perhaps they'll go away.

"Hello, Jason, can you hear me?"

"Yes. Away." The words were slurred, as though pronounced through a mouth full of saliva.

"Now, Jason, listen carefully. You know me, I'm Doctor Yorke. This is Doctor Angeli. You remember, don't you?"

"Yes." You were here yesterday with your bloody questions. And I'm not answering them today either.

"You must try to remember, Jason." Yorke pronounced the words slowly and deliberately. *"Remember exactly what happened. We'll try to help you all we can. You were on a ship—the Stella. Remember?"*

"Yes." Of course I remember. I remember everything. But I'm not telling. You go on thinking I can't remember. Pleased, he nodded his head.

"What is he doing?" asked a new voice—Doctor Angeli.

"I think he's nodding his head," replied Yorke in a low voice. *You think. Can't you see? You know what a head looks like, don't you? Well, I'm nodding mine.* "At least," amended Yorke, "he's trying to."

"Ready, Jason." Slow and clear again. "The *Stella*. All right? Now you were going to Vesta. Vesta is an asteroid." *I know what Vesta is. I haven't lost my mind. Stop talking to me as though I were a bloody child.* "While you were going to Vesta the alarms rang, didn't they?"

Nod.

"Those alarms meant that a slug ship was on the screens. Did you know that?"

Nod. *Of course I know that. I'm an officer in the navy. I told you. You think I'm mad?*

"Now after the ship was attacked, you escaped in a spacecraft. The raft was picked up by the slugs after they blasted the *Stella* apart. Is that all right so far?"

Nothing. *No, it isn't right, imbecile. And here's where I stop answering, and your logic goes off the rails.*

Yorke started talking in his low voice again, to Angeli. "He always stops there. I don't know what happened then or afterward. He closes up entirely, and I can't worm even another nod out of him. Only thing he says is 'Away'."

"Try again," requested Angeli.

"Jason, I'm talking again. Understand?"

"Yes." Nod.

"You were captured by slugs. What does a slug look like, Jason?"

Nothing. *A slug looks like a colossal coenocytic mass with thousands of nuclear blobs, modifications to serve for eyes and ears, and a mouth with no lips. It can repeat most things we say, but it can't make all the sounds we can. Vocal apparatus different. God what an understatement! All its apparatus is different. Alien. But I won't tell you.*

"Could it be just that he can't speak?"

"Oh, he can speak all right. After a fashion anyway. He can't say everything we can, but with improvisation he can manage enough to get along. He did quite a lot of talking in the beginning. About his family, mostly. Had to, to convince us he was William Jason."

"Then why won't he tell us?"

"I don't know. We can only keep trying." Louder again.
"Jason, what did the slugs do to you?"

Nothing.

"Jason, you must tell us. We are at war with the slugs. You are the only man, as far as we know, who might have seen one. We need every last little bit of information you can give us. Now what did they do to you to make you look like this?"

Look like what? I'm Bill Jason. I've always been Bill Jason. I look like Bill Jason.

"Jason, this body you have. Is it a slug's?"

Slug's? What the hell? I'm Bill Jason, human. Go away.

Angeli chipped in again. "How can we be sure that it is Jason anyhow, wearing a body like that. Couldn't the slugs have picked Jason's mind, sent a spy with his memories?"

"Where would be the point?" said Yorke tiredly, "what good would a spy be to them, locked up in this place? And he isn't ever going to get out, Jason or not."

"Then why won't he talk?"

"I don't know. If he can talk, and he can, I can only see one conceivable reason, and that's that he doesn't want to talk. But that doesn't fit either. Why should he withhold information after they did *this* to him?"

Did what to me? I'm Bill Jason, and I'm not talking. Do what you like, you'll get nothing out of me.

"Jason!" began Yorke again. "Can you remember when you were picked up? You were in a slug spacecraft. Now, can you remember getting on that liferaft? Where was it? What happened? Were you released, or did you escape?"

Nothing. *I'm not telling you. Get nothing from me.*

"Jason! Where did they take you?"

Nothing.

"Look, Jason, you've got to tell us. For the sake of your family, for your own sake. Now, you escaped from the *Stella* in a spacecraft. Is that correct or not?"

"No!"

"But you must have. The *Stella* was completely wrecked. You could only have survived in a spacecraft."

A pause. Then Angeli said, "He's not telling. I think he honestly believes we're the enemy. After all, he is in a slug body. Or what we think is a slug body. He may even be a slug."

One of the round black blobs moved from side to side.

"You must tell us," protested Yorke desperately. "What did the slugs do to you? Why won't you tell us?"

Oh hell! If I tell them why, maybe they'll leave me alone. I doubt it though. They don't seem to think my way. I wish they'd stop plaguing me.

Slowly, his lipless mouth formed the syllables. He managed to slobber out the barely intelligible words:

"They killed me . . ."

— BRIAN M. STABLEFORD

We have pleasure in introducing another new writer, Mr. Chris Hebron. An sf fan from his earliest years, Chris has only recently turned to serious writing. He has had a varied career, spending some years in Africa before taking up his present appointment as Lecturer in Communication at Rutherford College of Technology, Newcastle. He is eminently qualified to write on his present theme ; the strange story of the little boy Alfred, the first perfect telepath in the history of the human race . . .

THE EXPERIMENT

by Chris Hebron

one

Dr. Edwin Caradoc did not normally have reason to find himself in Biological Engineering, up in the A Block tower, and the fact that as a result he had to search for the room he wanted annoyed him: like most linguistic analysts he had a precise, almost fussy mind, and did not take well to being hurried. In addition he couldn't be certain whether the room he wanted was a research lab, a tutorial room, or simply an office: all he'd been given, in the message from the Academic Board—couched in such curt terms, too, to a member of his seniority!—was the room number, A807. All in all, he was not in a good temper when he found it. He raised his hand to knock, somewhat petulantly.

"Come in," a voice called, before he'd even touched the blank door. Dr. Caradoc looked at his hand, astonishedly: but he was late, in any case. "Come in," a second voice repeated. He shrugged, and went in. Espers, of course. It had to be. Then he stopped, surprised.

The room was an office, after all ; and carpeted, which meant, despite the blank door, the sanctum of the Department Head. Across from him was a desk, with behind it the Head of B.E., Dr. Pendrake, whom he knew by sight—

which is to say, as well as anybody outside the Department. In front of the desk, seated on stacking chairs, were a man and a woman in elegant, well cut clothes, young—maybe thirty, maybe not—with that indefinable air of aliveness that makes it easy, once you know about it, to pick out espers. The man, presumably, was the other one who had called out. But what surprised him was that in the middle of the carpet was a seven-year-old boy, sitting cross-legged on the floor; and the boy was absolutely motionless.

"Come on in, Dr. Caradoc," said Pendrake, "and sit down." He motioned to a third chair, between the couple. Caradoc picked his way round the child, who still sat entirely without moving and seemed not to notice he was there. When he was level with it, he said "Hello." The child looked up at him, without either recognition or interest, said, "Hello," absolutely clearly, and looked down again. "Poor devils," thought Caradoc; "minds of their ability, and an autistic child." He always prided himself on being absolutely unprejudiced where espers were concerned, especially since the last lot of campaigns had started. But what did their problem have to do with B.E., or for that matter with him? Everybody knew autism was not a genetic but a psychological disorder—even though since the Limited War it had become only too common. He reached the desk and sat down.

"Look here, Pendrake," he said, "I don't know what this is all about, but I think it only fair to warn you——"

"——'that you are more than a little annoyed at having your personal research project postponed, and being assigned, virtually without option, to this one', wasn't it?" said the young woman. Caradoc stopped dumbfounded; it was not only that that was exactly what he was going to say, which an esper might well pick up, but those were, he realised, the exact words in which he had intended to say it. He was still angry, but he had to admit the situation was unusual: and despite his fussiness this aroused his interest, even though he resented the impertinence of it.

"No, Dr. Caradoc," said the man, "we aren't being cheeky. Believe me, my wife is as angry as I am that you've been pulled away from your own personal researches—'Communication as a factor in Managerial Promotion Patterns', wasn't it, on the basis of this new socio-math

your friends downstairs have been developing?—particularly since your proposed co-worker is from your point of view a sexually and personally attractive young woman, and you are an unattached male who feels himself more than a little past normal mating age. My wife felt I ought to say this, by the way; you might be embarrassed at it coming from her. We are genuinely sorry—but this is genuinely important, though not necessarily for the reasons Dr. Pendrake will give you. We're Bill and Sonia Jamieson by the way, and the boy on the floor is our son Alfred."

Caradoc looked across the desk, interest fully aroused, his anger almost gone. "I still don't know what this is about, Pendrake," he said, "but your rude friends are quite something as espers. Very well, you've made your point. Whatever's going on here is odd enough to be thoroughly intriguing." He turned to the Jamiesons. "I haven't met all that many espers," he said. "Are they all as accurate as you?"

Sonia Jamieson leant forward: her eyes were brilliant, and she seemed excited. "Were we accurate?" she asked.

Caradoc looked at her, surprised. "You mean you don't know? You two read me like a book. *Didn't* you know it?"

"With each other, yes," she said: "but we couldn't be sure——"

"——With normals it's much harder, you know," her husband cut in. "Very few of us can extend that far. We've not often done it before, this fully——"

"——And the form of words is particularly difficult," Sonia finished up ("they switch conversations as precisely as a video-tape cut," Caradoc thought). "But that's part of the problem, too."

Caradoc took his pipe out of his pocket and began to fill it. "Look," he said, "suppose you fill me in on what the problem is. I don't like guessing games."

Pendrake looked across the desk at him, and smiled. "Good," he said. "I'll do that. But first, will you answer me two questions? How much do you already know about what we do here in Biological Engineering, and how much do you know about the Mental Health Act of 1985? I don't want to bore you with repeating things you already know."

"Not really much more than the average layman on each, I think," said Caradoc, lighting up. "Let me see now; what

you do here. Well, frankly, not very much. I know the basic idea of B.E., of course—that once we'd cracked the DNA code, just before the Limited War, it became theoretically possible to 'send' messages in that code, by molecular rearrangement of the DNA in germ-plasm, and so build organisms with desired characteristics, that would afterward breed true. It's a classical communications analysis problem, and one of the few with a genuinely elegant solution, though I'm probably not enough of a chemist to appreciate just how elegant. And I know that once the war had knocked out a lot of man's mechanical potential, it became not only possible but essential as a technology. But as to what you yourselves do, I'm damned if I know anything. You're such a cagey lot, stuck away up here: nobody seems to know anything about you."

Pendrake smiled, wryly. "Our caginess isn't of our own making, Dr. Caradoc, I assure you. But you know what I'd hoped you would. And the other thing?"

"The Esper Act? Well again, only what everybody knows."

"——Which should be quite a lot," Sonia Jamieson put in.

"It is," said Caradoc. "I agree, the campaigns to get it repealed are pretty stupid. Though that display you gave a few minutes back was rather unnerving."

Sonia smiled (like most esper women, her face was intense and distinguished rather than beautiful, but when it relaxed it was highly attractive). "We don't make a habit of it, I can assure you," she said. "But go on about the Act."

"Well, when esper children started being born in quantity around the sites after the Limited War, people—employers, parents, other children—got frightened. Too much late-night science-fiction in their subconscious, I suppose; and of course, Limited or not, the war was one hell of a traumatic shock. Anyway, they imagined these children were some sort of monsters" (he looked at the Jamiesons uncomfortably, but they were both grinning) "and reacted against them. There were some quite ugly scenes, I believe: I was only a boy then myself. Anyhow, the Government realised it had to control this, but couldn't simply ignore the prejudice involved. The Esper Act was the result: it

officially declared espers, unless suffering from other mental conditions also, to be sane and mentally capable, forbade public discrimination against them, and set up a quota system for employment. At the same time they had to be registered with the Local Health Authority, report for certain periodic checks, and attend special schools. Oh, and they could only marry other espers." He glanced at Sonia. "I think I begin to see why. We are such a sexually jealous species. But don't you mind that bit?"

It was Bill who answered. "Not at all," he said. "As a matter of fact we prefer it that way. The few accidentals who existed before the Limited War usually married normals, and it worked well enough—unless they met another of their own kind. Then all hell broke loose. In their case, there were so few of them it hardly ever happened. But we're so thick on the ground where we do occur that frankly that section of the Act's a blessing. And in any case, the wording only applies to marriage—no, Sonia, I won't tell the nice man about your boyfriends. It might give him ideas beyond his station."

They all laughed—except, Caradoc realised, the child. He had remained motionless and unresponsive to atmosphere throughout. Then Pendrake got up, and went to the window.

"We're hidden away up here," he said, "because of something I'm going to tell you which few other people know. Believe me, it's not because we're antisocial, nor for the view—though every time I look out across the site here, I realise how lucky we were that the Limited War selectors took out Shields instead of Newcastle. London wasn't nearly so lucky.

"And that brings me to the point of all this," he went on. "You were quite right when you said the Limited War was a traumatic shock. And when the Government was re-established, at Stratford, they decided that such a thing must never happen again.

"The root cause of the whole thing was communication. Why did the War begin? Simply because even the best-intentioned leaders couldn't understand exactly what was going on in the minds of others, or how they should take exactly what was said. The Limited part was an incredibly lucky break—a strong Secretary-General and just enough time-lag to prevent total escalation. Even then we had to

submit to a number of cities being taken out after the cease-fire, to even the score. We can't expect another near-miracle next time ; we wouldn't get one.

"As soon as the esper children began to appear the affected Governments knew what they had to do. You'll find the equivalent of the Esper Act in every affected country—here, the USA, the USSR, China—it's the registration part that's important.

"For twenty years we looked for a couple in whom esp communication was almost perfect. Eight years ago we found them—not one couple, but five. It happened that they were here on Tyneside ; they could have been anywhere. Presumably the irradiation level was just exactly right here ; they didn't measure it that accurately while the fallout was coming down, so we'll just never know. Or it might simply be random statistics.

"Then the second part came into action. We moved up here, where nobody would bother us, and squeezed out all our research projects in favour of one project, on a DSIR grant. We analysed the codes on the germ-plasm of the five couples—Sonia and Bill here were one of them—and proceeded to engineer selected sperm and ova so that any fruit of the unions would have perfect esp communication. Then——"

"——without permission," said Sonia bitterly——

"——the five young ladies were artificially implanted."

Caradoc looked at the motionless child, almost grimly. "And this is the result?" he asked.

"This is the result," said Pendrake.

There was a momentary silence. Then he continued. "We have to find out what went wrong, Caradoc. And we have to do it before the campaign to abolish the Esper Act turns into a general pogrom, which the extremist organisations like the Race Purity League are already hinting at."

"But what——?"

"——has this to do with you?" said Sonia. "I didn't have to read that one. Ralph, here," (motioning towards Pendrake) "assures us that the records kept on the B.E. procedures show they were as near perfect as you'll ever get. The psychologists and parapsychologists are in the dark ; they can describe it, but they can't explain it. But then" (she gestured, hopelessly ; Caradoc felt intensely sorry for

her, and almost somehow, protective) "they can hardly ever explain anything."

"——We are in the dark ourselves," said Bill. "Alfred, so far as we can see him, communicates thought perfectly. Pure thought forms; mental surfaces, without formal words. But when we try to contact him passively, there's nothing. He only seems to think when we think at him."

"There is perceptual activity though," said Sonia.

"So you say; I've not detected it clearly." Bill sounded bitter, now.

Caradoc frowned. "Thought without words?" he said. "So that's it. Alfred is a walking problem in linguistic philosophy—he does walk, doesn't he?" Sonia nodded. "Yes," went on Caradoc, "yes, I'll certainly come in on this one. But I still don't quite see all the hurry."

Pendrake looked at him. "Didn't you read your paper this morning?" he asked. "Somebody leaked the data on what we've been doing, and Alfred's condition. According to the Race Purity League this whole project is a devilish Communist plot to populate England with mindless monsters."

"But one child——" Caradoc said.

"It's not one child, Edwin," said Sonia. "All five of the implants are exactly the same."

two

"Alfred," said Caradoc. "How do you do?"

The boy looked up from the child's chair on which he was sitting. "How do you do?" he said, clearly and expressionlessly, and looked down again.

"Well?" said Pendrake, coming into the lab in which they were.

"The psychologists were right," said Caradoc. "The child's not autistic. Watch, and listen." He turned to Alfred. "Lovely weather, isn't it?"

"Yes, isn't it?" said the child, in exactly the same clear expressionless voice, and looked down again.

"Alfred, can you still hear me?"

"Yes."

"I want to know what you had for breakfast this morning, and who cooked it."

"Sonia Jamieson cooked bacon and egg," said the child.

"Was it nice?"

The child did not answer.

"Was it nice?" repeated Caradoc. "Did you like it?"

"I was hungry. I ate it up," the child said, again without emotion, and once more looked down.

"Will you shut the window please?" said Caradoc. The child got up, walked mechanically across to the open window, shut it, and returned to its place.

"I told him to sit there when we first came in," Caradoc said to Pendrake, in a low voice. Then he addressed the child again. "You can go and play with your ball in the next room now, if you like." The child sat still, unmoving. Pendrake looked at Caradoc. "Go and play with your ball," said Caradoc. The child got up and, this time, trotted out of the door. From the next room came the sound of a ball being bounced.

"Well?" asked Pendrake. "What did that prove?"

Caradoc ticked the points off on his fingers. "One: Alfred is aware of his surroundings," he said. "Two: he recalls previous experience. Three: he recalls previous instruction. Four: he will obey direct instruction. As a matter of fact, he won't obey instruction that would injure him. He shut the window; if I'd told him to jump out, he'd simply have said, 'No'."

"You haven't!"

"I have—but don't worry. It was a ground floor window. He didn't know that though. I confused him with lifts and corridors, and thought nursery rhymes to myself while I was talking to him. It's a tip I picked up from some old writer or other—you know my ragbag of a mind. But let me go on. Five: he will communicate factual information. Six: he is aware of social relationships. His control of phatic language is as accurate as that of an adult."

"But this would make him virtually normal, surely?"

"Not necessarily. There are certain things he won't do, which a normal child would. He won't initiate communication for instance. He speaks when he's spoken to, or when he comes back from carrying out some simple task which

requires to be reported; otherwise he keeps quiet. He won't make personal choice, or express personal preference, except when it involves the possibility of injury."

"Is that why you got no answer the first time you asked him if his breakfast was nice?"

"Yes. Now 'nice' is one of the easiest words to teach a child—it requires almost no differentiation. Yet so far as I can ascertain he doesn't use it. But he does use 'hungry', which is on about the same level, and 'bacon', which is considerably more difficult. And he distinguishes between 'eat' and 'eat up', which is fairly abstract."

"At what age would a normal child begin to do that?"

"It varies considerably—before four, anyway; frequently a good deal earlier. I'm not making any predictions about his language quotient yet, I haven't enough data on him. But one point frankly puzzles me—did you notice he said 'Sonia Jamieson' instead of 'Mummy'?"

"Yes. I thought that was odd."

"So did I. But this is typical of Alfred. Always the social label for people: never a personal emotional one. I am 'Doctor Caradoc'. In full, if you please."

"He's not 'mindless', then?"

"No. Far from it. He may be mentally disturbed or sub-normal though; too much exposure to traumatic thought at an early age perhaps. For instance, if his esp ability is as you blueprinted it, he would have been able to pick up Sonia and Bill making love from being in the cradle. It's a pity your psych. boys couldn't get something a bit more definite, analytically."

"He doesn't reply to most of their questions, and his reactions to tests are something weird—you've seen them."

"Yes, I have," said Caradoc. "You surely didn't think he was mindless, though?"

"No, of course not. I just wanted to be able to give some sort of definitive answer to the Press over this campaign. They're all over me these days. Bill was getting worried on that score though."

"Bill?"

"Yes. He can't pick up 'perceptual activity', he says, whatever that means."

"Oh yes, I remember he said that when we first met. Well if it's any help to you, you can quote me to the Press as

quite definitely refuting the statement. But at the level at which the campaign's being conducted I doubt if it'll do any good."

"What about the others?"

"The other children? I still have to check them out. But according to what the psychologists say they should run clear to type." The two men walked to the door of the next room. Alfred was still playing with the ball, bouncing it. He took no notice of them.

"His co-ordination is good, you see," said Caradoc.

"Yes," said Pendrake. "But Caradoc—he's still doing exactly what you initiated nearly half an hour ago."

"I told you he didn't make choices," said Caradoc.

"No," said Pendrake. "And neither does an imbecile."

three

"I think I'm going to have to bring the Jamiesons and the four other couples to live in the Hall of Residence," said Pendrake, looking moodily out of the Common Room window at the crowd in the square outside. "I had a hell of a job bringing them through this morning. And the Race Purity League appears to have found out where they live. Their houses were stoned last night."

Caradoc looked moodily out at the crowd, too: it was small and silent, but sullen, and pickets with placards marched up and down in front of it. He finished his coffee and put the cup down. "I had some of those pickets outside my flat this morning," he said. "Perhaps we shouldn't have issued the statement about Alfred under my name."

"You can always move in with me if you have to," said Pendrake. "I only wish I could trace the source of this." He was silent for a moment. Then he said, "What about the other children now?"

"The same," said Caradoc. "Absolutely the same. And you know, Pendrake, that has me worried. There should be *some* difference between their reactions, however slight. But there's none. You'd almost think they were purely instinctive except that words, being personalised communication,

can't be instinctive. I can't fit that part of it into anything yet."

"What about the traumatic material?"

"No, that wouldn't account for it. Traumatic withdrawal or fantasy is one of the most highly personalised things of all. But in any case, the test results are weird, as you said. I had Sonia over to my flat to dinner two or three nights ago, to try and find out what sort of traumatic material Alfred might have picked up. I thought a relaxed atmosphere, and not having to comment in front of Bill, might help. But she knows what I'm going to ask in advance of course, and she's not giving anything away. I can't say I blame her, really; her pride in her child's involved, poor girl."

"These test results," said Pendrake, after a pause. "Were they the same for each child?"

"Yes, the same for each child."

"*Exactly* the same?"

"Yes," said Caradoc. Then he turned, suddenly. "Look—don't go jumping to conclusions on that. The results were identical, but they were also meaningless. As far as I can see this means the tests don't apply, and all the psychology bods were getting was instinctual material from far lower in the subconscious than you'd go with a normal. Like getting a crossed hookup in a telephone circuit—the information being retrieved was coming from the wrong set of storage banks. The conscious use of verbal symbols is certainly meaningful. You saw that yourself."

"All right, I'll believe you," said Pendrake. "But all I can say is if that information leaks out, we're sunk. Your conclusions on the Psych. tests, particularly if it was known you entertained the desirable Sonia Jamieson alone, would look too much like emotional involvement."

Caradoc looked at him angrily. "Doctor Pendrake, that is an insinuation that I cannot allow! Of *course* it looks as if the reactions on those tests are instinctual, because they are. But equally my tests of symbol-using on all five children—not just the Jamieson child—show conscious communication, as you saw for yourself. And I may add that I propose to run the next series of tests, to try and plot the level of intelligence at which that communication takes place, in the very near future—and whatever that

level of intelligence is, I shall declare it as accurately as I can calculate it, and observe it as objectively as possible."

Pendrake smiled. "I know, Edwin, I know. I'm not attacking you, for goodness sake. I'm merely pointing out the sort of tight-rope we're walking on."

"H'm!" replied Caradoc. "If that's the case I suggest that future discussions of this subject take place in your Department, and are left behind when we come down here; coffee cups and ginger biscuits have ears, Ralph. And I accept your apology."

four

"This," said Caradoc testily, shutting off the film projector, "is ridiculous."

"Why?" asked Pendrake. "You've got the results you wanted on the children's intelligence. And what's more we've got documentary evidence, on film, of them solving practical problems, matching puzzles—heavens man, doing mathematical calculations yet, at seven plus!"

"——Which the Race Purity League will immediately put forward as faked evidence," said Sonia. "You two may be convinced by them—so may other people with your specialities. So am I. But the average man has been far too subjected to advertising techniques to more than half believe anything he sees on film. I worked for an advertising firm once—Market Research. It's one of *our* specialities, you know. But Edwin meant something different, and I agree with him." Her voice hardened. "So would Bill, if he'd been here. You seem to have forgotten why you called him in, Ralph; it wasn't to produce material to outwit the Race Purity League." She smiled at Caradoc. "I think I'd better let you say it yourself, hadn't I?"

Caradoc smiled back. In the absence of Bill Jamieson, whose work study post seemed to take him away a lot of the time, he had had to rely for information on Sonia, and, especially since the Jamiesons had moved into the Hall of Residence, a rapport had grown up between them as close as one ever gets between an esper and a normal.

"Sonia's right," he said. "Look, Pendrake, you called me in because there was something seriously wrong. The children simply were not behaving like any normal child—at all. You wanted me to find out what it was, if I could. And so far, all I've done is to find out what's *not* wrong."

He paused, and tapped the projector. "We have established that on any *non-verbal* test of intelligence these children are all well above average," he said. "We have also established that on normal verbal tests of intelligence they are at best high-grade morons. We have established that they can communicate verbally perfectly clearly. We have also established that, except under outside command, they don't. We have established that they are fully aware of their surroundings. We have also established that fifty per cent of the time they act as if they were autistic. We know that they *could* have been exposed to traumatic experience, but we also know that the psychological tests don't show any meaningful results. And their reactions to outside behaviour, when they occur at all, are perfectly sane. Why, Pendrake, why? We know they have intelligence and awareness; but fifty per cent of the time they simply shut it off and either just sit, or indulge in directed repetitive rote play. And yet whenever the intelligence is needed they use it perfectly adequately. What sort of reason could you give to explain that? It simply doesn't make sense."

He ran one hand through his hair. "These children are as much of a mystery as when I came in on this project," he concluded. "And until we can explain not only what it is they do, but why, they'll continue to be mysterious, and therefore frightening. All your film release will do is replace mindless monsters by alien-minded monsters as a public image, and that's even worse. Unless we can explain them—which we can't—or relate them to normality—which we likewise can't—well, frankly, the best bet would be to try and trace the source of the leak, and discredit it—if it *can* be discredited." He sighed. "You should have called another esper in on this, Ralph," he said. "We simply don't know enough about how their minds work."

"Relate them to normality," said a voice inside his head. He looked round, at Sonia: her eyes were alive with excitement. He realised that the intensity of her thinking had communicated itself to him—most normals had, he knew,

a little residual esp, and such accidental overflowings had occurred once or twice before, since they had come to know each other well.

"I think I have an idea," she said aloud. "It may or may not give Edwin the extra information he needs to solve his problem, but at least it should provide some material to offset the Race Purity League." She turned to Caradoc. "Look here," she said. "Most of the time you've studied Alfred and the other children under test conditions, here in the B.E. Department. Right?"

"Yes," said Caradoc. "Naturally. We wanted information, and controlled tests are the best way to get it."

"That may or may not be true," said Sonia. "But the fact remains that you have no detailed material, on film or otherwise, relating any of the children systematically to a routine home life. You've asked me a number of questions—and you've refrained from asking a number of others I know you wanted to. But there's no direct evidence on the *feel*—the *gestalt* if you like—of a household with one of these children in it. Now I think there should be."

"It might be useful," said Pendrake, slowly. "I don't see what it would add that we haven't got already, in any exact form. But it wouldn't do any harm."

Caradoc looked at Sonia. "What exactly are you suggesting?"

"I want you to spend a day in our flat in the Hall of Residence," she said. "A *whole* day. Come over as early as you like: before breakfast if you want. Film or record anything you want. Start with Alfred getting up. Afterwards, you can analyse the film as much as you want; but even if it doesn't give you anything more to work on, at least we shall be able to produce evidence that these 'monsters' are quiet, well-behaved, ordinary members of a family circle. What could be more 'normal', to the average man, than that?"

"I'm not a behavioural psychologist," said Caradoc. "I doubt if I'd be competent to analyse half the results. But——" Sonia grinned at him, infectiously. He grinned back. "All right," he said. "You've sold me on the idea. I'll come. When nothing works, we try anything twice."

five

Caradoc packed the last of the spools into his bag, ignoring the mutterings that came from outside the Jamie-sons' living-room window. Winter night had fallen, but he knew the picketers below would stay there for some time yet. He would probably have to slip out the back way.

Sonia, slim and elegant in a sleeveless dress, handed him a cup of coffee.

"Thanks," he said. "It's useful, having an esper around. You look nice, too."

She smiled. "I thought I'd change into something a bit less sexless, now that Alfred's in bed," she said. "You got everything you wanted, then?"

"Plenty," he said. "I only hope I can get it processed in time. Frankly, I didn't think they'd trace you all here quite so soon. Do you think one of the students told them?"

"Possibly. But I doubt it."

"You should know," he said.

"Yes, I should. But in any case that doesn't worry me too much. It's the way the campaign itself is getting entrenched that upsets me. The English don't make good mobs—but they do make good snobs. In the long run discrimination would do us more harm than a few broken windows or beatings up, no matter what Pendrake says." She drank coffee and went on, "The Act's partly to blame for this, you know. It created us as a separate community, and that's a bad thing."

Caradoc studied her, carefully. "Did you want to marry Bill?" he said.

"Oh yes. Believe me, yes. But——" she broke off. "You don't think this new information'll do any good, do you, Ed?"

Caradoc put his cup down. "No, I don't. I'm sorry, my dear, but I don't. Oh, I admit there are one or two new facts here; for instance, I never expected to find Alfred quite so actively helpful around the house. I supposed he would spend much more time just sitting still. But while that makes a good point for Pendrake's publicity, it doesn't

help me at all. After all, it's purely due to the role you've had the good sense to create for him."

She looked at him, eyes wide. "Oh—oh, how stupid of me!" she exclaimed. "I thought you already knew, I didn't bother to check you. I didn't create any role for him, Ed. I was too shocked at what he seemed to be. As soon as he discovered there were things to be done he created the role himself. He's as busy as a little bee, that way."

Caradoc stopped her. "Would you mind saying that again?" he asked.

"He's as busy as a bee. Why?"

He shook his head, depressedly. "Nothing. It just seemed as if it ought to suggest something to me. But it doesn't. Go on."

She reached out and touched his sleeve. Her hand was trembling. "Look," she said slowly, "I didn't intend to tell you this, but since almost everything else has fallen through, you may as well know. You remember you were asking me, a while back, if Alfred had picked up any traumatic experiences?"

Caradoc nodded. "You needn't tell me, if you don't want to," he said, softly.

"Yes, I want to. You see he has, but not the ones you think. Bill—ever since we found out about Alfred, Bill won't make love to me. In case a natural child turns out the same. And so—we quarrel. In the mind. Oh, Ed—what have we done to him?"

Caradoc placed his other hand on hers. "Nothing, maybe. I don't know. I don't even know whether that information would account for anything. But thank you for telling me. You're a brave woman." Leaning forward, he kissed her cheek.

"Oh no!" said a voice behind him. "No—not another one!" He turned: it was Bill Jamieson. He stood in the doorway, dishevelled, his coat torn. "Not only do I have to fight my way through a howling mob outside, but I return home to find the research investigator making love to my wife!"

"——I wasn't doing any such thing!" protested Caradoc, hotly.

"——And as for you, Sonia," Jamieson went on icily, clearly intending to humiliate her by letting Caradoc hear

the accusations, "I must admit your taste has become a little better these days. At least a Ph.D.'s an improvement on Kruger the milkman, even if he is still a normal."

His wife's whole being flared: Caradoc could only guess at what was passing between them, but he knew it was ferocious. Then she crumpled up and began to cry, desolately. Jamieson turned back to him. "Before I throw you out," he said, "I'll say what I said to the others. You know it already, but I'll remind you anyway. I shouldn't jump into bed with my wife, if I were you—not unless you want a mindless lump of matter for a son." He advanced on Caradoc. "And now——"

Then he froze. So did Sonia. So did Caradoc. It seemed the room was all at once filled with a white light, like a neon fluorescence; and in it, never quite in focus, were (if one could only see them!) a procession of moiré shapes, grating ladders, visual scales, that revolved and fell down, down, down. One felt the floor was unreal, like oil refractions on water: the vertically spinning patterns (never clear except at the corner of the eye) insisted to the sight that this was the meniscus of some hitherto unperceived cerebro-spinal pit. One could not move because one had become, in the moment of recognition of this, the prisoner of one's own body cavity. Also, because of and behind all these epiphenomena, was fear; so that one could not have moved anyway, any more than a rabbit before a stoat. And it was equally impossible to deny the perceptual distortion by act of will; one had no power.

Then the light exploded soundlessly in Caradoc's head. He had an enormous sensation—though quite where was not defined—of being hurt. And a treble voice seemed to be saying: "Hurt. Not working. Bad society. Not good. Reduces. Stop it. STOP IT . . ."

Slowly, the light faded. Caradoc turned his head. In the doorway from the bedroom, as he expected, stood the small pyjama'd figure of Alfred, erect, his eyes blazing. Then the glow faded from them. His attention dropped to the floor again. He turned, walked mechanically back to bed, and fell immediately back into sleep.

Bill Jamieson sank into another chair. "I'm sorry," he muttered. "I must have been mad. Forget what I said, Dr. Caradoc, will you?"

Sonia went over and put her arms round him. "No, not mad, love," she said aloud. "Just jealous. But you didn't need to be, either time." She looked at Caradoc. "I'll make some more coffee."

"Ed, I'm terribly sorry," said Jamieson, after she had gone out. "It's just that the strain . . ."

"I know," said Caradoc. "But there really is no need for it. Tell me though, who was 'Kruger the milkman'?"

"Not a milkman at all, in actual fact," said Jamieson, in a flat voice. "A colleague of Sonia's from her market research days. A normal. He took to coming round to see her. You know the rest."

"I can guess it," said Caradoc. "You realise of course that he was the one who tipped off the League. *Was* there anything in it?"

"Sonia says not: but there was, a little. I could read it."

"She may well not have realised that herself," said Caradoc. "But whatever gave you the idea that a normally conceived child would be like Alfred?"

"I should have thought it would have been obvious, from what Pendrake said. No ambiguity at all about that."

"No ambiguity about Alfred either," said Sonia, coming back with the coffee. "Well at least you can't maintain he's mindless now, William Jamieson. Talk about a busy little bee!"

Caradoc put his cup down with a clatter. A light seemed to be bursting in his head again, but this time of his own making. "Ambiguity—busy little bee——" He laughed, harshly. "I knew those words ought to mean something to me. Good God, the answer's been in front of us all the time . . ."

"What the . . . ?" said the Jamiesons, together: but Caradoc was already gathering up his things.

"Excuse me—I have a lot to do. I don't know if I can get hold of the books I want this late at night. But be in Pendrake's office at about ten tomorrow, will you? And bring Alfred with you—I may need him."

"What is it?" said Sonia. "All I get are vague shapes. What will you want him for?"

"To prove he's a busy little bee of course," said Caradoc. "What a fool I've been!"

"I don't know what on earth this is supposed to be about," said Pendrake coldly, "but I've got hold of all the stuff for you. I see you've been at the books already. You let yourself in here, I suppose."

"Yes," said Caradoc. "I had to check all the equipment was here, and there were a couple more points I wanted to look up. Sorry if I overturned protocol, but I've been up half the night getting film developed and analysing the results." He looked it: he was unshaven, and his eyes were heavy.

Pendrake looked round the room. "Three works of literary criticism and a book on insect behaviour," he said. "Four india-ink drawings on card run off a protractor, a fishing-rod, a drawing of a man catching fish, a cine projector and a BBC-TV documentary copy of a film about Australia made forty years ago—I admit you're the specialist, but what in heaven's name is this circus supposed to prove?"

"I'm very much afraid it'll prove your experiment a failure," said Caradoc. "I can't be one hundred per cent certain of that till the Jamiesons arrive: but in any case I think it'll explain Alfred and the others—poor things." He looked at his watch. "They'll be along in about ten minutes," he said. "Did you know that we now know who leaked the story?"

"Yes," said Pendrake. "Bill Jamieson was on to me by phone from the Warden's Office a while ago—I was in the lab next door. A man named Gorringe, I understand. Some kind of Market Research character."

"It must have cost him a lot to tell you," said Caradoc. "Some experiences last night—oh well, never mind, I'll come to that later—anyway I've just realised how highly espers must rate privacy. They have so little of it. Tell me, though, Pendrake, did either Bill or Sonia put up any resistance to the implant idea when it was first broached?"

Pendrake looked at him. "Yes," he said. "They did.

Both of them. They wanted a child of their own, conceived naturally. How did you know?"

"Just checking," said Caradoc. "And may I further surmise that you 'sold' them the idea, as the phrase is, by suggesting that all you were doing was making sure that the most probably genes in any case were a hundred per cent fixed—that the child was as good as their own?"

"Yes, I believe I did use some such argument," said Pendrake. "They couldn't be expected to understand the niceties of statistical genetics, after all. But why——?"

"Dr. Pendrake, *why*, if you had to 'sell' the idea, could you not have used something nearer the exact truth? You see, for Sonia, partly because of her market research background, it didn't matter: she never more than half believes anything, unless it's absolutely precise. But Bill believed you implicitly: and *that* was how the trouble all started."

A knock came at the door, and all three Jamiesons walked in.

"Ah, good morning," said Caradoc. "Please sit down. I was just explaining to Pendrake here that it was his white lie that started all the trouble with Gorringer."

"White lie?" said Bill. "What do you mean?"

"You don't read me, do you?"

"No—I'm confused."

"Precisely. And you couldn't be *certain* you'd read me correctly when I first met you."

"No," said Bill.

"And you didn't always pick up Alfred's emissions, until last night?"

"No, I—I suppose I didn't."

Caradoc turned to Pendrake. "Bill and Sonia, as espers, are very, very good," he said. "But they are *not perfect*. In fact, they are just sufficiently imperfect—Bill, anyway—for you, if you keep your mind very blank, to get away with something not quite exactly true."

Pendrake looked uncomfortable. "Yes," he said eventually. "They are."

"Could their genetic stock, normally—without engineering—ever produce a perfect esper—someone like Alfred?"

"Yes," said Pendrake. "Yes, it could."

"You see?" said Bill Jamieson, bitterly. "I told you."

"Wait a minute," said Caradoc. Then he turned to Pendrake again. "How long would it take?"

"It's a statistical matter," said Pendrake. "You can't say for any one individual case."

"But the most probable time?" persisted Caradoc.

Pendrake looked down at the desk. "Fifteen generations," he said in a low voice. Sonia whistled.

"Three hundred years," said Caradoc.

"Yes," said Pendrake. "But we didn't have that sort of time."

Bill Jamieson stood up. "Well—I'll—be—damned!" he said, slowly.

"Most probably," said Caradoc. "But you can settle your score with Pendrake afterwards. That was just an incidental, although it does bear on the main point. What we're really here for is to explain Alfred's condition." He went over to the cine projector. "I've prepared a little film show for you," he said. "It won't seem clear exactly what bearing it has, at first. But if you'll *bear* with me, I hope to make it clearer as we go on."

Sonia groaned: Bill and Pendrake smiled. Alfred remained on the floor, motionless. "Yes," said Caradoc. "The pun was intentional. You'll see why as we go on. Now can we have the blind please, Dr. Pendrake?"

He started the machine. "You must understand that what I am presenting will need a great deal more work to make it scientifically watertight," he said. "But at least now we know what it is we're looking for. I want first to run you part of the film I shot yesterday in Sonia's flat. Here we are; Sonia getting the dinner ready."

The screen showed the kitchen in the Married Hall flat: clean wipewood working surfaces. Sonia Jamieson came into the picture, evidently preparing a hotpot of some kind. "A good advertisement for B.E., this," smiled Caradoc. "Wipewood, and unless I'm much mistaken that casserole's one of the pyrogourds you developed here a couple of years ago. I do my homework, you see. Now, this is the part I want you to watch."

The camera swung to show Alfred seated in the familiar posture, quite still, then went back to Sonia. At one stage she glanced to one side. Alfred, on screen again and motionless, got up suddenly and moved over to the pantry,

opened the door, took out two onions, brought them across to her. "You esped him at that point, I think, didn't you?" said Caradoc.

"Yes," said Sonia. "Yes, I did." She fell quiet, watching.

On the screen the preparations went on steadily, mother and son working together in silence, swiftly, efficiently. Yet as they watched it became obvious that there was a difference between the two. Neither let up, but whereas the movements of Sonia Jamieson showed, every now and again, the momentary hesitation of any worker making a choice of action or timing, Alfred proceeded unremittingly, always at the same pace, always exact and quick, the young, delicate fingers never faltering for an instant, with the air almost of running through a pre-set programme. Bill's eyes widened as he watched.

Eventually the preparations were complete, and the casserole was put into the oven. Sonia relaxed, wiped her hands, and began to brew coffee. Alfred returned to his corner and sat down, motionless as before. Caradoc switched off.

"There's plenty more," he said, putting the light on and changing reels. "But the basic pattern is all the same. I hope you noticed the difference in working methods: it should have struck Bill at least. How would you describe it, Bill?"

"Well, Sonia was very efficient, ergonomically. She had all the tools right, and all the materials—except those onions."

"She had a tool for those too," said Caradoc.

"Yes," said Bill. "That was just what I was going to say. Sonia was an efficient *worker*, but Alfred—Alfred was *part of the process*. I've never seen such identification between worker and tool." He looked at Caradoc. "Ed, if you mean what I read you as meaning, I'm frightened."

"Not a proper attitude," said Caradoc. "Reality is; don't attribute moral being to it." He coughed. "You know, the thing that struck me most was the way he went over to the corner and sat down. It reminded me of a ballet I once saw—Coppélia. Do you know it?"

"I see what you mean," said Sonia slowly. Like most espers she was highly musical; Caradoc had been certain

she would know the ballet. "Old Coppélius wanted a child who would be better—brighter—more beautiful than himself. He was a toymaker of genius, but he was unmarried. So he made a doll, Coppélia. She was lovely, talented, intellectual. She danced divinely. But she was only a doll: and when—when the clockwork ran down—she sat down—in—a—chair." She seemed to be about to cry.

"That is only an analogy, to express it," said Caradoc. "Don't take on, my dear. It isn't what has really happened. And you've used analogy yourself, about Alfred, before now."

"I?"

"Yes, you have. You called him 'a busy little bee'. That gave me my first clue, though I didn't see it at the time." He switched the light out again. "This next piece of film Dr. Pendrake got for me, and he's been wondering what it was all about. It's an old BBC-TV documentary from before the Limited War, called '*The Darling River*'. The reason I wanted it was because it is one of the few recordings on film of the waggle-dance of bees."

Pendrake spluttered. "Oh, Caradoc, surely——" he said. But Caradoc had started the film.

On the screen was a swarm of wild bees, hanging from a bough. An Australian voice was speaking:

"And now we were able to record a thing very rarely filmed, the waggle dance of bees." The camera zoomed in for a close-up: the swarm filled the screen. Its entire surface was alive with a rippling of bees, pacing out circles on the backs of the swarm, bisecting them once, twice, again, and all the time shivering, almost obscenely rubbing and trembling with their long glistening abdomens. "The waggle dance is the means by which bees communicate," said the voice. "By the circles they pace, and the movements of the abdomen, they tell each other how far it is to the nearest place for a new hive, in what direction it is, how high they must fly to reach it. And each insect communicates to its neighbour, until the whole swarm knows where it is to go and what it is to do."

"Oh, no," said Sonia.

"Watch," said Caradoc. On the screen the dance continued, random at first; but gradually they saw that the voice was right. The movements of the bees were becoming

more regular. More and more of the little creatures were moving in unison. And gradually too they became aware that the movement of the insects had a certain quality—a precision, a lack of hesitation, a definition of pace, that matched exactly the quality they had found in Alfred's movements. "Oh yes," said Caradoc. He shut the film off.

"Now," he said, switching the lights up for the second time, "we come to the nub of all this. You can open the blind if you like, Pendrake. This artificial light hurts my eyes."

"If we consult an authority about Insect Behaviour on this communication system of bees," he went on, "we find a rather curious fact. Bees are flying animals: they have to move in three dimensions. Now to communicate movement in three dimensions requires pretty fair powers of abstraction. And we find that bees can in fact communicate some pretty abstract notions: the idea of 'angle', for example, or that of 'velocity'. Their number recognition is pretty good as well—in their own code, of course.

"Now this also involves us in a rather curious philosophical problem. For the ability to handle abstract notions, in human beings, is usually held to be one aspect of intelligence. And bees show apparent intelligence in other ways too—for instance in their complex social co-operation. Yet the individual bee manifestly does *not* show what we would regard as intelligence.

"Earlier writers in the field regarded this as evidence for some sort of group mind: but later work showed this pretty clearly not to be so. In fact, it is fairly certain now that we have been confusing two factors. The thing that bees lack, and human beings have, is not intelligence, in the sense of 'ability to handle abstract notions'. It is conscious personality.

"The communications system of a bee is intelligent enough, but it is utterly apersonal. No bee ever exhibits choice of how it will communicate, or extends its range of communication by any degree whatsoever. This language—and they have only one—probably has not changed at all for forty million years. And neither can one bee misunderstand another. The interpretation of communication is a physical act, controlled by the co-enzyme system. They have no ambiguity of language at all. And the same lack

of choice, or new activity, or ambiguity, extends through their entire social system and their activities within it."

He paused, and took up the other three books. "Now for the other side of the picture. Doctor Pendrake accused me just before you came in of making a 'circus'; but I think he will be beginning to see the point of it—if a 'circus' can have a 'point'. Please note these ambiguities.

"We all know that human communication, by contrast, is personalised, and involves choice; that's why we teach its skills to students. But in fact it is more basic than that." He read the titles from the books. "*The Meaning of Meaning*. I. A. Richards. Perhaps the greatest *linguistic* critic of the twentieth century. *The Seven Types of Ambiguity*—the writer of that book was William Empson, simultaneously a poet, a philologist and a linguistic philosopher. Two men who were perhaps better acquainted with the nature of human communication by words than anyone before or since: and both these men maintained that the degree of ambiguity in human language was *not* merely a nuisance, but essential to its nature and working.

"Very well, then. Let's suppose that ambiguity in language is a result of conscious human personality. But I suggest we can go further—I suggest we can invert this and say *that human personal consciousness, in part at least, is the result of ambiguity in language*. Consider a moment.

"A baby has no 'personality' as we understand it: its personality is potential rather than actual. At first it does not distinguish itself from its surroundings. Personal consciousness seems to grow precisely as it learns to do this. But simultaneously it is making the connections which enable it to learn speech. Could this speech, and these connections, in fact structure that personal consciousness? We've all heard the problem about 'thought without words'—and we've all heard people say, of a bilange or a trilange, 'he seems to change personality when he shifts into another language'. Suppose this is not just a metaphor, but the truth?"

He touched the third book. "Koestler. *The Act of Creation*. He suggested, you'll recall, that creative acts were the result of a juxtaposition of dissimilar information, possible because of ambiguity. The result was a reorientation of the consciousness. It issued in two forms: an act

of creative invention, or a joke. He used his theory, among other things, to explain puns."

He turned to Pendrake. "You and your government bosses," he said, "were afraid of ambiguity because it was dangerous; you forgot of course that all human life is dangerous. So you built into these children a perfect communication system—one in which there was no ambiguity at all. But the less ambiguity, the less possibility of choice or creative action: and where there is no ambiguity, there is no personal consciousness. Alfred—and the others—are something. I don't know what, exactly. But not persons, as we understand it."

There was a long silence in the room. Then Pendrake said tiredly, "That's a very neat piece of theoretical analysis. But are you quite sure you have any proof?"

"I'm coming to that," said Caradoc. "Some of the proof we have already. Alfred and the others don't make personal choices; they have no personal relationship labels for others; they react identically; they don't initiate activity, except social activity——"

"They eat, and avoid danger," said Pendrake.

"Instinctual. So does an amoeba. What does that prove?"

"Wait a minute," said Bill. "Alfred calls himself 'I.'"

"Yes, I agree," said Caradoc. "The bee analogy was only an analogy. I don't think any intelligent mechanism, at Alfred's level, can be utterly without a term to describe itself. But I doubt if it has any semantic loading. It's simply a convenient label—one unit, as distinct from another unit. He uses the words you've given him, remember, when he uses words at all. His co-enzyme code is quite different though. We felt part of it, last night."

Sonia shuddered. "If that's perfect esp, I'm glad I'm imperfect," she said.

"Be thankful you are," said Caradoc. "You're rather a nice person. I suggest, though, we need a lot more proof before we can be rigorous about this. But at least if I'm right we ought to be able to test it with a simple experiment, here and now. Can I have the cards and the rod, please?"

Pendrake passed them to him.

"I needn't worry about Alfred hearing this," said Caradoc. "If I'm right it won't mean anything to him anyway:

and in any case if it meant anything he could esp it. You'll recall bees are good on angles; it so happens that this is a part of maths these children are good on too. But 'angle' is also a word applying to fishing—rather a difficult word, but with his esp abilities Alfred, if he were a human child, would have no trouble picking it up. And even a normal child would either simply repeat the word and accept the ambiguity, or say something like 'fish'. Now watch."

He went over to Alfred.

"Alfred," he said.

"Yes," said the boy. Not a question; a statement.

"There is information to compute. When it is computed a problem will be solved."

"He's using far too long words!" said Pendrake.

"Sh!" said Sonia. "He'll esp the logical meaning."

"Is this understood?" said Caradoc, to the child.

"Yes," said the child.

Caradoc held out the first geometrical card, and said, "Angle," in a flat, toneless voice.

"Thirty degrees," said the child.

He put the card away, and held out the second one. "Angle."

"Forty-five degrees," said the child. Pendrake caught his breath.

Caradoc held out the third card, and said, "Angle."

"Sixty degrees," said the child. There was silence in the room.

Caradoc held out the card with the drawing on an angler on it.

"Angle," he said.

"Seventy-four degrees, eight minutes," said the child.

Caradoc nodded. He put all the cards down, and picked up the fishing rod. "Angle," he said again, for the last time.

"Forty-one and a half degrees," said the child.

"The problem is solved," said Caradoc. The child returned its gaze to the floor.

Pendrake said, very slowly, "What do we do now?"

Caradoc sat down, heavily. "You get in contact with your government chappies and tell them to use what they've already got, instead of trying to manufacture a father-figure in reverse," he said. "The children will have to be certified mentally subnormal, I suppose. That should make

everybody feel safe. And the Esper Act will have to go, or be modified. Mixed marriages, for a start ; the more weak genes there are around, the less people worry about them." He looked at the Jamiesons. "I suggest Sonia and Bill here go away and make some nice normal healthy esper babies, in the usual way ; and train them up to go into the Foreign Service or something. Honestly, I sometimes think you scientists are the worst people to start trying to run the world. There's no such thing as invarientive reality. Didn't you know that?" He ran the back of his hand across the stubble on his chin. "As for me," he said, "I'm going to get a bath and a shave, and go to bed. Then I'm going to organise the socio-math basis for getting this Race Purity League nonsense run down once Gorringer has been discredited. There's a nice brown-haired sociologist downstairs who has just the right approach." He stood up, and went to the door. "Oh, and you might return those books to the library for me," he said, going out. "Goodnight, all. And the next time you postpone my personal projects, ask me, will you?" He shut the door. They heard his footsteps go down the corridor.

"Certify the children," said Sonia: "do you think they'll let us?"

The silence in the room was broken only by the muttering of the crowd outside.

— CHRIS HEBRON

He was lost, on an alien planet. But he had a foolproof plan . . .

THE UNSUNG MARTYRDOM OF ABEL CLOUGH

by Robert J. Tilley

When Vat finally and somewhat shakily made planet-fall on the mountain-top of his choice and emerged from his scouter to find one of its stabilising fins irreparably crushed against an unpleasantly jagged boulder, his first brief reaction was one of pure, unadulterated panic.

It was forgivable. Vat was young, it was his very first solo Hunt, and the blue-green sphere that he was now on, while undoubtedly an inviting prospect when viewed from the depths of space, was a desolately forbidding composite of jagged mountain peaks and rough terrain as seen from his present position.

It promised, however, the maximum amount of privacy that could be expected under the circumstances. He fervently thanked the appropriate deity that he had chosen the night side to make his preliminary landing on, and dived back into the ship to sub-radio for help and to issue the now somewhat dampened news of his find.

The "King Hunter", having proffered suitable congratulations regarding the latter, expressed apologetic concern over his mishap. Unfortunately, all suitably equipped members of the expedition were absent from the ship, being deployed over something in the region of 500,000 cubic light-years. The nearest of these would, of course,

be directed to proceed immediately to his present position, but hasty calculations informed them that he would have to fend for himself for approximately eight days.

He made briefly appropriate replies to enquiries regarding his state of health and supplies position, and moodily broke contact.

Eight days. He reviewed the prospect, and shuddered. Vat was both youthful and gregarious, and the prospect of this lengthy and possibly dangerous period of isolation he found gloomy in the extreme.

He left the ship again, climbed the rim of the small, shallow basin, and cautiously studied the dully winking lights on the plain below.

The village was, at a rough guess, a little over three miles away, nestling snugly and blackly against the silvered ground. There was no sign of activity around its outskirts, and no sounds could be heard through the still night air.

Vat relaxed a little, thankfully. Had his descent been noted, it was certain that an investigation of some kind would have been under way by now.

He drew his tongue across lips that were, perhaps, a shade paler than their normal brilliant green. There seemed little doubt now that his initial assumption had been correct, and that he was viewing a rural community, small, virtually defenceless, and situated well away from the organized authority and protective policing of the nearest city.

Excitement stirred as he recommenced speculation regarding its inhabitants. What were they—bipeds, like himself, quadrupeds, or something after the fashion of those frightful eight-tentacled monstrosities from the Etil system, currently being put to profitable use in the supplenium mines on Ortolis? Not, he hoped with a slight shudder of distaste, the latter. Apart from their appearance and rather odd physical habits, they took up considerably more room in the freeze chamber than they were worth. The non-digitated races tended to be a relatively unrewarding investment, and with the market in its present rather flooded condition, anyway . . .

Sternly, he chided himself for his premature misgivings. For all he knew he could have stumbled onto a species

worth their weight in cobalt, and since circumstances dictated that he had considerable leisure time on his hands, it would be foolish to waste it in idle speculation. Further, he had few illusions regarding his chances of evading disciplinary action once he was back aboard the "King Hunter". It was quite possible that the damage to his ship had been unavoidable—he consoled his ego with this meagre and unlikely salve—but such mishaps were unfairly classed as lack of initiative in an emergency. If, however, he was in a position to offer something in the nature of a compensating factor, perhaps this undesirable state of affairs could be at least minimised.

He retired inside once more, strapped his adaptakit firmly around his waist, checked that his Hunter's Friend was at full charge, made a final, bitter inspection of the crumpled ruins that now chained the ship so firmly to the planet's surface, and grimly set off down the mountain-side.

The single moon that hovered serenely overhead had retired behind cloud, and his progress was slow. He picked his way carefully between boulders and occasional stunted trees that loomed blackly in his path, prudently avoiding large open areas that would be subject to sudden illumination should the satellite re-emerge suddenly into clear sky.

This happened as he neared the base of the slope. Vat paused, studied the terrain from the shelter of a convenient boulder, and saw the road a short distance below him.

He hissed with pleased expectancy. It wasn't much of a road, it was true, little more than an uneven pathway that skirted the perimeter of the hill, but that in itself was reassuring, an indication of promise that he somehow sensed was a pointer towards the ultimate fruition of his find.

He was crouched watchfully by it, preparatory to making a sudden dash across to the deeper shadows on the far side, when he heard the scuffle of footsteps.

Breath suspended, he sank gently to the ground, his right hand sliding cautiously to his holster.

A figure came into view down the moonlit path. A *biped*! Vat barely restrained the squeal of triumph that rose automatically to his lips. Of all the fantastic, unprecedented luck! His very first solo, and he'd picked a

world that was peopled by the rarest and most valuable species in the entire cosmos! Shaking with excitement, the sudden clamour of his heart loud in his ears, he crouched motionless as the figure passed by his place of concealment.

In the bright illumination from overhead he witnessed further indications of promise. The native was clothed in crude, ill-fitting garments that bore further testimony to Vat's astuteness and powers of logical deduction. It was now perfectly plain that he was observing a member of a relatively primitive species of agricultural dweller, one whose puny defensive powers would provide no stumbling-block when the time for capture was ripe.

His eyes bright with anticipation, Vat allowed the figure to proceed a short distance down the path, then rose silently and paced him, discreetly maintaining his position in the shadows of the hillside.

He had, of course, no intention of making his presence known at the present time. To appropriate an obligingly solitary specimen such as this could only further endanger his already precarious position. After all, there were eight lonely, dangerous days to be survived before he could expect the arrival of reinforcements. To cause the disappearance of one of their members at such a tactlessly early time would be a direct invitation to curiosity on the part of the local population. No, this would merely be a long-range study of the species, during which time he would have to glean as much information as possible without resorting to contact in any way.

He studied the figure carefully as he glided silently in its wake, gradually permitting the trace of a smirk to play across his features. There was none of the integrated smoothness of his own walk in the other's progress. Very much to the contrary. This was the poorly co-ordinated shambling of the lowest kind of peasant, a sloppily conceived placing of one foot before the other, with little or no attention paid to correct concepts of energy-conserving balance and minimum of movement. There was little doubt now that with a selection of similarly pliable specimens to draw on at the appropriate time, the feared disciplinary action would be foregone and he would meet instead with the highest praise from his superiors for un-

earthing such a veritable prize for exploitation. Why, he might even get a commission! Vat mentally savoured this and similar glittering possibilities as they unravelled themselves in a delightfully kaleidoscopic pattern through his mind.

The lights of the buildings were only a short distance ahead and the native was displaying distinct indications of haste to reach them when another thought intruded jarringly into his pleasant speculations.

Suppose—Great Wim, just suppose—that the man had, in fact, witnessed the descent of the scouter! He had obviously been fairly near at the time; after all, Vat had encountered him only a short distance away from the scene of his landing. And while it was true that his rate of travel had required no particular effort on Vat's part to emulate, he had, of course, no means of ascertaining whether or not the man had, in fact, been in a desperate hurry, and was now summoning a final burst of speed that would carry him to the village and safety. To report what he had seen? To arouse the curiosity of the populace to such a pitch that an investigation would be made, his own life placed in serious danger, and the smooth-running procedure of the "King Hunter's" impending sorties seriously hampered by the alerting of the planet as a whole? This was sparsely populated country, it was true, but the possibility that the natives were in possession of some means of radio communication could not be entirely ignored . . .

Vat swallowed, numbly. If such was the true state of affairs—and he had no means at the time of verifying otherwise—then immediate action had to be taken before the village could be reached and the alarm sounded.

The lights were dangerously close as, with a clammy and shaking hand, he slid his weapon from its holster. He clumsily set it to a paralysis-charge, aimed briefly, and pressed the firing-stud. The figure in front of him paused, wobbled slightly, then stood motionless.

Sweating profusely, Vat glided silently round him, and worriedly studied his prize.

He was roughly his own height and build, a middle-aged, pouchy-faced man, whose eyes now held a blankly dazed look. His clothing was none too clean, and his

breath, at close quarters, was unpleasantly fetid. He was altogether a far from prepossessing specimen, but Vat was painfully aware that he was in no position to pick and choose his samples at the present time. He glanced about him, adjusted his weapon to a propelling-charge, and hastily directed the mute and stiff-limbed figure to the shelter of a cluster of boulders a short distance from the road.

He manoeuvred him to a prone position, and studied him, unhappily.

What now? For the moment he had been spared any curiosity on the part of the natives, but for how long? He assumed that the man was a local inhabitant; a total absence of luggage gave him no good reason to think otherwise, and if his disappearance was prolonged, then undoubtedly an organised search would be made. And when it was, the scouter would be discovered, which meant that his present course of action was merely a postponement of the inevitable.

Vat scowled miserably, and with understandable perversity directed an oath at the ill-fortune that had permitted him to discover this accursed planet in the first place. He shivered as the appalling vulnerability of his position seeped through his thoughts with a chill insistence that could not be ignored. If only there was *some* way . . .

He froze there in his thinking.

Wait a minute, now. If it was possible—his brain juggled gently with the idea, excitement stirring faintly to life once more—if it was possible to assume the other's identity, long enough and convincingly enough to establish a false trail, then surely the inescapable search could at least be directed *away* from the scouter . . .

He crouched and studied the figure again, this time with active interest.

Physically, the similarity was passably close, with, of course, the exception of the face. He fingered his own youthful, cleanly-cut features thoughtfully. The problem, as such, was small; a judicious application of plastiflesh would broaden his own finely-chiselled nose to the other's fleshy shapelessness, and the pouchiness of the cheeks was a simple addition.

Vat warmed to the problem. What then? Well, obviously

the man would have to be disposed of: he was hardly in the best of condition, anyway, and even if he was successfully hidden on the scouter until the arrival of the rescue party, it was extremely doubtful that freeze-chamber space on the "King Hunter" would be wasted on him. His subsequent plan of action must, of course, be both simple and brief, involving a minimum amount of contact with the inhabitants of the village. They must see him clearly enough to afterwards claim recognition, but that was all. Speed was essential, and any attempted verbal contact must be dismissed with indications of haste on his own part—a cursory wave and a vague gesture in the direction that he was heading would add a touch of authenticity.

He cautiously re-checked the various actions involved, and took a deep breath. Yes, it would work. Once through the centre of the village, ensuring that he was seen by at least a handful of the inhabitants, and then straight out of the other side, in a direct line away from the position of the scouter. Once beyond the range of the lights, he would simply double back around the outskirts, retire to his mountain-top hideout, and wait. Then, if at any time during the next eight days an investigation of his victim's whereabouts was made, it would, with simple logic head in the direction that he was last seen proceeding.

He stripped the native to his undergarments, and attempted to don the musty clothing over his uniform. After a brief and expletive-filled interval of experiment, he accepted the impossibility of this. The man was, after all, slightly smaller than he had calculated. Vat regretfully removed his adaptakit and black, one-piece coverall, and shudderingly squeezed himself into the grimy and tattered garments.

A closer study of his unprotesting prisoner's face by the light of his carefully shielded torch revealed a minor impediment to his plan which had gone unnoticed before. It was pink, contrasting unpleasantly with Vat's own tastefully muted greenish pallor. He hesitated momentarily, but eventually decided that the similarity of the actual tonal qualities should provide sufficient disguise. After all, he would be moving at speed, the lighting would be fairly dim, and with his victim's wide-brimmed hat

shading most of his features, such a minor difference would be hardly noticeable.

He extracted a plastiflesh container from his adaptakit, and set to work.

Fifteen minutes later, he was critically comparing the result of his efforts with the original. He was satisfied. Vat's skill at this particular aspect of his training had always earned him commendations for accuracy, and the face that now stared back at him from the mirror bore a quite remarkable similarity to that of the supine figure by his side. He made final minor adjustments, eliminated the native with a full vapourising-charge, concealed his adaptakit and uniform in a deep fissure at the base of the rocks, and rose.

With his weapon concealed in the front of the coarse shirt, he re-traced his way back to the path, meticulously aping the jerky movements appropriate to his disguise. Briskly, he approached the buildings, his head lowered and his eyes flicking watchfully from side to side.

He encountered no traffic as he proceeded clumsily along the board walk that flanked the buildings. Somewhere ahead of him there were sounds of activity; a faint, jangling cadence could be heard, punctuated with occasional muffled vocal interjections.

Breathing hard, his skin prickling uncomfortably beneath the unaccustomed clothing, he rounded a corner. He slowed, imperceptibly, then carried on, his chin lowered well into the collar of his shirt.

Ahead of him was the building from which the sounds were coming. Light poured brightly from its doors and windows, and a small group of natives lounged in a variety of attitudes in front of it.

As he approached, Vat drew in his breath sharply, and almost turned on his heel and bolted. He faltered again, steeled himself, and carried shakingly on.

To a man, they were armed! The light from the building glinted dully on the metal of the weapons at their waists. Vat floundered doggedly forward, but he was horribly shaken. Where, in the name of the Great Hunter, was he? Had he, through some catastrophic error of judgment, walked blithely into the middle of some kind of

army establishment? Impossible, surely—he had encountered no sentries, and such a place would . . .

A voice addressed him.

Even though his knowledge of the language was nil, Vat was left in no doubt that he was the intended recipient of the greeting. One of the natives had detached himself from the group and was standing directly in front of him, blocking his path.

Through necessity, he halted, and stared wildly about from beneath the shelter of his hat-brim. To his left was the wall of the building, to his right a waist-high railing. Short of ducking beneath this, vaulting it, or retreating, he was trapped.

Fighting panic, he backed a step, and stared at the native.

He was a large man, colourfully attired. A wide-brimmed hat topped his head, and a chequered shirt covered the upper part of his body. On it was pinned a decoration of some kind, a strange five-pointed device that winked slightly in the gloom. He carried two weapons, slung oddly low on either side of his waist.

The words were repeated, sharply.

Vat was almost in a state of complete paralysis by this time. In a matter of moments, his confidence had evaporated completely. His glibly fool-proof plan, so neat and impregnable in theory, had been shattered beyond repair by a chance meeting that could end in complete disaster. Vat knew the rules. If he was absent from his ship when his rescuers arrived, no attempt would be made to find him. The ship would be hastily repaired and removed, he would personally be entered in the records as lost in the line of duty, and the planet would be classified as dangerously unsuitable for development, implacable procedure to which there were no exceptions and which was justified by past grimly expensive experience.

Blindly, he half-turned and clumsily attempted to duck beneath the railing. A hand gripped his arm, firmly. He gave a choked squeal, straightened, and whipped his hand to the front of his shirt with the lightning speed that was born of long, arduous practice.

Even as the weapon appeared in his hand, he saw a blur of movement and heard the vicious crack of a sharp ex-

plosion. And as the sudden, numbing blow on his chest threw him back against the wall and then to his knees, swamping him in all-engulfing blackness, Vat knew, with stunned and rapidly dulling surprise, that somehow he had failed . . .

The deputy eased his plug of well-chewed tobacco over to one side of his mouth, cleared his throat, and expectorated with accuracy towards the spittoon in the corner. It dinged satisfactorily. He cocked an eyebrow at the man behind the desk, eased his own position on its corner, and coughed, apologetically.

"Shucks, Ham," he said. "Ain't no need t' take on so. You wasn't t' know he was goin' t' do somethin' all-fired foolish like that, now was you?" He shook his head, and spat again. "Best you kin do is fergit all about it, jest as quick as you kin."

Sheriff Ham Bisbee scowled, sucked morosely at a hollow tooth, and stared in sombre silence at the desk-top. Charlie was right, of course. The best thing to do was forget it, all right, but it sure wasn't going to be easy. After all, he'd known Abe Clough a long time, a whole heap of dirt-grubbing years before he'd finally struck it rich and set up his cabin at the foot of the hills with only bottles for company. And he hadn't always been as bad as he'd gotten just lately. Most of the time he'd been a quiet kind of drunk; he'd just amble peaceably into town when supplies got low, draw another slice of that big, fat bank account of his, invest it in more bottles, and then amble straight out again.

But a man who did that much drinking all alone was bound to get it affecting him some time sooner or later. Last week there'd been that business of him waving a gun at Miss Hennessey, and telling her it was open season on schoolmarms; a couple of weeks before that, he'd shot out Plummers' hardware-store window.

He shifted uncomfortably in his seat. Heck, what else could he have done? With Abe going the way he was, he'd only been doing him a kindness by telling him to go home. But when he'd pulled that darn-fool little toy gun on him (a funny-looking gadget, that was for sure, and it was too bad his shot had practically demolished it before finding

its way into Abe's chest), he'd reacted instinctively. The last gun had been a real one, and loaded, so why not this one? Besides, it had been kind of dark, Abe had been half-turned when he pulled it, and he'd gotten pretty mad and said some mean and stupid things when he'd had the other one taken from him. And although he'd hauled it out awful quick for a man in his obvious condition, Sheriff Bisbee was modesly forced to concede that he'd been up against the fastest gun in eight counties when he'd done it. It was sure funny about how fast he'd pulled it, though—from the look of him when he came staggering up the walk he couldn't have been much drunker. There was always a chance he'd have gotten away with winging him, but it might have cost him his own blood to have taken a chance like that . . .

He winced. He'd never been a hard-drinking man himself, but he wasn't a teetotaller, either. After this, though . . .

"'Course, I always knowed," he said aloud, "that too much likker was supposed to play real hob with a man's internals. Reckon Abe must've bin just about ready to go, anyways." He looked hopefully at the deputy, deriving a little comfort from this line of reasoning. "Purty advanced, like. Fust time I ever heerd of a man's blood turnin' green on him like that." He eyed the two glasses and the opened bottle by his elbow, ran his tongue across his lips, reflectively, and looked doubtfully at the deputy. "Wouldn't care fer one fer the road, I s'pose?"

The deputy shook his head, decisively.

"Funny thing," he said. He cleared his throat, spat agin, and looked thoughtful. "Don't seem t' be carryin' much of a thirst with me t'night."

Sheriff Bisbee nodded, solemnly, and firmly corked the bottle.

— ROBERT J. TILLEY

Presenting the final part of Harry Harrison's great serial

MAKE ROOM! MAKE ROOM!

by Harry Harrison

SYNOPSIS

The year is 1999 and the world is a living hell. Overpopulation and overconsumption have caught up with the western world, and there is no essential difference between the teeming slums of London, Bombay or New York City.

Billy Chung is a teen-ager, a native of New York, a child of this world, and he is a murderer. He wanted to steal, but he killed instead, and in murdering the politician Mike O'Brien he has changed a number of lives. Tab Fielding, Mike's bodyguard, is out of a job. Shirl Green, Mike's mistress, has had her life disrupted too. Only Andy Rusch, a police detective, takes the death in his stride, because at least 10 of the city's 35 million inhabitants are murdered every day. But even Andy finds his life changed when he is assigned to investigate the murder and finds himself enjoying the pleasures of the dead man's black market existence—and even the affections of the dead man's girl. For a little while Andy has escaped the realities of the city; dirt, people and violence, all made worse by the unending heat wave. The streets of New York City in August are hell on Earth.

Reality can not be escaped in this city. There is a food shortage and a water shortage. Billy Chung discovers that Andy is searching for him and he flees, and it is only by chance that he finds a temporary refuge in the ruins of the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Shirl must leave the luxury of the dead man's apartment and she moves in with Andy. What happiness they have must be found in the few hours a day when Andy is not working, and his work is not pleasant. The search for Billy Chung is forgotten as food riots sweep the city and even the detectives are forced to act as riot police.

three

New York City trembled on the brink of disaster. Every locked warehouse was a nucleus of dissent, surrounded by crowds who were hungry and afraid and searching for someone to blame. Their anger incited them to riot, and the food riots turned to water riots and then to looting, wherever this was possible. The police fought back, only the thinnest of barriers between angry protest and bloody chaos.

At first night sticks and weighted clubs stopped the trouble, and when this failed gas dispersed the crowds. The tension grew, since the people who fled only reassembled again in a different place. The solid jets of water from the riot trucks stopped them easily when they tried to break into the Welfare stations, but there were not enough trucks, nor was there more water to be had once they had pumped dry their tanks. The Health Department had forbidden the use of river water: it would have been like spraying poison. The little water that was available was badly needed for the fires that were springing up throughout the city. With the streets blocked in many places the fire fighting equipment could not get through and the trucks were forced to make long detours. Some of the fires were spreading and by noon all of the equipment had been committed and was in use.

The first gun was fired a few minutes past twelve, by a Welfare Department guard who killed a man who had broken open a window of the Tompkins Square food depot and had tried to climb in. This was the first but not the last shot fired—nor was it the last person to be killed.

Flying wire sealed off some of the trouble areas, but there was only a limited supply of it. When it ran out the

copters fluttered helplessly over the surging streets and acted as aerial observation posts for the police, finding the places where reserves were sorely needed. It was a fruitless labour because there were no reserves, everyone was in the front line.

After the first conflict in Madison Square nothing else made a strong impression on Andy. For the rest of the day and most of the night, he along with every other policeman in the city, was braving violence and giving violence to restore law and order to a city torn by battle. The only rest he had was after he had fallen victim to his own gas and had managed to make his way to the Department of Hospitals ambulance for treatment. An orderly washed out his eyes and gave him a tablet to counteract the gut-tearing nausea. He lay on one of the stretchers inside, clutching his helmet, bombs and club to his chest, while he recovered. The ambulance driver sat on another stretcher by the door, armed with a .30 calibre carbine, to discourage anyone from too great an interest in the ambulance or its valuable surgical contents. Andy would liked to have lain there longer, but the cold mist was rolling in through the open doorway, and he began to shiver so hard that his teeth shook together. It was difficult to drag to his feet and climb to the ground, yet once he was moving he felt a little better—and warmer. The attack on the Welfare centre had been broken up, maybe his grabbing the bullhorn had helped, and he moved slowly to join the nearest cluster of blue coated figures, wrinkling his nose at the foul odour of his clothes.

From this point on the fatigue never left him and he had memories only of shouting faces, running feet, the sound of shots, screams, the thud of gas grenades, of something unseen that had been thrown at him and hit the back of his hand and raised an immense bruise.

By nightfall it was raining, a cold downpour mixed with sleet, and it was this and exhaustion that drove the people from the streets, not the police. Yet when the crowds were gone the police found that their work was just beginning. Gaping windows and broken doorways had to be guarded until they could be repaired, the injured had to be found and brought in for treatment, while the Fire Department needed aid in halting the countless fires. This went on

through the night and at dawn Andy found himself slumped on a bench in the precinct, hearing his name being called off from a list by Lieutenant Grassioli.

"And that's all that can be spared," the lieutenant added. "You men draw rations before you leave and turn in your riot equipment. I want you all back here at eighteen-hundred and I don't want excuses. Our troubles aren't over yet."

Sometime during the night the rain had stopped. The rising sun cast long shadows down the crosstown streets, putting a golden sheen on the wet, black pavement. A burned-out brownstone was still smoking and Andy picked his way through the charred wreckage that littered the street in front of it. On the corner of Seventh Avenue were the crushed wrecks of two pedicabs, already stripped of any usable parts, and a few feet farther on the huddled body of a man. He might be asleep, but when Andy passed the upturned face gave evidence that the man was painfully dead. He walked on, ignoring it. The Department of Sanitation would be collecting only corpses today.

Going up the stairs in his building he trod heavily on some of the sleepers but was too fatigued to care—or even notice. He had trouble fumbling his key into the lock and Sol heard him and came to open it.

"I just made some soup," Sol said. "You timed it perfectly."

Andy pulled the broken remains of some weedcrackers from his coat pocket and spilled them onto the table.

"Been stealing food?" Sol asked, picking up a piece and nibbling on it. "I thought no grub was being given out for two more days?"

"Police ration."

"Only fair. You can't beat up the citizenry on an empty stomach. I'll throw some of these into the soup, give it some body. I guess you didn't see TV yesterday so you wouldn't know about all the fun and games in Congress. Things are really jumping . . ."

"Is Shirl awake yet?" Andy asked, shucking out of his coat and dropping heavily into a chair.

Sol was silent a moment, then he said slowly, "She's not here."

Andy yawned. "It's pretty early to go out. Why . . . ?"

"Not today, Andy." Sol stirred the soup with his back turned. "She went out yesterday, a couple of hours after you did. She's not back yet——"

"You mean she was out all the time during the riots—and last night too? What did you do?" He sat upright, his bone-weariness forgotten.

"What could I do? Go out and get myself trampled to death like the rest of the old fogies? I bet she's all right, she probably saw all the trouble and decided to stay with friends instead of coming back here."

"What friends? What are you talking about? I have to go find her."

"Sit!" Sol ordered. "What can you do out there? Have some soup and get some sleep, that's the best thing you can do. She'll be okay. I know it," he added reluctantly.

"What do you know, Sol?" Andy took him by the shoulders, half turning him from the stove.

"Don't handle the merchandise!" Sol shouted, pushing the hand away. Then, in a quieter voice. "All I know is she just didn't go out of here for nothing, she had a reason. She had her old coat on, but I could see what looked like a real nifty dress underneath. And nylon stockings. A fortune on her legs. And when she said so long I saw she had lots of makeup on."

"Sol—what are you trying to say?"

"I'm not trying—I'm saying. She was dressed for visiting, not for shopping, like she was on the way out to see someone. Her old man maybe, she could be visiting him."

"Why should she want to see him?"

"You tell me? You two had a fight, didn't you? Maybe she went away for a while to cool off."

"A fight . . . I guess so." Andy dropped back into the chair, squeezing his forehead between his palms. Had it only been last night? No, the night before last. It seemed a hundred years since they had had that stupid argument. He looked up with sudden fear. "She didn't take her things—anything with her?" he asked.

"Just a little bag," Sol said, and put a steaming bowl on the table in front of Andy. "Eat up. I'll pour one for myself." Then, "She'll be back."

Andy was almost too tired to argue—and what could be said? He spooned the soup automatically, then realized as

he tasted it that he was very hungry. He ate with his elbow on the table, his free hand supporting his head.

"You should have heard the speeches in the senate yesterday," Sol said. "Funniest show on earth. They're trying to push this Emergency Bill through—some emergency, it's only been a hundred years in the making—and you should hear them talking all around the little points and not mentioning the big ones." His voice settled into a rich, southern accent. "Faced by dire straits, we propose a survey of all the ee-mense riches of this the greatest ee-luvial basin, the delta, suh, of the mightiest of rivers, the Mississippi. Dikes and drains, suh, science, suh, and you will have here the richest farm lands in the western world!" Sol blew on his soup angrily. "Dikes is right—another finger in the dike. They've been over this ground a thousand times before. But does anyone mention out loud the sole and only reason for the Emergency Bill? They do not. After all these years they're too chicken to come right out and tell the truth, so they got it hidden away in one of the little riders tacked onto the bottom."

"What are you talking about?" Andy asked, only half listening.

"Birth control, that's what. They are finally getting around to legalizing clinics that will be open to anyone—married or not—and making it a law that all mothers *must* be supplied with birth control information. Boy, are we going to hear some howling when the bluenoses find out about that!"

"Not now, Sol. I'm tired. Did Shirl say anything about when she would be back?"

"Just what I told you . . ." He stopped and listened to the sound of footsteps coming down the hall. They stopped—and there was a light knocking on the door.

Andy was there first, twisting at the knob, tearing the door open.

"Shirl!" he said. "Are you all right?"

"Yes, sure—I'm fine."

He held her to him, tightly, almost cutting off her breath. "With the riots—I didn't know what to think," he said. "I just came in a little while ago myself. Where have you been? What happened?"

"I just wanted to get out for awhile, that's all." She wrinkled her nose. "What's that funny smell?"

He stepped away from her, anger welling up through the fatigue. "I caught some of my own puke gas and heaved up. It's hard to get off. What do you mean that you wanted to get out for awhile?"

"Let me get my coat off."

Andy followed her into the other room and closed the door behind them. She was taking a pair of high-heeled shoes out of the bag she carried and putting them into the closet. "Well?" he said.

"Just that, it's not complicated. I was feeling trapped in here, with the shortages and the cold and everything, and never seeing you, and I felt bad about the fight we had. Nothing seemed to be going right. So I thought if I dressed up and went to one of the restaurants where I used to go, just have a cup of koffee or something, I might feel better. A morale booster, you know." She looked up at his cold face, then glanced quickly away.

"Then what happened?" he asked.

"I'm not in the witness box, Andy. Why the accusing tone?"

He turned his back and looked out the window. "I'm not accusing you of anything, but—you were out all night. How do you expect me to feel?"

"Well, you know how bad it was yesterday, I was afraid to come back. I was up at Curley's——"

"The meateasy?"

"Yes, but if you don't eat anything it's not expensive. It's just the food that costs. I met some people I knew and we talked, they were going to a party and invited me and I went along. We were watching the news about the riots on TV and no one wanted to go out, so the party just went on and on. That's about all, a lot of people stayed overnight and so did I." She slipped off her dress and hung it up, then put on wool slacks and a heavy sweater.

"Is that all you did, just spend the night?"

"Andy, you're tired. Why don't you get some sleep? We can talk about this some other time."

"I want to talk about it now."

"Please, there's nothing more to be said . . ."

"Yes there is. Whose apartment was it?"

"No one you know. He's not a friend of Mike's, just someone I used to see at parties."

"He?" The silence stretched tight, until Andy's question snapped it. "Did you spend the night with him?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Of course I want to know. What do you think I'm asking you for? You slept with him, didn't you?"

"Yes."

The calmness of her voice, the suddenness of her answer stopped him, as though he had asked the question hoping to get another answer. He groped for the words to express what he felt and, finally, all he could ask was, "Why?"

"Why?" This single word opened her lips and spilled out the cold anger. "Why? What other choice did I have? I had dinner and drinks and I had to pay for it. What else do I have to pay with?"

"Stop it, Shirl, you're being . . ."

"I'm being what? Truthful? Would you let me stay here if I didn't sleep with you?"

"That's different!"

"Is it?" She began to tremble. "Andy, I hope it is, it should be—but I just don't know any more. I want us to be happy, I don't know why we fight. That's not what I want. But things seem to be going so wrong. If you were here, if I was with you more . . ."

"We settled that the other night. I have my work—what else can I do?"

"Nothing else I suppose, nothing . . ." She clasped her fingers together to stop their shaking. "Go to sleep now, you need the rest."

She went into the other room and he did not stir until the door clicked shut. He started to follow her, then stopped and sat on the edge of the bed. What could he say to her? Slowly he pulled off his shoes and, fully dressed, stretched out and pulled the blanket over him.

Tired and exhausted as he was, he did not fall asleep for a very long time.

Since most people don't like to get up while it is still dark, the morning line for the water ration was always the shortest of the day. Yet there were still enough people about when Shirl hurried to get a place in line so that no one ever bothered her. By the time she had her water the sun would be up and the streets were a good deal safer. Besides that, she and Mrs. Miles had fallen into the habit of meeting every day, whoever came first saved a place in line, and walking back together. Mrs. Miles always had the little boy with her who still seemed to be ill with the kwash. Apparently her husband needed the protein-rich peanut butter more than the child did. The water ration had been increased. This was so welcome that Shirl tried not to notice how much harder it was to carry, and how her back hurt when she climbed the stairs. There was even enough water now to wash with. The water points were supposed to open again by mid-November in the very latest, and that wasn't too far away. This morning, like most of the other mornings, Shirl was back before eight and when she came into the apartment she saw that Andy was dressed and just ready to leave.

"Talk to him, Shirl," Andy said. "Convince him that he is being a chunkhead. It must be senility." He kissed her good-bye before he went out. It had been three weeks since the fight and on the surface things were the same as before, but underneath something had changed, some of the feeling of security—or perhaps love—had been eroded away. They did not talk about it.

"What's wrong?" she asked, peeling off the outer layers of clothing that swaddled her. Andy stopped in the doorway.

"Ask Sol, I'm sure he'll be happy to tell you in great detail. But when he's all through remember one thing. He's wrong."

"Every man to his own opinion," Sol said placidly, rubbing the grease from an ancient can of dubbing onto an even more ancient pair of Army boots.

"Opinion nothing," Andy said. "You're just asking for trouble. I'll see you tonight, Shirl. If it's as quiet as yesterday I shouldn't be too late." He closed the door and she locked it behind him.

"What on earth is he talking about?" Shirl asked, warming her hands over the brick of seacoal smouldering in the stove. It was raw and cold out, and the wind rattled the window in its frame.

"He's talking about protest," Sol said, admiring the buffed, blackened toe of the boot. "Or maybe better he's talking against protest. You heard about the Emergency Bill? It's been schmeared all over TV for the last week."

"Is that the one they call the Baby-killer Bill?"

"They?" Sol shouted, scrubbing angrily at the boot. "Who are they? A bunch of bums, that's who. People with their minds in the Middle Ages and their feet in a rut. In other words—bums."

"But, Sol—you can't force people to practise something they don't believe in. A lot of them still think that it has something to do with killing babies."

"So they think wrong. Am I to blame because the world is full of fatheads? You know well enough that birth control has nothing to do with killing babies. In fact it saves them. Which is the bigger crime—letting kids die of disease and starvation, or seeing that the unwanted ones don't get born in the first place?"

"Putting it that way sounds different. But aren't you forgetting about natural law? Isn't birth control a violation of that?"

"Darling, the history of medicine is the history of the violation of natural law. The Church—and that includes the Protestant as well as the Catholic—tried to stop the use of anaesthetics because it was natural law for a woman to have pain while giving birth. And it was natural law for people to die of sickness. And natural law that the body not be cut open and repaired. There was even a guy named Bruno that got burned at the stake because he didn't believe in absolute truth and natural laws like these. *Everything* was against natural law once, and now birth control has got to join the rest. Because all of our troubles today come from the fact that there are too many people in the world."

"That's too simple, Sol. Things aren't really that black and white . . ."

"Oh yes they are, no one wants to admit it, that's all. Look, we live in a lousy world today and our troubles come from only one reason. Too goddamn many people. Now, how come that for ninety-nine per cent of the time that people have been on this earth we never had any over-population problems?"

"I don't know—I never thought about it."

"You're not the only one. The reason—aside from wars and floods and earthquakes, unimportant things like that—was that everybody was sick like dogs. A lot of babies died, a lot of kids died, and everybody else died young. A coolie in China living on nothing but polished rice used to die of old age before he was thirty. I heard that on TV last night, and I believe it. And one of the Senators read from a hornbook, that's a school book they used to have for kids back in colonial America, that said something like 'be kind to your little sister or brother, he won't be with you very long'. They bred like flies and died like flies. Infant mortality—boy! And not so long ago, I tell you. In 1949 after I got out of the Army, I was in Mexico. Babies there die from more diseases than you or I ever heard of. They never baptize the kids until after they are a year old because most of them are dead by that time and baptisms cost a lot of money. That's why there never used to be a population problem. The whole world used to be one big Mexico, breeding and dying and just about staying even."

"Then—what changed?"

"I'll tell you what changed." He shook the boot at her. "Modern medicine arrived. Everything had a cure. Malaria was wiped out along with all the other diseases that had been killing people young and keeping the population down. Death control arrived. Old people lived longer. More babies lived who would have died, and now they grow up into old people who live longer still. People are still being fed into the world just as fast—they're not just being taken out of it at the same rate. Three are born for every two that die. So the population doubles and doubles—and keeps on doubling at a quicker rate all the time. We got a plague of people, a disease of people infesting the world. We got more people who are living longer. Less

people have to be born, that's the answer. We got death control—we got to match it with birth control."

"I still don't see how you can when people still think it has something to do with killing babies."

"Stop with the dead babies!" Sol shouted, and heaved the boot the length of the room. "There are no babies involved in this—alive or dead—except in the pointed heads of the idiots who repeat what they have heard without understanding a word of it. Present company excepted," he added in a not-too-sincere voice. "How can you kill something that never existed? We're all winners in the ovarian derby, yet I never heard anyone crying about the—if you will excuse the biological term—the sperm who were the losers in the race."

"Sol—what on earth are you talking about?"

"The ovarian derby. Every time an egg is fertilized there are a couple of million sperm swimming along, racing along trying to do the job. Only one of them can win the derby, since the very instant fertilization takes place all the rest of them are out in the cold. Does anyone give a damn about the millions of sperm that don't make it? The answer is no. So what are all the complicated rhythm charts, devices, pills, caps and drugs that are used for birth control? Nothing but ways of seeing that *one* other sperm doesn't make it either. So where do the babies come in? I don't see any babies?"

"When you put it that way, I guess they don't. But if it is that simple how come nothing was ever done before this?"

Sol breathed a long and tremulous sigh and gloomily retrieved the boot and went back to polishing it.

"Shirl," he said, "if I could answer that they would probably make me president tomorrow. Nothing is ever that simple when it comes down to finding an answer. Everyone has got their own ideas and they push them and say to hell with everyone else. That's the history of the human race. It got us on top, only now it is pushing us off. The thing is that people will put up with any kind of discomfort, and dying babies, and old age at thirty as long as it has always been that way. Try to get them to change and they fight you, even while they're dying, saying it was good enough for grandpa—cough, cough—so it's good

enough for me. Bango, dead. When the UN sprayed the houses with DDT in Mexico—to kill the mosquitoes who carried malaria that killed the people—they had to have soldiers hold the people back so they could spray. The locals didn't like that white stuff on the furniture, didn't look good. I saw it myself. But that was the rarity. Death control slid into the world mostly without people even knowing it. Doctors used better and better drugs, water supplies improved, public health people saw to it that diseases didn't spread the way they used to. It came about almost naturally without hardly being noticed, and now we got too many people in the world. And something has to be done about it. But doing *something* means that people must change, make an effort, use their minds, which is what most people do not like to do."

"Yet, it does seem an intrusion of privacy, Sol. Telling people they can't have any children."

"Stop it! We're almost back to the dead babies again! Birth control doesn't mean no children. It just means that people have a choice how they want to live. Like rutting, unthinking, breeding animals—or like reasoning creatures. Will a married couple have one, two or three children—whatever number will keep the world population steady and provide a full life of opportunity for everyone? Or will they have four, five or six, unthinking and uncaring, and raise them in hunger and cold and misery? Like that world out there," he added, pointing out of the window.

"If the world is like that—then everyone must be unthinking and selfish, like you say?"

"No—I think better of the human race. They've just never been told, they've been born animals and died animals, too many of them. I blame the stinking politicians and so-called public leaders who have avoided the issue and covered it up because it was controversial and what the hell, it will be years before it matters and I'm going to get mine now. So mankind gobbled in a century all the world's resources that had taken millions of years to store up, and no one on the top gave a damn or listened to all the voices that were trying to warn them, they just let us overproduce and overconsume, until now the oil is gone, the topsoil depleted and washed away, the trees chopped down, the animals extinct, the earth poisoned, and all we have to

show for this is seven billion people fighting over the scraps that are left, living a miserable existence—and still breeding without control. So I say the time has come to stand up and be counted.”

Sol pushed his feet into the boots, laced them up and tied them. He put on a heavy sweater, then took an ancient, moth-eaten battle jacket from the wardrobe. A row of ribbons drew a line of colour across the olive drab, and under them were a sharpshooter's medal and a technical school badge. “It must have shrunk,” Sol said, grunting as he struggled to close it over his stomach. Then he wrapped a scarf around his neck and shrugged into his ancient, battered overcoat.

“Where are you going?” Shirl asked, baffled.

“To make a statement. To ask for trouble as our friend Andy told me. I'm seventy-five years old and I reached this venerable state by staying out of trouble, keeping my mouth shut and not volunteering, just like I learned in the Army. Maybe there were too many guys in the world like me, I don't know. Maybe I should have made my protest a lot earlier, but I never saw anything I felt like protesting about—which I do now. The forces of darkness and the forces of light, they're meeting today. I'm going to join with the forces of light.” He jammed a woollen watch cap down over his ears and stalked to the door.

“Sol, what on earth are you talking about? Tell me please,” Shirl begged, not knowing whether to laugh or to cry.

“There's a rally. The Save Our Babies nuts are marching on City Hall, trying to lick the Emergency Bill. There's another meeting, of people in favour of the bill, and the bigger the turnout there, the better. If enough people stand up and shout they might be heard, maybe the bill will get through Congress this time. Maybe.”

“Sol . . .” she called out, but the door was closed.

Andy brought him home, late that night, helping the two ambulance men carry the stretcher up the stairs. Sol was strapped to the stretcher, white-faced and unconscious, breathing heavily.

“There was a street fight,” Andy said, “almost a riot when the march started. Sol was in it. He got knocked

down. His hip is broken." He looked at her, unsmiling and tired as the stretcher was carried in.

"That can be very serious with old people," he said.

five

There was a thin crust of ice on the water, and it crackled and broke when Billy pushed the can down through it. As he climbed back up the stairs he saw that another rusted metal step had been exposed. They had dipped a lot of water out of the compartment, but it still appeared to be at least half full.

"There's a little ice on top, but I don't think it can freeze all the way down solid," he told Peter as he closed and dogged shut the door. "There's still plenty of water there, plenty."

He measured the water carefully every day and locked the door on it as though it were a bank vault full of money. Why not? It was as good as money. As long as the water shortage continued they could get a good price for it, all the D's they needed to keep warm and eat well.

"How about that, Pete?" he said, hanging the can from the bracket over the seacoal fire. "Did you ever stop to think that we can eat this water? Because we can sell it and buy food, that's why."

Peter squatted on his hams, staring fixedly out the door, and paid no attention until Billy shouted to him and repeated what he had said. Peter shook his head, unhappily.

"Whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame," he intoned. "I have explained to you, Billy, we are approaching the end of all material things. If you covet them you are lost . . ."

"So—are you lost? You're wearing clothes bought with that water and eating the grub—so what do you mean?"

"I eat simply to exist for the Day," he answered solemnly, squinting through the open door at the watery November sun. "We are so close, just a few weeks now, it is hard to believe. Soon it will be days. What a blessing that it should come during our lifetimes." He pulled himself to his feet

and went out: Billy could hear him climbing down to the ground.

"World coming to an end," Billy muttered to himself as he stirred ener-G granules into the water. "Nuts, plain nuts."

This wasn't the first time he had thought that—but only to himself, never aloud in Peter's hearing. Everything the man said did sound crazy but it could be true too. Peter could prove it with the Bible and other books, he didn't have the books now, but he had read them so much he could recite whole long pieces out of them. Why couldn't it be true? What other reason could there be for the world being like this? It hadn't always been this way, the old films on TV proved that, yet it had changed so much so quickly. There had to be a reason, so maybe it was like Peter said, the world would end and New Year's Day would be Doomsday . . .

"It's a nutty idea," he said out loud, but he shivered at the same time and held his hands over the smoking fire.

Things weren't that bad. He was wearing two sweaters and an old suit jacket with pieces of inner tube sewed on to patch the elbows, warmer than anything he had ever worn before. And they ate well; he noisily sucked the ener-G broth from the spoon. Buying the Welfare cards had cost a lot of D's but it was worth it, well worth it. They got Welfare food rations now, and even water rations so they could save their own water to sell. And he had been sniffing LSD dirt at least once a week. The world wasn't going to come to an end for a long while yet. The hell with that, the world was all right as long as you kept your eyes open and looked out for yourself.

A jingling clank sounded outside, from one of the pieces of rusty metal hanging from the bare ribs of the ship. Anyone who tried to climb up to the cabin now had to push past these dangling obstacles and give clear warning of their approach. Since the discovery of the water they had to be wary of any others who might want to move in as occupants. Billy picked up the crowbar and walked to the door.

"I made us some food, Peter," he said, leaning over the edge. A strange, bristle-bearded face looked up at him.

"Get down from there!" Billy shouted. The man

mumbled something around the length of sharpened automobile leaf spring that he had clamped in his mouth, then hung by one hand and took out the weapon with his free hand.

"Bettyjo!" he shouted in a hoarse voice, and Billy jumped as something whizzed by his ear and crashed into the metal bulkhead behind him.

A squat woman with an immense tangle of blonde hair stood among the ribs of the ship below, and Billy dodged as she hurled another lump of broken concrete at him. "Go on, Donald!" she screeched. "Get up there!"

A second man, hairy and filthy enough to be a twin to the first one, scrambled over the rusty metal and began to climb up on the other side of the ship. Billy saw the trap at once. He could brain anyone who tried to get to the strip of deck in front of the door—but only one at a time. He couldn't guard both sides at once. While he was beating off one attacker the other would climb up behind him.

"Peter!" he shouted as loud as he could, "Peter!"

Another piece of concrete burst into dust behind him. He ran to the edge and swung his crowbar at the first man who bent lower and let it clang against the beam above his head. The noise gave Billy an idea and he jumped back and pounded his crowbar against the metal wall of the deck-house until the hammering boom rolled out across the shipyard. "Peter!" he shouted once more, desperately, then leaped for the other end where the second man had thrown an arm over the edge. The man withdrew it hurriedly and swung down out of range of his weapon, jeering up at him.

When Billy turned back he saw that the first man had both arms over the edge and was pulling himself up. Screaming, more afraid than angry, Billy ran at him swinging down his crowbar: it grazed the man's head and thudded into his shoulder, knocking the auto spring out of his mouth at the same time. The man roared with rage but did not fall. Billy swung his weapon up for another blow, but found himself caught roughly from behind by the second man. He couldn't move—could scarcely breathe—as the man before him spat out fragments of teeth. Blood ran down into his beard and he gurgled as he pulled himself all the way up and began beating Billy with granite fists. Billy howled with pain, lashed out with his feet, tried

to break free, but there was no escape. The two men, laughing now, pushed him over the edge of the deck, prying at his clutching hands, sending him towards destruction on the jagged metal twenty feet below.

He was hanging by his hands as they stamped at his fingers, when they suddenly jumped back. This was the first that Billy realized Peter had returned and climbed up behind him, swinging his length of pipe at the two men above. In the moment's respite Billy transferred his grip to the skeletal side of the ship and eased his aching body towards the ground that looked impossibly far below. The invaders had occupied the ship and had the advantage now. Peter dodged a swing of the leaf spring and joined Billy in a retreat to the ground. Words penetrated and Billy realized that the woman was screaming curses, and had been for some time.

"Kill 'em both!" she shouted. "He hit me, knocked me down. Kill 'em!" She was hurling lumps of concrete again, but was so carried away by rage that none of them came close. When Peter and Billy reached the ground she waddled quickly away, calling curses over her shoulder, her mass of yellow hair flying around her head. The two men above blinked down at them, but said nothing. They had done their job. They were in possession of the ship.

"We shall leave," Peter said, putting his arm around Billy to help him walk, using his pipe as a staff to lean upon. "They are strong and have the ship now—and the water. And they are wise enough to guard it well, at least the harlot Bettyjo is. I know her, a woman of evil who gives her body to those two so they will do what she asks. Yes, it is a sign. She is a harlot of Babylon, displacing us . . ."

"We have to get back in," Billy gasped.

" . . . showing us that we must go to the greater harlot of Babylon, there across the river. There is no turning back."

Billy sank to the ground, gasping for breath and trying to knead some of the pain from his fingers, while Peter calmly looked back at the ship that had been their home and fortune. Three small figures capered on the high deck and their jeers came faintly through the cold wind from the bay. Billy began to shiver.

"Come," Peter said gently, and helped him to his feet.

"There is no place to stay here, no dwelling any more. I know where we can get shelter in Manhattan, I have been there many times before."

"I don't want to go there," Billy said, drawing back, remembering the police.

"We must. We will be safe there."

Billy walked slowly after him. Why not? he thought, the cops would have forgotten about him a long time ago. It might be all right, specially if Peter knew some place to go. If he stayed here he would have to stay alone: the fear of that was greater than any remembered fear of the police. They would make out as long as they stuck together.

They were halfway across Manhattan Bridge before Billy realized that one of his pockets had been torn away in the fight. "Wait," he called to Peter, then, more frightened, "Wait!" as he searched through his clothing in growing panic. "They're gone," he finally said, leaning against the railing. "The Welfare cards. They must have got lost during the fight. Maybe you have them?"

"No, as you recall, you took them to get the water yesterday. They are not important."

"Not important!" Billy sobbed.

They had the bridge to themselves, an aching winter loneliness. The colour of the slate-grey water below was reflected in the lowering clouds above, which were driven along by the icy wind that cut sharply through their clothes. It was too cold to stay and Billy started forward, Peter following.

"Where are we going?" Billy asked when they came off the bridge and turned down Division Street. It seemed a little warmer here, surrounded by the shuffling crowds. He always felt better with people around.

"To the lots. There are a large number of them near the housing developments," Peter said.

"You're nuts, the lots are full, they always have been."

"Not this time of year," Peter answered, pointing to the filthy ice that filled the gutter. "Living in the lots is never easy, and this time of year it is particularly hard for the older people and invalids."

It was only on the television screen that Billy had seen the streets of the city filled with cars. For him it was a

historical—and therefore uninteresting—fact, because the lots had been there for as long as he could remember, a permanent and decaying part of the landscape. As traffic had declined and operating automobiles became rarer, there was no longer a need for the hundreds of parking lots scattered about the city. They began to gradually fill up with abandoned cars, some hauled there by the police, and others pushed in by hand. Each lot was now a small village with people living in every car because, uncomfortable as the cars were, they were still better than the street. Though each car had long since had its full quota of inhabitants, vacancies occurred in the winter when the weaker ones died.

They started to work their way through the big lot behind the Seward Park Houses, but were driven off by a gang of teen-agers armed with broken bricks and homemade knives. Walking down Madison Street they saw that the fence around the small park next to the La Guardia Houses had been pushed down years earlier, and that the park was now filled with the rusting, wheelless remains of cars. There were no aggressive teen-agers here and the few people walking about had a shuffling, hopeless look. Smoke rose from only one of the chimneys that projected from most of the automobiles. Peter and Billy pushed their way between the cars, peering in through windshields and cracked windows, scraping clear patches in the frost when they couldn't see in. Pale, ghostlike faces turned to look up at them or forms stirred inside as they worked their way through the lot.

"This looks like a good one," Billy said, pointing to a hulking, ancient, Buick turbine sedan with its brake drums half sunk into the dirt. The windows were heavily frosted on both sides, and there was only silence from inside when they tried all the locked doors. "I wonder how they get in?" Billy said, then climbed up on the hood. There was a sliding sunroof over the front seat and it moved a little when he pushed at it. "Bring the pipe up here, this might be it," he called down to Peter.

The cover shifted when they levered at it with the pipe, then slid back. The grey light poured down on the face and staring eyes of an old man. He had an evil looking club clutched in one hand, a bar of some kind bound about with

lengths of knotted cord that held shards of broken, pointed glass into place. He was dead.

"He must have been tough to hold on to a big car like this all by himself," Billy said.

He was a big man and stiff with the cold and they had to work hard to get him up through the opening. They had no need for the filthy rags bound around him, though they did take his Welfare card. Peter dragged him out to the street for the Department of Sanitation to find, while Billy waited inside the car, standing with his head out of the opening, glowering in all directions, the glass-studded club ready if anyone wanted to dispute the occupation of their new home.

six

"My, that does look good," Mrs. Miles said, waiting at the end of the long counter, watching as the Welfare clerk slid the small package across the counter to Shirl. "Someone sick in your fambly?"

"Where's the old package, lady?" the clerk complained. "You know you don't get the new one without turning in the old. And three D's."

"I'm sorry," Shirl said, taking the crumpled plastic envelope from her shopping bag and handing it to him along with the money. He grumbled something and made a check on one of his record boards. "Next," he called out.

"Yes," Shirl told Mrs. Miles, who was squinting at the package and shaping the words slowly with her mouth as she spelled out the printing on it. "It's Sol, he had an accident. He shares the apartment with us and he must be over seventy. He broke his hip and can't get out of bed; this is for him."

"Meat flakes, that sure sounds nice," Mrs. Miles said, handing back the package and following it with her eyes as it vanished into Shirl's bag. "How do you cook them?"

"You can do whatever you like with them, but I make a thick soup with weedcrumbs, it's easier to eat that way. Sol can't sit up at all."

"A man like that should be in the hospital, specially when he's so old."

"He was in the hospital, but there's no room at all now. As soon as they found out he lived in an apartment they got in touch with Andy and made him take Sol home. Anyone who has a place they can go to has to leave. Bellevue is full up and they have been taking over whole units in Peter Cooper Village and putting in extra beds, but there still isn't room enough." Shirl realized that there was something different about Mrs. Miles today: this was the first time she had seen her without the little boy. "How is Tommy—is he worse?"

"No better, no worse. Kwash stays the same all the time, which is okay because I keep drawing the ration." She pointed to the plastic cup in her bag, into which had been dropped a small dollop of peanut butter. "Tommy gotta stay home while the weather is so cold, there ain't enough clothes for all the kids to go around, not with Winny going out to school every day. She's smart. She's going to finish the whole three years. I haven't seen you at the water ration a long time now."

"Andy goes to get it, I have to stay with Sol."

"You're lucky having someone sick in the house, you can get in here for a ration. It's going to be weedcrackers and water for the rest of the city this winter, that's for sure."

Lucky? Shirl thought, knotting her kerchief under her chin, looking around the dark, bare room of the Welfare Special Ration section. The counter divided the room in half, with the clerks and the tiers of half-empty shelves on one side, the shuffling lines of people on the other. Here were the tight-drawn faces and trembling limbs of the sick, the ones in need of special diets. Diabetics, chronic invalids, people with deficiency diseases, and the numerous pregnant women. Were these the lucky ones?

"What you going to have for dinner tomorrow?" Mrs. Miles asked, peering through the dirt-filmed window, trying to see the sky outside.

"I don't know, the same as always I guess. Why?"

"It might snow. Maybe we might have a white Thanksgiving like we used to have when I was a little girl. We're going to have a fish, I been saving for it. Tomorrow's

Thursday, the twenty-fifth of November. Didn't you remember?"

Shirl shook her head. "I guess not. Things have been turned upside down since Sol has been sick."

They walked, heads lowered to escape the blast of the wind, and when they turned the corner from Ninth Avenue into Nineteenth Street, Shirl walked into someone coming in the opposite direction, jarring the woman back against the wall.

"I'm sorry," Shirl said. "I didn't see you . . ."

"You're not blind," the other woman snapped. "Walking around running into people." Her eyes widened as she looked at Shirl. "You!"

"I said I was sorry, Mrs. Haggerty. It was an accident." She started to walk on but the other woman stepped in front of her, blocking her way.

"I knew I'd find you," Mrs. Haggerty said triumphantly. "I'm going to have the court of law on you. you stole all my brother's money and he didn't leave me none, none at all. Not only that but all the bills I had to pay, the water bill, everything. They were so high I had to sell all the furniture to pay them, and it still wasn't enough and they're after me for the rest. You're going to pay!"

Shirl remembered Andy taking the showers and something of her thoughts must have shown on her face because Mary Haggerty's shout rose to a shrill screech.

"Don't laugh at me, I'm an honest woman! A thing like you can't stand in a public street smiling at me. The whole world knows what you are, you . . ."

Her voice was cut off by a sharp crack as Mrs. Miles slapped her hard across the face. "Just hold onto that dirty tongue, girly," Mrs. Miles said. "No one talks to a friend of mine like that."

"You can't do that to me!" Mike's sister shrieked.

"I already done it—and you'll get more if you keep hanging around here."

The two women faced each other and Shirl was forgotten for the moment. They were alike in years and background, though Mary Haggerty had come up a bit in the world since she had been married. But she had grown up in these streets and she knew the rules. She had to either fight or back down.

"This is none of your business," she said.

"I'm making it my business," Mrs. Miles said, balling her fist and cocking back her arm.

"It's none of your business," Mike's sister said, but she scuttled backwards a few steps at the same time.

"Blow!" Mrs. Miles said triumphantly.

"You're going to hear from me again!" Mary Haggerty called over her shoulder as she drew together the shreds of her dignity and stalked away. Mrs. Miles laughed coldly and spat after the receding back.

"I'm sorry to get you involved," Shirl said.

"My pleasure," Mrs. Miles said. "I wish she really had started some trouble. I would have slugged her. I know her kind."

"I really don't owe her any money . . ."

"Who cares? It would be better if you did. It would be a pleasure to stiff someone like that."

Mrs. Miles left her in front of her building and stamped solidly away into the dusk. Suddenly weary, Shirl climbed the long flights to the apartment and pushed through the unlocked door.

"You looked bushed," Sol told her. He was heaped high with blankets and only his face showed: his woollen watch cap was pulled down over his ears. "And turn that thing off, will you. It's an even chance whether I go blind or deaf first."

Shirl put down her bag and switched off the blaring TV. "It's getting cold out," she said. "It's even cold in here. I'll make a fire and heat some soup at the same time."

"Not more of that *drecky* meat flake stuff," Sol complained, and made a face.

"You shouldn't talk like that," Shirl said patiently. "It's real meat, just what you need."

"What I need, you can't get any more. Do you know what meat flakes are? I heard all about it on TV today, not that I wanted to but how could I turn the damn thing off? A big sales pitch programme on taming the wilds in Florida. Some wilds, they should hear about that in Miami Beach. They stopped trying to drain the swamps and are doing all kinds of fancy things with them instead. Snail ranches—how do you like that? Raising the giant West African snail, three-quarters of a pound of meat in every

shell. Plucked, cut, dehydrated, radiated, packed and sealed and sent to the starving peasants here in the frigid north. Meat flakes. What do you think of that?"

"It sounds very nice," Shirl said, stirring the brown, woodlike chips of meat into the pot. "I saw a movie once on TV where they were eating snails, in France I think it was. They were supposed to be something very special."

"For Frenchmen maybe, not for me . . ." Sol broke into a fit of coughing that left him weak and white-faced on the pillow, breathing rapidly.

"Do you want a drink of water?" Shirl asked.

"No—that's all right." His anger seemed to have drained away with the coughing. "I'm sorry to take it out on you kid, you taking care of me and everything. It's just that I'm not used to lying around. I stayed in shape all my life, regular exercise that's the answer, looked after myself, never asked anybody for anything. But there's one thing you can't stop." He looked down gloomily at the bed. "Time marches on. The bones get brittle. Fall down and bango, they got you in a cast to your chin."

"The soup's ready——"

"Not right now, I'm not hungry. Maybe you could turn on the TV—no, leave it off. I had enough. On the news they said that it looks like the Emergency Bill is going to pass after only a couple of months of yakking in Congress. I don't believe it. Too many people don't know about it or don't care about it, so there is no real pressure on Congress to do anything about it. We still have women with ten kids who are starving to death, who believe there is something evil about having smaller families. I suppose we can mostly blame the Catholics for that. They're still not completely convinced that controlling births is a good thing."

"Sol, please, don't be anti-Catholic. My mother's family . . ."

"I'm not being anti-nothing, and I love your mother's family. Am I anti-Puritan because I say Cotton Mather was a witch-burning bum who helped to cook old ladies? That's history. Your Church has gone on record and fought publicly against any public birth control measures. That's history too. The results—which prove them wrong—are just outside that window. They have forced their beliefs on the rest of us so we're all going down the drain together."

"It's not really that bad. The Church is not really against the idea of birth control, just the way it is done. They have always approved of the rhythm technique . . ."

"Not good enough. Neither is the Pill, not for everybody. When are they going to say okay to the Loop? This is the one that really works. And do you know how long it has been around and absolutely foolproof and safe and harmless and all the rest? Since 1964 when the bright boys at Johns Hopkins licked all the problems and side effects, that's how long. For thirty-five years they've had this little piece of plastic that costs maybe a couple of cents. Once inserted it stays in for years, it doesn't interfere with any of the body processes, it doesn't fall out, in fact the woman doesn't even know it is there—but as long as it is she is not going to get pregnant. Remove it and she can have kids again, nothing is changed. And the funny part is that no one is even sure how it works. It's a mystery. Maybe it should be spelled with a capital M, Mystery, so your Church could accept it and say it's God's will whether the thing is going to work or not."

"Sol—you're being blasphemous."

"Me? Never! But I got just as much right as the next guy to take a guess as to what God is thinking. Anyway, it really has nothing to do with Him. I'm just trying to find an excuse for the Catholic Church to accept the thing and give the suffering human race a break."

"They're considering it now."

"That's great. They're only about thirty-five years too late. Still, it might work out, though I doubt it. It's the old business of too little and too late. The world's gone—not going—to hell in a hand basket, and it's all of us who pushed it there."

Shirl stirred the soup and smiled at him. "Aren't you exaggerating maybe a *little* bit? You can't really blame all our troubles on overpopulation."

"I damned well can, if you'll pardon the expression. The coal that was supposed to last for centuries has all been dug up because so many people wanted to keep warm. And the oil too, there's so little left that they can't afford to burn it, it's got to be turned into chemicals and plastics and stuff. And the rivers—who polluted them? The water—who drank it? The topsoil—who wore it out? Everything

has been gobbled up, used up, worn out. What we got left—our one natural resource? Old car lots, that's what. Everything else has been used up and all we got to show for it is a couple of billion old cars that are rusting away. One time we had the whole world in our hands, but we ate it and burned it and it's gone now. One time the prairie was black with buffalo, that's what my schoolbooks said when I was a kid, but I never saw them because they had all been turned into steaks and moth-eaten rugs by that time. Do you think that made any impression on the human race? Or the whales and passenger pigeons and whooping cranes, or any of the hundred other species that we wiped out? In a pig's eye it did. In the fifties and the sixties there was a lot of talk about building atomic power plants to purify sea water so the desert would bloom and all that jazz. But it was just talk. Just because some people saw the handwriting on the wall didn't mean they could get anyone else to read it too. It takes at least five years to build just one atomic plant, so the ones that should have supplied the water and electricity we need *now* should have been built *then*. They weren't. Simple enough."

"You make it sound simple, Sol, but isn't it too late to worry about what people should have done a hundred years ago . . . ?"

"Forty, but who's counting."

"What can we do today? Isn't that what we should be thinking about?"

"You think about it, honeybunch, I get gloomy when I do. Run full speed ahead just to stay even, and keep our fingers crossed, that's what we can do today. Maybe I live in the past, and if I do I got good reasons. Things were a lot better then, and the trouble would always be coming tomorrow, so the hell with it. There was France, a great big modern country, home of culture, ready to lead the world in progress. Only they had a law that made birth control illegal, and it was a crime for even doctors to talk about contraception. Progress! The facts were clear enough if anybody had bothered to look. The conservationists kept telling us to change our ways or our resources would soon be gone. They're gone. It was almost too late then, but something could have been done. Women in every country in the world were begging for birth control information so

they could limit the size of their families to something reasonable. All they got was a lot of talk and damn little action. If there had been 5,000 family planning clinics for every one there was it still wouldn't have been enough. Babies and love and sex are probably the most emotionally important and the most secret things known to mankind, so open discussion was almost impossible. There should have been free discussion, tons of money for fertility research, world wide family planning, educational programmes on the importance of population control—and most important of all free speech for free opinion. But there never was, and now it is 1999 and the end of the century. Some century! Well, there's a new century coming up in a couple of weeks, and maybe it really will be a new century for the knocked-out human race. I doubt it—and I don't worry about it. I won't be here to see it."

"Sol—you shouldn't talk like that."

"Why not? I got an incurable disease. Old age."

He started coughing again, longer this time, and when he was through he just lay on the bed, exhausted. Shirl came over to straighten his blankets and to tuck them back in, and her hand touched his. Her eyes opened wide and she gasped.

"You're warm—hot. Do you have a fever?"

"Fever?" He started to chuckle but it turned to a fit of coughing that left him weaker than before. When he spoke again it was in a low voice. "Look, darling, I'm an old cocker. I'm flat on my back in bed all busted up and I can't move and it's cold enough to freeze a brass monkey in here. The least I should get is bedsores, but the chances are a lot better that I get pneumonia."

"No!"

"Yes. You don't get anywheres running away from the truth. If I got it, I got it. Now, be a good girl and eat the soup, I'm not hungry, and I'll take a little nap." He closed his eyes and settled his head into the pillow.

It was after seven, that evening, when Andy came home. Shirl recognized his footsteps in the hall and met him with her finger to her lips, then led him quietly towards the other room, pointing to Sol who was still asleep and breathing rapidly.

"How is he feeling?" Andy asked, unbuttoning his sod-

den topcoat. "What a night out, rain mixed with sleet and snow."

"He has a fever," Shirl said, her fingers twisting together. "He says that it is pneumonia. Can it be? What can we do?"

Andy stopped, halfway out of his coat. "Does he feel very warm? Has he been coughing?" he asked. Shirl nodded. Andy opened the door and listened to Sol's breathing, then closed it again silently and put his coat back on.

"They warned me about this at the hospital," he said. "There's always a chance with old people who have to stay in bed. I have some antibiotic pills they gave me. We'll give those to him, then I'll go to Bellevue and see if I can get some more—and see if they won't readmit him. He should be in an oxygen tent."

Sol barely woke up when he swallowed the pills, and his skin felt burning hot to Shirl when she held up his head. He was still asleep when Andy returned, less than an hour later. Andy's face was empty of expression, unreadable, what she always thought of as his professional face. It could mean only one thing.

"No more antibiotics," he whispered. "Because of the flu epidemic. The same with the oxygen tents and the beds. None available, filled up. I never even saw any of the doctors, just the girl at the desk."

"They can't do that. He's terribly sick. It's like murder."

"If you go into Bellevue it looks as though half the city is sick, people everywhere, even in the street outside. There just isn't enough medicine to go around, Shirl. I think just the children are getting it, everyone else has to take their chances."

"Take their chances!" She leaned her face against his wet coat and began to sob helplessly. "But there is no chance at all here. It's murder. An old man like that, he needs some help, he just can't be left to die."

He held her to him. "We're here and we can look after him. There are still four of the tablets left. We'll do everything that we can. Now come inside and lie down. You're going to get sick too if you don't take better care of yourself."

"No, Rusch, impossible. Can't be done—and you should know better than to ask me." Lieutenant Grassioli held his knuckle against the corner of his eye, but it did not stop the twitching.

"I'm sorry, lieutenant," Andy said. "I'm not asking for myself. It's a family problem. I've been on duty nine hours now and I'll take double tours the rest of the week——"

"A police officer is on duty twenty-four hours a day."

Andy held tight to his temper. "I know that, sir. I'm not trying to avoid anything."

"No. Now that's the end of it."

"Then let me off for a half an hour. I just want to go to my place, then I'll report right back to you. After that I can work through until the day duty men come on. You're going to be shorthanded here after midnight anyway, and if I stay around I can finish off those reports that Centre Street has been after all week."

It would mean working twice around the clock without any rest, but this would be the only way to get any grudging aid out of Grassy. The lieutenant couldn't order him to work hours like this—if it wasn't an emergency—but he could use the help. Most of the detective staff had been turned out again on riot duty so that the routine work had fallen far behind. Headquarters on Centre Street did not think this a valid excuse.

"I never ask a man to do extra duty," Grassioli said, grabbing the bait. "But I believe in fair play, give and take. You can take a half an hour now—but no more, understand—and make it up when you come back. If you want to stay around later, that's your choice."

"Yes, sir," Andy said. Some choice. He was going to be here when the sun came up.

The rain that had been falling for the past three days had turned to snow, big, slow flakes that fell silently through the wide-spaced pools of light along Twenty-third Street. There were few other pedestrians, though there were still dark figures curled up in knots around the supporting

pillars of the expressway. Most of the other street-sleepers had sought some kind of shelter from the weather and, though they were unseen, their crowded numbers, along with the other citizens of the city, pressed out from the buildings with an almost tangible presence. Behind every wall were hundreds of people, seen now only as dark shapes in doorways or the sudden silhouette against a window. Andy lowered his head to keep the snow out of his face and walked faster, worry pushing him on until he had to slow down, panting to catch his breath.

Shirl hadn't wanted him to leave that morning, but he had no other choice. Sol had been no better—nor worse—than he had been for the past three days. Andy would have liked to have stayed with him, to help Shirl, but he had no choice. He had to leave, he was on duty. She had not understood this and they had almost fought over it, in whispers so that Sol wouldn't hear. He had hoped to be back early, but the riot duty had taken care of that. At least he could look in for a few minutes, talk to them both, see if he could help in any way. He knew it wasn't easy for Shirl to be alone with the sick, old man—but what else was there to do?

Music and the canned laughter of television sounded from most of the doors along the hall, but his own apartment was silent: he felt a sudden, cold premonition. He unlocked the door and opened it quietly. The room was dark.

"Shirl?" He whispered. "Sol?"

There was no answer, and something about the silence struck him at once. Where was the fast, rasping breathing that had filled the room? His flashlight whirred and the beam struck across the room and moved to the bed, to Sol's still, pale face. He looked as though he were sleeping quietly, perhaps he was, yet Andy knew—even before his fingertips touched—that the skin would be cold and that Sol was dead.

Oh, God, he thought, she was alone with him here, in the dark, while he died.

He suddenly became aware of the almost soundless, heart-beaking sobbing from the other side of the partition.

eight

"I don't want to hear about it any more!" Billy shouted, but Peter kept talking just as if Billy hadn't been there, lying right next to him, and hadn't said a word.

"... and I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea', that is the way it is written in Revelation, the truth is there if we look for it. A revelation to us, a glimpse of tomorrow . . ."

"SHUT UP!"

It had no effect, and the monotonous voice went on steadily, against the background of the wind that swept around the old car and keened in through the cracks and holes. Billy pulled a corner of the dusty cover over his head to deaden the sound, but it didn't help much and he could hardly breathe. He slipped it below his chin and stared up at the grey darkness inside the car, trying to ignore the man beside him. With the seats removed the sedan made a single, not too spacious room. They slept, side by side on the floor, seeking what warmth they could from the tattered mound of firewall insulation, cushion stuffing and crumpled plastic seat covering that made up their bedding. There was the sudden reek of iodine and smoke as the wind blew down the exhaust-pipe chimney and stirred the ashes in the trunk, which they used for a stove. The last chunk of seacoal had been burned a week before.

Billy had slept, he didn't know how long, until Peter's droning voice had woken him up. He was sure now that the man was out of his head, talking to himself most of the time. Billy felt stifled by the walls and the dust, the closeness and the meaningless words that battered at him and filled the car. Getting to his knees he turned the crank, lowered the rear window an inch and put his mouth to the opening, breathing in the cold freshness of the air. Something brushed against his lips, wetting them. He bent his head to look out through the opening and could see the white shapes of snowflakes drifting down.

"I'm going out," he said as he closed the window, but

Peter gave no sign that he had heard him. "I'm going out. It stinks in here." He picked up the poncho, made from the plastic covering that had been stripped from the front seat of the Buick, put his head through the opening in the centre and wrapped it around him. When he unlocked the rear door and pushed it open a swirl of snow came in. "It stinks in here, and you stink—and I think you're nuts." Billy climbed out and slammed the door behind him.

When the snow touched the ground it melted, but it was piling up on the rounded humps of the automobiles. Billy scraped a handful from the hood of their car and put it into his mouth. Nothing moved in the darkness and, except for the muffled whisper of the falling snow, the night was silent. Picking his way through the white-shrouded cars he went to Canal Street and turned west towards the Hudson River. The street was strangely empty, it must be very late, and the occasional pedicab that passed could be heard a long way off by the hissing of its tyres. He stopped at the Bowery and watched in a doorway as a convoy of five tug-trucks went past, guards walked on both sides and the tug-men were bent double as they dragged at the loads. Must be something valuable, Billy thought, food probably. His empty stomach grumbled painfully at this reminder and he kneaded it with his fingers. It was going on two whole days since he had last eaten. There was more snow here, clumped on an iron fence, and as he passed he scraped it off and wadded it into a ball that he put into his mouth. When he came to Elizabeth Street he crossed over and peered up at the spring-powered clock mounted on the front of the Chinese Community Centre building, and he could just make out the hands. It was a little after three o'clock. That meant there were at least three or four more hours before it got light, plenty of time to get uptown and back.

As long as he was walking he felt warm enough, though the snow melted and ran down inside his clothes. But it was a long way up to Twenty-third Street and he was very tired: he had not eaten much the last few weeks. Twice he halted to rest, but the cold bit through him as soon as he stopped moving, and after only a few minutes he struggled to his feet and went on. The further north he walked, the larger the fear became.

Why shouldn't I come up here? he asked himself, looking

around unhappily at the darkness. The cops have forgotten all about me by now. It was too long ago, it was—he counted off on his fingers—four months ago, going on five now in December. Cops never followed a case more than a couple of weeks, not unless somebody shot the mayor or stole a million D's or something. As long as no one saw him he was safe as houses. Twice before he had come north, but as soon as he got near the old neighbourhood he had stopped. It wasn't raining hard enough or there were too many people around or something. But tonight was different, the snow was like a wall around him—it seemed to be coming down heavier—and he wouldn't be seen. He would get to the *Columbia Victory* and go down to the apartment and wake them up. They were his family, they would be glad to see him, no matter what he had done, and he could explain that it was all a frameup, he wasn't guilty. And food! He spat into the darkness. They had rations for four and his mother always hoarded some of it. He would eat his fill. Oatmeal, slabs of it, maybe even fresh-cooked and hot. Clothes too, his mother must still have all of his clothes. He would put on some warm things and get the pair of heavy shoes that had been his father's. There was no risk, no one would know he had been there. Just stay a few minutes, a half an hour at the most, then get out. It would be worth it.

At Twentieth Street he crossed under the elevated highway and worked his way out on Pier Sixty-one. The barn-like building of the pier was jammed full of people and he did not dare pass through it. But a narrow ledge ran around the outside, on top of the row of piles, and he knew it well, though this was the first time he had ever gone there at night—with the ledge slippery with moist snow. He sidled along, feeling for each step with his back to the building, hearing the slapping of waves against the piles below. If he fell in there would be no way to get back up, it would be a cold, wet death. Shivering, he slid his foot forward and almost tripped over a thick mooring line. Above him, almost invisible in the darkness, was the rusty flank of the outermost hulk of Shiptown. This was probably the longest way to get to the *Columbia Victory*, which meant it would be the safest. There was no one in sight as he eased up the gangplank and onto the deck.

As he crossed the floating city of ships Billy had the sudden feeling that it was going to be all right. The weather was on his side, snowing just as hard as ever, wrapping around and protecting him. And he had the ships to himself, no one else was topside, no one saw him pass. He had it all figured out, he had been preparing for this night for a long time. If he went down the passageway he might be heard while he was trying to wake someone inside his apartment, but he wasn't that stupid. When he reached the deck he stopped and took out the braided wire he had made weeks earlier by splicing together the ignition wires from a half dozen old cars. At the end of the wire was a heavy bolt. He carefully paid it out until the bolt reached the window of the compartment where his mother and sister slept. Then, swinging it out and back, he let it knock against the wooden cover that sealed the window. The tiny sound was muffled by the snow, lost among the creakings and rattlings of the anchored fleet. But inside the room it would sound loud enough, it would wake someone up.

Less than a minute after he started the thumping he heard a rattle below and the cover moved, then vanished inside. He pulled up the wire as a dark blur of a head protruded through the opening.

"What is it? Who is there?" his sister's voice whispered.

"The eldest brother," he hissed back in Cantonese. *"Open the door and let me in."*

n i n e

"I feel so bad about Sol," Shirl said. "It seems so cruel."

"Don't," Andy said, holding her close in the warmth of the bed and kissing her. "I don't think he felt as unhappy about it as you do. He was an old man, and in his life he saw and did a lot. For him everything was in the past and I don't think he was very happy with the world the way it is today. Look— isn't that sunshine? I think the snow has stopped and the weather is clearing up."

"But dying like that was so useless, if he hadn't gone to that demonstration——"

"Come on, Shirl, don't beat it. What's done is done. Why

don't you think about today? Can you imagine Grassy giving me a whole day off—just out of sympathy?"

"No. He's a terrible man. I'm sure he had some other reason and you'll find out about it when you go in tomorrow."

"Now you sound like me," he laughed. "Let's have some breakfast and think about all the good things we want to do today."

Andy went in and lit the fire while she dressed, then checked the room again to make sure that he had put all of Sol's things out of sight. The clothes were in the wardrobe and he had swept shelves clear and stuffed the books in on top of the clothes. There was nothing he could do about the bed, but he pulled the cover up and put the pillow into the wardrobe too so that it looked more like a couch. Good enough. In the next few weeks he would get rid of the things one by one in the flea market; the books should bring a good price. They would eat better for awhile and Shirl wouldn't have to know where the extra money came from.

He was going to miss Sol, he knew that. Seven years ago, when he had first rented the room, it had just been a convenient arrangement for both of them. Sol had explained later that rising food prices had forced him to divide the room and let out half, but he didn't want to share it with just any bum. He had gone to the precinct and told them about the vacancy. Andy, who had been living in the police barracks, had moved in at once. So Sol had his money—and an armed protection at the same time. There had been no friendship in the beginning, but this had come. They had become close in spite of their difference in ages: Think young, be young, Sol always said, and he had lived up to his own rule. It was funny how many things Sol said that Andy could remember. He was going to keep on remembering these things. He wasn't going to get sentimental over it—Sol would have been the first one to laugh at that, and give what he called his double razzberry—but he wasn't going to forget him.

The sun was coming in the window now and, between that and the stove, the chill was gone and the room was comfortable. Andy switched on the TV and found some music, not the kind of thing he liked, but Shirl did, so he

kept it on. It was something called *The Fountains Of Rome*, the title was on the screen, superimposed on a picture of the bubbling fountains. Shirl came in, brushing her hair and he pointed to it.

"Doesn't it give you a thirst, all that splashing water?" Andy asked.

"Makes me want to take a shower. I bet I smell something terrible."

"Sweet as perfume," he said, watching her with pleasure as she sat on the windowsill, still brushing her hair, the sun touching it with golden highlights. "How would you like to go on a train ride—and a picnic today?" he asked suddenly.

"Stop it! I can't take jokes before breakfast."

"No, I mean it. Move aside for a second." He leaned close to the window and squinted out at the ancient thermometer that Sol had nailed to the wooden frame outside. Most of the paint and numbers had flaked away, but Sol had scratched new ones on in their place. "It's fifty already—in the shade—and I bet it goes up close to fifty-five today. When you get this kind of weather in December in New York—grab it. There might be five feet of snow tomorrow. We can use the last of the soypaste to make sandwiches. The water train leaves at eleven, and we can ride in the guard car."

"Then you meant it?"

"Of course, I don't joke about this kind of thing. A real excursion to the country. I told you about the trip I made, when I was with the guard last week. The train goes up along the Hudson River to Croton-on-Hudson where the tank cars are filled. This takes about two, three hours. I've never seen it, but they say you can walk over to Croton Point Park—it's right out in the river—and they still have some real trees there. If it's warm enough we can have our picnic, then go back on the train. What do you say?"

"I say it sounds wonderfully impossible and unbelievable. I've never been that far from the city since I was a little girl, it must be miles and miles. When do we go?"

"Just as soon as we have some breakfast. I've already put the oatmeal up—and you might stir it a bit before it burns."

"Nothing can burn on a seacoal fire." But she went to

the stove and took care of the pot as she said it. He didn't remember when he had seen her smiling and happy like this: it was almost like the summer again.

"Don't be a pig and eat all the oatmeal," she said. "I can use that corn oil—I knew I was saving it for something important—and fry up oatmeal cakes for the picnic too."

"Make them good and salty, we can drink all the water we want up there."

Andy pulled the chair out for Shirl so that she sat with her back to Sol's charging bicycle: there was no point in her seeing something that might remind her of what had happened. She was laughing now, talking about their plans for the day, and he didn't want to change it. It was going to be something special, they were both sure of that.

There was a quick rap on the door while they were packing in the lunch, and Shirl gasped. "The call boy—I knew it! You're going to have to work today . . ."

"Don't worry about that," Andy smiled. "Grassy won't go back on his word. And besides, that's not the call boy's knock. If there is one sound I know it's his bam-bam-bam."

Shirl forced a smile and went to unlock the door while he finished wrapping the lunch.

"Tab!" she said happily. "You're the last person in the world . . . come in, it's wonderful to see you. It's Tab Fielding," she said to Andy.

"Morning, Miss Shirl," Tab said stolidly, staying in the hall. "I'm sorry, but this is no social call. I'm on the job now."

"What is it?" Andy asked, walking over next to Shirl.

"You have to realize I take the work that is offered to me," Tab said. He was unsmiling and gloomy. "I've been in the bodyguard pool since September, just the odd jobs, no regular assignment, we take whatever work we can get. A man turns down a job he goes right back to the end of the list. I have a family to feed . . ."

"What are you trying to say?" Andy asked. He was aware that someone was standing in the darkness behind Tab and he could tell by the shuffle of feet that there were others out of sight down the hall.

"Don't take no stuff," the man in back of Tab said in an unpleasant, nasal voice. He stayed behind the bodyguard

where he could not be seen. "I got the law on my side. I paid you. Show him the order!"

"I think I understand now," Andy said. "Get away from the door, Shirl. Come inside, Tab, so we can talk to you."

Tab started forward and the man in the hall tried to follow him. "You don't go in there without me——" he shrilled. His voice was cut off as Andy slammed the door in his face.

"I wish you hadn't done that," Tab said. He was wearing his spike-studded, iron knucks, his fist clenched tight around them.

"Relax," Andy said. "I just wanted to talk to you alone first, find out what was going on. He has a squat-order, doesn't he?"

Tab nodded, looking unhappily down at the floor.

"What on earth are you two talking about?" Shirl asked, worriedly glancing back and forth at their set expressions.

Andy didn't answer and Tab turned to her. "A squat-order is issued by the court to anyone who can prove they are really in need of a place to live. They only give so many out, and usually just to people with big families that have had to get out of some other place. With a squat-order you can look around and find a vacant apartment, or room or anything like that, and the order is a sort of search warrant. There can be trouble, people don't want to have strangers walking in on them, that kind of thing, so anyone with a squat-order takes along a bodyguard. That's where I come in, the party out there in the hall, name of Belicher, hired me."

"But what are you doing here?" Shirl asked, still not understanding.

"Because Belicher is a ghoul, that's why," Andy said bitterly. "He hangs around the morgue looking for bodies."

"That's one way of saying it," Tab answered, holding on to his temper. "He's also a guy with a wife and kids and no place to live, that's another way of looking at it."

There was a sudden hammering on the door and Belicher's complaining voice could be heard outside. Shirl finally realized the significance of Tab's presence, and she gasped. "You're here because you're helping them," she said. "They found out that Sol is dead and they want this room."

Tab could only nod mutely.

"There's still a way out," Andy said. "If we had one of the men here from my precinct, living in here, then these people couldn't get in."

The knocking was louder and Tab took a half step backwards towards the door. "If there was somebody here now, that would be okay, but Belicher could probably take the thing to the squat court and get occupancy anyway because he has a family. I'll do what I can to help you—but Belicher, he's still my employer."

"Don't open that door," Andy said sharply. "Not until we have this straightened out."

"I have to—what else can I do?" He straightened up and closed his fist with the knucks on it. "Don't try to stop me, Andy. You're a policeman, you know the law about this."

"Tab, must you?" Shirl asked in a low voice.

He turned to her, eyes filled with unhappiness. "We were good friends once, Shirl, and that's the way I'm going to remember it. But you're not going to think much of me after this because I have to do my job. I have to let them in."

"Go ahead—open the damn door," Andy said bitterly, turning his back and walking over to the window.

The Belichers swarmed in. Mr. Belicher was thin, with a strangely shaped head, almost no chin, and just enough intelligence to sign his name to the Welfare application. Mrs. Belicher was the support of the family; from the flabby fat of her body came the children, all seven of them, to swell the Relief allotment on which they survived. Number eight was pushing an extra bulge out of the dough of her flesh, it was really number eleven since three of the younger Belichers had perished through indifference or accident. The largest girl, she must have been all of twelve, was carrying the sore-covered infant which stank abominably and cried continuously. The other children shouted at each other now, released from the silence and tension of the dark hall.

"Oh, looka the nice fridge," Mrs. Belicher said, waddling over and opening the door.

"Don't touch that," Andy said, and Belicher pulled her by the arm.

"I like this room, it's not big you know, but nice. What's in here?" He started towards the open door in the partition.

"That's my room," Andy said, slamming it shut in his face. "Just keep out of there."

"No need to act like that," Belicher said, sidling away quickly like a dog that has been kicked too often. "I got my rights. The law says I can look wherever I want with a squat-order." He moved further away as Andy took a step towards him. "Not that I'm doubting your word, mister. I believe you. This room here is fine, got a good table, chairs, bed . . ."

"Those things belong to me. This is an empty room, and a small one at that. It's not big enough for you and all your family."

"It's big enough, all right. We lived in smaller . . ."

"Andy—stop them! Look——" Shirl's unhappy cry spun Andy around and he saw that two of the boys had found the packets of herbs that Sol had grown so carefully in his window box, and were tearing them open, thinking that it was food of some kind.

"Put those things down," he shouted, but before he could reach them they had tasted the herbs, then spat them out.

"Burn my mouth!" the bigger boy screamed and sprayed the contents of the packet on the floor. The other boy bounced up and down with excitement and began to do the same thing with the rest of the herbs. They twisted away from Andy and before he could stop them the packets were empty.

As soon as Andy turned away the younger boy, still excited, climbed on the table—his mud-stained foot wrappings leaving filthy smears—and turned up the TV. Blaring music crashed over the screams of the children and the ineffectual calls of their mother. Tab pulled Belicher away as he opened the wardrobe to see what was inside.

"Get these kids out of here," Andy said, white-faced with rage.

"I got a squat-order, I got rights," Belicher shouted, backing away and waving an imprinted square of plastic.

"I don't care what rights you have," Andy told him, opening the hall door. "We'll talk about that when these brats are outside."

Tab settled it by grabbing the nearest child by the scruff

of the neck and pushing it out through the door. "Mr. Rusch is right," he said. "The kids can wait outside while we settle this."

Mrs. Belicher sat down heavily on the bed and closed her eyes, as though all this had nothing to do with her. Mr. Belicher retreated against the wall saying something that no one heard or bothered to listen to. There were some shrill cries and angry sobbing from the hall as the last child was expelled.

Andy looked around and realized that Shirl had gone into their room: he heard the key turn in the lock. "I suppose this is it?" he said, looking steadily at Tab.

The bodyguard shrugged helplessly. "I'm sorry, Andy, honest to God I am. What else can I do? It's the law, and if they want to stay here you can't get them out."

"It's the law, it's the law," Belicher echoed tonelessly.

There was nothing Andy could do with his clenched fists and he had to force himself to open them. "Help me carry these things into the other room, will you, Tab?"

"Sure," Tab said, and took the other end of the table. "Try and explain to Shirl, about my part in this, will you? I don't think she understands that it's just a job I have to do."

Their footsteps crackled on the dried herbs that littered the floor and Andy did not answer him.

t e n

"Andy, you must do something, those people are driving me right out of my mind."

"Easy, Shirl, it's not that bad," Andy said. He was standing on a chair, filling the wall tank from a jerry can, and when he turned to answer her some of the water splashed over and dripped down to the floor. "Let me finish this first before we argue, will you."

"I'm not arguing—I'm just telling you how I feel. Listen to that."

Sound came clearly through the thin partition. The baby was crying, it seemed to do this continuously day and night: and they had to use earplugs to get any sleep. Some of the children were fighting, completely ignoring their father's

reedy whine of complaint. To add to the turmoil one of them was beating steadily on the floor with something heavy. The people in the apartment below would be up again soon to complain: it never did any good. Shirl sat on the edge of the bed, wringing her hands.

"Do you hear that?" she said. "It never stops, I don't know how they can live like that. You're away so you don't hear the worst of it. Can't we get them out of there? There must be something we can do about it."

Andy emptied the jerry can and climbed down, threading his way through the crowded room. They had sold Sol's bed and his wardrobe, but everything else was jammed in here and there was scarcely a foot of clear floor space. He dropped heavily into a chair.

"I've been trying, you know I have. Two of the patrolmen, they live in the barracks now, are ready to move in here if we can get the Belichers out. That's the hard part. They have the law on their side."

"Is there a law that says we have to put up with people like that?" She was wringing her hands helplessly, staring at the partition.

"Look, Shirl, can't we talk about this some other time? I have to go out soon——"

"I want to talk about it now. You've been putting it off ever since they came, and that's over two weeks now, and I can't take much more of it."

"Come on, it's not that bad. It's just noise."

The room was very cold. Shirl pulled her legs up and wrapped the old blanket tighter around her; the springs in the bed twanged under her weight. There was a momentary lull from the other room that ended with shrill laughter.

"Do you hear that?" Shirl asked. "What kind of minds do they have? Every time they hear the bed move in here they burst out laughing. We've no privacy, none at all, that partition is as thin as cardboard and they listen for everything we do and hear every word we say. If they won't go—can't we move?"

"Where to? Show some sense will you, we're lucky to have this much room to ourselves. Do you know how many people still sleep in the streets—and how many bodies get brought in every morning?"

"I couldn't care less. It's my own life I'm worrying about."

"Please, not now," he looked up as the light bulb flickered and dimmed, then sprang back to life again. There was a sudden rattle of hail against the window. "We can talk about it when I get back, I shouldn't be long."

"No, I want to settle it now, you've been putting this off over and over again. You don't have to go out now."

He took his coat down, restraining his temper. "It can wait until I get back. I told you that we finally had word on Billy Chung—an informer saw him leaving Shiptown—the chances are that he had been visiting his family. It's old news too, it happened fifteen days ago, but the stoolie didn't think it important enough to tell us about right away. I guess he was hoping to see the boy come back, but he never has. I'll have to talk to his family and see what they know."

"You don't have to go now—you said this happened some time ago . . ."

"What does that have to do with it? The lieutenant will want a report in the morning. So what should I tell him—that you didn't want me to go out tonight?"

"I don't care what you tell him . . ."

"I know you don't, but I do. It's my job and I have to do it."

They glared at each other in silence, breathing rapidly. From the other side of the partition there sounded a shrill cry and childish sobbing.

"Shirl, I don't want to fight with you," Andy said, "I have to go out, that's all there is to it. We can talk about it later, when I come back."

"If I'm here when you come back." She had her hands clenched tightly together and her face was pale.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I don't know what I mean. I just know something has to change. Please, let's settle this now . . ."

"Can't you understand that's impossible. We'll talk about it when I get back." He unlocked the door and stood with the knob in his hand, getting a grip on his temper. "Let's not fight about it now. I'll be back in a few hours, we can worry about it then, all right?" She didn't answer, and after waiting a moment he went out and closed the door

heavily behind him. The foul, thick odour of the room beyond hit him in the face.

"Belicher," he said, "you're going to have to clean this place up. It stinks."

"I can't do nothing about the smoke until I get some kind of chimbley," Belicher sniffled, squatting and holding his hands over a smouldering lump of seacoal. This rested in a hubcap filled with sand from which eye-burning, oily smoke rose to fill the room. The opening in the outer wall that Sol had made for the chimney of his stove had been carelessly covered with a sheet of thin polythene that billowed and crackled as the wind blew against it.

"The smoke is the best smell in here," Andy said. "Have your kids been using this place for a toilet again?"

"You wouldn't ask kids to go down all them stairs at night, would you?" Belicher complained.

Wordless, Andy looked around at the heap of coverings in the corner where Mrs. Belicher and the smaller Belichers were huddled for warmth. The two boys were doing something in the corner with their backs turned. The small light bulb threw long shadows over the rubbish that was beginning to collect against the baseboard, lit up the new marks gouged in the wall.

"You better get this place cleaned up," Andy said and slammed the door shut on Belicher's whining answer.

Shirl was right, these people were impossible and he had to do something about them. But when? It had better be soon, she couldn't take much more of them. He was angry at the invaders—and angry at her. All right, it was pretty bad, but you had to take things as they came. He was still putting in a twelve and fourteen-hour day, which was a lot worse than just sitting and listening to the kids scream.

The street was dark, filled with wind and driving sleet. There was snow mixed with it and had already begun to stick to the pavement and pile up in corners against the walls. Andy ploughed through it, head down, hating the Belichers and trying not to be angry at Shirl.

The walkways and connecting bridges in Shiptown were ice-coated and slippery and Andy had to grope his way over them carefully, aware of the surging black water below. In the darkness all of the ships looked alike and he

used his flashlight on their bows to pick out their names. He was chilled and wet before he found the *Columbia Victory* and pulled open the heavy steel door that led below deck. As he went down the metal stairs light spilled across the passageway ahead. One of the doors had been opened by a small boy with spindly legs: it looked like the Chung apartment.

"Just a minute," Andy said, stopping the door before the child could close it. The little boy gaped up at him, silent and wide-eyed.

"This is the Chung apartment, isn't it?" he asked, stepping in. Then he recognized the woman standing there. She was Billy's sister, he had met her before. The mother sat in a chair against the wall, with the same expression of numb fright as her daughter, holding on to the twin of the boy who had opened the door. No one answered him.

These people really love the police, Andy thought to himself. At the same instant he realized that they all kept looking towards the door in the far wall and quickly away. What was bothering them?

He reached behind his back and closed the hall door. It wasn't possible—yet the night Billy Chung had been seen here had been stormy like this one, perfect cover for a fugitive. Could I be having a break at last? he wondered. Had he picked the right night to come here?

Even as the thoughts were forming the door to the bedroom opened and Billy Chung stepped out, starting to say something. His words were drowned by his mother's shrill cries and his sister's shouted warning. He looked up and halted, shocked motionless when he saw Andy.

"You're under arrest," Andy said, reaching down to the side of his belt to get his nippers.

"No!" Billy gasped hoarsely and grabbed at his waistband and pulled out a knife.

It was a mess. The old woman kept screaming shrilly, over and over, without stopping for breath and the daughter hurled herself on Andy, trying to scratch at his eyes. She raked her nails down his cheek before he grabbed her and held her off at arm's length. And all the time he was watching Billy who held out the long, shining blade as he advanced in a knife-fighter's crouch, waving the weapon before him.

"Put that down," Andy shouted, and leaned his back against the door. "You can't get out of here. Don't cause any more trouble." The woman found she couldn't reach Andy's face so she raked lines of fire down the back of his hand with her nails. Andy pushed her away and was barely aware of her falling as he grabbed for his gun.

"Stop it!" he shouted, and pointed the gun up in the air. He wanted to fire a warning shot, then he realized that the compartment was made of steel and any bullet would ricochet around inside of it: there were two women and two children here.

"Stop it, Billy, you can't get out of here," he shouted, pointing the gun at the boy who was halfway across the room, waving the knife wildly.

"Let me by," Billy sobbed. "I'll kill you! Why couldn't you just leave me alone?"

He wasn't going to stop, Andy realized. The knife was sharp and he knew how to use it. If he wanted trouble he was going to get it.

Andy aimed the gun at Billy's leg and pulled the trigger just as the boy stumbled.

The boom of the .38 calibre shell filled the compartment and Billy pitched forward, the bullet hit his head and he kept going down to sprawl on the steel deck. The knife spun from his hand and stopped almost at Andy's feet. Shocked silence followed the sound of the shot and the air was strong with the sharp reek of gunpowder. No one moved except Andy who bent over and touched the boy's wrist.

Andy was aware of a hammering on the door behind him and he reached back and fumbled to open it without turning around.

"I'm a police officer," he said. "I want someone to get over to Precinct 12-A on Twenty-third Street and report this at once. Tell them that Billy Chung is here. He's dead."

A bullet in the temple, Andy realized suddenly. Got it in the same spot that Big Mike O'Brien did.

It was messy, that was the worst part of it. Not Billy, he was safely dead. It was the mother and the sister, they had screamed abuse at him while the twins had held on to

each other and sobbed. Finally Andy made the neighbours across the hall take the whole family in and he had remained alone with the body until Steve Kulozik and a patrolman had arrived from the precinct. He hadn't seen the two women after that, and he hadn't wanted to. It had been an accident, that was all, they ought to realize that. If the kid hadn't fallen he would have gotten the bullet in the leg and that would have been the end of it. Not that the police would care about the shooting, the case could be closed now without any more red tape, it was just the two women. Well, let them hate him, it wouldn't hurt him and he wasn't ever going to see them again. So the son was a martyr, not a killer, if they preferred to remember him that way. Fine. Either way the case was closed.

It was late, after midnight, before Andy got home. Bringing back the body and making a report had taken a long time. As usual the Belichers hadn't locked the hall door—they didn't care, they had nothing worth losing or stealing. Their room was dark and he flashed his light across it, catching a fleeting glimpse of their huddled bodies, a glimmer of reflection from their eyes. They were awake—but at least they were all quiet for a change, even the baby. As he put his key into the lock on his door he heard a muffled titter behind him in the darkness. What could they possibly have to laugh about?

Pushing the door open into the silent room he remembered the trouble with Shirl earlier that evening, and he felt a sudden dart of fear. He raised the flashlight but did not squeeze it. There was the laughter behind him again, a little louder this time.

The light sliced across the room to the vacant chairs, the empty bed. Shirl wasn't here. It couldn't mean anything, she had probably gone downstairs to the lavatories, that was all.

Yet he knew, even before he opened the wardrobe that her clothes were gone and so were her suitcases.

Shirl was gone too.

"What do you want?" the hard-eyed man asked, standing just inside the bedroom door. "You know Mr. Briggs is a busy man. I'm a busy man. Neither of us like you telephoning, saying someone should come over, just like that. You got something you want to tell Mr. Briggs, you come and tell him."

"I'm very sorry that I can't oblige you," Judge Santini said, wheezing a little while he talked, propped up on pillows in the big dark, double bed, smooth blankets carefully tucked in around him. "Much as I would like to. But I'm afraid that my running days are over, at least that's what my doctor says, and I pay him enough for his opinions. When a man my age has a coronary, he has to watch himself. Rest, plenty of rest. No more climbing up those stairs in the Empire State Building. I can confide in you, Schlachter, that I really won't miss them very much . . ."

"What do you want, Santini?"

"To give you some information for Mr. Briggs. The Chung boy has been found, Billy Chung, the one who killed Big Mike."

"So?"

"So—I had hoped you would remember a meeting we had where we discussed this subject. There was a suspicion that the killer might be connected with Nick Cuore, that the boy was in his pay. I doubt if he was, he seems to have been operating on his own. We will never know for certain because he is dead."

"Is that all?"

"Isn't that enough? You might recall that Mr. Briggs was concerned about the possibility of Cuore moving in on this city."

"No chance of that at all. Cuore has been tied up for a week in taking over in Paterson. There been a dozen killings already. He was never interested in New York."

"I'm pleased to hear that. But I think you had better tell Mr. Briggs about this in any case. He was interested

enough in the case to put pressure on the police department, they have had a man on the case since August."

"Tough. I'll tell him if I get a chance. But he's not interested in this any more."

Judge Santini settled wearily into the covers when his guest had gone. He was tired tonight, tireder than he could ever remember. And there was still a memory of that pain deep inside his chest.

Just about two weeks more to the new year. New century too. It would be funny to write two thousand instead of nineteen something or other as he had done all his life.

January 1, 2000. It seemed like a strange date for some reason. He rang the bell so Rosa could come and pour him his medicine. How much of this new century would he see? The thought was a very depressing one.

In the quiet room the ticking of the old-fashioned clock sounded very loud.

twelve

"The lieutenant wants to see you," Steve called across the squad room.

Andy waved his hand in acknowledgment and stood and stretched, only too willing to leave the stack of reports he was working on. He had not slept well the night before and he was tired. First the shooting, then finding Shirl gone, it was a lot to have happen in one night. Where would he look for her, to ask her to come back? Yet how could he ask her to come back while the Belichers were still there? How could he get rid of the Belichers? This wasn't the first time that his thoughts had spiralled around this way. It got him nowhere. He knocked on the door of the lieutenant's office, then went in.

"You wanted to see me, sir?"

Lieutenant Grassioli was swallowing a pill and he nodded, then choked on the water he was using to wash it down. He had a coughing fit, and dropped into the battered swivel chair, looking greyer and more tired than usual. "This ulcer is going to kill me one of these days. Ever hear of anyone dying of an ulcer?"

There was no answer for a question like this. Andy wondered why the lieutenant was making conversation, it wasn't like him. He usually found no trouble in speaking his mind.

"They're not happy downtown about your shooting the Chink kid," Grassiolo said, pawing through the reports and files that littered his desk.

"What do you mean——?"

"Just that, Christ, just like I don't have enough trouble with this squad, I got to get mixed up in politics too. Centre Street thinks you been wasting too much time on this case, we've had two dozen unsolved murders in the precinct since you started on this one."

"But——" Andy was dumbfounded. "You told me the Commissioner himself ordered me onto the case full time. You told me I had to——"

"It doesn't matter what I told you," Grassioli snarled. "The Commissioner's not available on the phone, not to me he's not. He doesn't give a damn about the O'Brien killer and no one's interested in any word I got about that Jersey hood, Cuore. And what's more, the Assistant-Commissioner is on to me over the Billy Chung shooting. They left me holding the bag."

"Sounds more like I'm the one with the bag."

"Don't get snotty with me, Rusch." The lieutenant stood and kicked the chair away and turned his back on Andy, looking out of the window and drumming his fingers on the frame. "The Assistant-Commissioner is George Chu and he thinks you got a vendetta against the Chinks or something, tracking the kid all this time, then shooting him down instead of bringing him in."

"You told him I was acting on orders, didn't you, lieutenant?" Andy asked softly. "You told him the shooting was accidental, it's all in my report."

"I didn't tell him anything." Grassioli turned to face Andy. "The people who pushed me onto this case aren't talking. There's nothing I can tell Chu. He's nuts on this race thing anyway. If I try to tell him what really happened I'm only going to make trouble for myself, for the precinct—for everybody." He dropped into his chair and rubbed at the twitching corner of his eye. "I'm telling you straight, Andy. I'm going to pass the buck to you, let you

take the blame. I'm going to put you back into uniform for six months until this thing cools down. You'll stay in grade, you won't lose any pay."

"I wasn't expecting any award for cracking this case," Andy said angrily, "or for bringing in the killer—but I didn't expect this. I can ask for a departmental trial."

"You can, you do that." The lieutenant hesitated a long time, he was obviously ill at ease. "But I'm asking you not to. If not for me, for the good of the precinct. I know it's a raw deal, passing the buck, but you'll come out of it okay. I'll have you back on the squad as soon as I can. And it's not like you'll be doing anything different, anyway. We might as well all be walking a beat for the little detective work we do." He kicked viciously at the desk. "What do you say?"

"The whole thing stinks."

"I know it stinks!" the lieutenant shouted. "But what the hell else can I do? You think it'll stink less if you stand trial? You won't stand a chance. You'll be off the force and out of a job and I'll probably be with you. You're a good cop, Andy, and there aren't many of them left. The department needs you more than you need them. Stick it out. What do you say?"

There was a long silence, and the lieutenant turned back to look out of the window.

"All right," Andy finally said. "I'll do whatever you want me to do, lieutenant." He went out of the office without being dismissed; he didn't want the lieutenant to thank him for this.

thirteen

"Half an hour more and we'll be in a new century," Steve Kulozik said, stamping his feet on the icy pavement. "I heard some joker on TV yesterday trying to explain why the new century doesn't start until next year, but he must be a chunkhead. Midnight, year two thousand, new century. That makes sense. Look at that." He pointed up at the projection TV screen on the old Times Building. The

headlines, in letters ten feet high, chased each other across the screen.

COLD SNAP IN MIDWEST SCORES OF DEATHS REPORTED

"Scores," Steve grunted. "I bet they don't even keep score any more, they don't want to know how many die."

FAMINE REPORTS FROM RUSSIA NOT TRUE SAYS GALYGIN

PRESIDENTIAL MESSAGE ON MORN OF NEW CENTURY

NAVY SUPERSONJET CRASH IN FRISCO BAY

Andy glanced up at the screen, then back at the milling crowd in Times Square. He was getting used to wearing the blue uniform again, though he still felt uneasy when he was around any other men from the detective squad. "What are you doing here?" he asked Steve.

"Same as you, on loan to this precinct. They're still screaming for reserves, they think there's going to be a riot."

"They're wrong, it's too cold and there's not that many people."

"That's not the worry, it's the nut cults, they're saying it's the millennium, Judgment Day or Doomsday or whatever the hell you call it. There's bunches of them all over town. They're going to be damn unhappy when the world doesn't come to an end at midnight, the way they think it will."

"We'll be a lot unhappier if it does."

The giant, silent words raced over their heads.

COLIN PROMISES QUICK END OF BABY BILL FILIBUSTER

The crowd surged slowly back and forth, craning their necks up at the screen. Some horns were blowing and the roar of voices was penetrated by a ringing cowbell and the occasional whirr of rattles. They cheered when the time appeared on the screen.

23:38—11:38 PM—JUST 22 MINUTES TO THE NEW YEAR

"End of the year, and the end of my service," Steve said.

"What are you talking about?" Andy asked.

"I've quit. I promised Grassy to stay until the first of January, and not to talk it around until I was ready to go.

I've signed on with the State Troopers. I'm going to be a guard on one of the prison farms. Kulozik eats again—I can hardly wait."

"Steve, you're kidding. You've been ten twelve years on the force. You've got seniority, you're a Second Grade Detective . . ."

"Do I look like any kind of detective to you?" He tapped his riotstick lightly against the blue and white helmet he was wearing. "Face it, this city is through. What they need here is animal trainers, not policemen. I got a good job coming, me and the wife are going to eat well—and I'm going to get away from this city once and for all. I was born and raised here, and I have news for you—I'm not going to miss it. They need police with experience upstate. They'd take you on in a minute. Why don't you come with me?"

"No," Andy said.

"Why you answering so fast? Think about it. What's this city ever give you but trouble? You break a tough case and get the killer and look at your medal—back on a beat."

"Shut up, Steve," he said, without animosity. "I'm not sure why I'm staying—but I am. I don't think it's going to be that great upstate. For your sake, I hope it is. But . . . my job is here. I picked it up, knowing what I was getting into. I just don't feel like putting it down yet."

"Your choice." Steve shrugged, the movement almost lost in the depths of his thick topcoat and many wrappings. "See you around."

Andy raised his club in a quick good-bye as his friend pushed his way into the press of people and disappeared.

23:58—11:58 PM—ONE MINUTE TO MIDNIGHT

As the words slipped from the screen and were replaced by a giant clock face the crowd cheered and shouted: more horns sounded. Steve worked his way through the mass of people that filled the Square and pressed against the boarded-up windows on all sides. The light from the TV screen washed their blank faces and gaping mouths with flickering green illumination, as though they were sunk deep in the sea.

Above them, the second hand ticked off the last seconds of the last minute of the year. Of the end of the century.

"End of the world!" a man shrieked, loud enough to be heard above the crowd, his spittle flying against the side of Andy's face. "End of the world!" Andy reached out and jabbed him with the end of his stick and the man gaped and grabbed at his stomach. He had been poked just hard enough to take his mind off the end of the world for awhile and make him think about his own guts. Some people who had seen what had happened pointed and laughed, the sound of their laughter lost in the overwhelming roar, then they vanished from sight along with the man as the crowd surged forward.

The scratchy, static-filled roar of amplified church bells burst from the loudspeakers mounted on the buildings around Times Square, sending pealing waves of sound across the crowd below.

"HAPPY NEW YEAR!" the thousands of massed voices shouted, "HAPPY NEW CENTURY!" Horns, bells and noisemakers joined in the din, drowning out the words, merging them into the speechless roar.

Above them the second hand had finished a complete circle, the new century was already one minute old, and the clock faded away and was replaced by the magnified head of the President. He was making a speech, but not one word of it could be heard from the scratchy loudspeakers, above the unending noise of the crowd. Uncaring, the great pink face worked on, shaping unheard sentences, raising an admonitory finger to emphasize an unintelligible point.

Very faintly, Andy could hear the shrill of a police whistle from the direction of Forty-second Street. He worked his way towards the sound, forcing through the mass of people with his shoulders and club. The volume of noise was dying down and he was aware of laughs and jeers, someone was being pushed about, lost in a tight knot of figures. Another policeman, still blowing on the whistle he held tight-clamped in his teeth, was working into the jam from the side, wielding his club heavily. Andy swung his own and the crowd melted away before him. A tall man was on the pavement, shielding his head with his arms from the many feet about him.

On the screen the President's face flicked out of existence with an almost-heard burst of music, and the flying, silent letters once more took its place.

The man on the ground was bone-skinny, dressed in tied-on ends of rags and cast-off clothing. Andy helped him to his feet and the transparent blue eyes stared right through him.

"‘And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes’,” Peter said, the shining skin stretched tight over the fleshless bones of his face as he hoarsely bellowed the words. “‘And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new’.”

"Not this time," Andy said, holding on to the man so he would not fall. "You can go home now."

"Home?" Peter blinked dazedly as the words penetrated. "There is no home, there is no world, for it is the millennium and we shall all be judged. The thousand years are ended and Christ shall return to reign gloriously on Earth."

"Maybe you have the wrong century," Andy said, holding the man by the elbow and guiding him out of the crowd. "It's after midnight, the new century has begun and nothing has changed."

"Nothing changed?" Peter shouted. "It is Armageddon, it must be." Terrified, he pulled his arm from Andy's grip and started away, then turned back when he had only gone a pace.

"It must end," he called in a tortured voice. "Can this world go on for another thousand years, like this?—LIKE THIS?" Then people came between them and he was gone.

Like this? Andy thought, as he pushed tiredly through the dispersing crowd. He shook his head to clear it and straightened up: he still had his job to do.

Now, with their enthusiasm gone, the people were feeling the cold and the crowd was rapidly breaking up. Wide gaps appeared in their ranks as they moved away, heads bent into the icy wind from the sea. Around the corner on Forty-fourth Street, Hotel Astor guards had cleared a space so the pedicabs could come in from Eighth Avenue and line up in the taxi rank at the side entrance. Bright lights on the marquee lit up the scene clearly and Andy passed by the corner as the first guests came out. Fur coats and evening dresses, black tuxedo trousers below dark coats with astrakhan collars. Must be a big party going on in

there. More bodyguards and guests emerged and waited on the sidewalk. There was the quick sound of women laughing and many shouts of Happy New Year.

Andy moved to head off a knot of people from the Square who were starting down Forty-fourth Street, and when he turned back he saw that Shirl had come out and stood, waiting for a cab, talking to someone.

He didn't notice who was with her, or what she was wearing or anything else, just her face and the way her hair spun out when she turned her head. She was laughing, talking quickly to the people she was with. Then she climbed into a cab, pulled the storm cover closed and was gone.

A fine, cold snow was falling, driven sideways by the wind and swirling across the cracked pavements of Times Square. Very few people remained, and they were leaving, hurrying away. There was nothing for Andy to stay for, his duty was done, he could begin the long walk back downtown. He spun his club on its lanyard and started towards Seventh Avenue. The glaring screen of the gigantic TV cast its unnoticed light on his coat, putting a spark into each melted drop of snow, until he passed the Times Building and vanished into the sudden darkness.

The screen hurled its running letters across the empty square.

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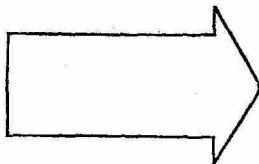
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