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SCIENCE FANTASY

Featuring the first part of SWANN's 'THE BLUE MONKEYS'

A KIPLING SF masterpiece re-discovered and other stories

SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 1964 Vol 22 No 67

SCIENCE FANTASY

Edited by Kyril Bonfiglioli

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Published every other month by ROBERTS & VINTER LTD., 44 Milkwood Rd., London, S.E.24. Subscriptions 17/- ($3.00) post free per year.
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Printed by the Rugby Advertiser Ltd., Castle Street, Rugby.

Editorial . . . . by Kyril Bonfiglioli

This is the third issue of Science Fantasy under the new regime and the first with which I am fully satisfied. Eyebrows may be lifted at the presence of a story half a century old—Kipling's AS EASY AS ABC—but I think that no fair critic can deny that, on the showing of this story, Kipling was far ahead of his time as a science-fiction writer and, had he cared to pursue this line, could have left Wells and the rest of the field standing. As a fantasy writer, too, he must be given pride of place for his Mowgli stories (the first appeared in 1893) which were, of course, the inspiration (to phrase it kindly) of the greatest hack of science-fiction and fantasy: Edgar Rice Burroughs.

There are other contents of this issue which call for a word of comment. I was solemly warned not to print Thom Keyes' PERIOD OF GESTATION since it deals with matters more familiar in the pages of THE SEVEN PILLARS OF WISDOM than in the curiously chaste and prudish ambience of science fiction. I do not think it is an immoral story: to record unnatural crime is not to endorse it. Moreover, I think it is the first story I have seen which takes a really straight—if disillusioned—look at what might really happen to human nature when subjected to the intolerable strains of space.

Keith Roberts' two stories are less controversial, though no less excellent. All I have to say is that I am proud to have him aboard and hope that we shall have more of his work in Science Fantasy before success carries him off—as it inevitably will—to realms where our budget cannot follow him. I regret to say that I can tell readers nothing about him at present except that he is a professional artist and seems to have acquired, somewhere, a professional style and verve to his writing which should have taken him long years to develop.

* * *

On the whole I tend to assume that readers would rather have their full whack of stories than read adulatory letters from other readers, but I feel that my first really hostile piece of mail should find a place here. Mr. James

Goodrich of Middletown, New York, writes:

"I deduct from reading your editorial, skimming thru the stories (read Aldiss') and noting the competition for scientists that u are not going to pub anything that might be labelled fantasy, weird, horror, mythical or—perish the thought—sword & sorcery. If this conclusion is correct, then u may remove a potential subscriber from the list. When I became convinced that I could rely on Ted to include 1 fantastic story in almost every ish & decided to mail a check, the old Science Fantasy ceases. Overjoyed to learn SF was to return, I eagerly awaited the 1st no. only to have my hopes ruined.

Did I like anything about your debut? No. The cover is fashionably avant garde & consequently repugnant. The contents are uniformly ugh. I am over 35, have a degree in biology, am a responsible adult tho highly unconventional, am a parent & a professional public librarian; yet scientific s/f of any calibre bores me completely.

Regardless of my feelings I wish u much success in reaching your fictional goals."

(*Dear Sir,*

I regret to deduct that u found debut ish ugh & note that u wd prefer unscientific science-fic in unfashionable cover. I hope u dislike this ish less. *Sincerely—Ed.*)

* * *

Which reminds me to apologise for the delay in answering some people who have written or submitted stories. A fairly nasty road accident combined with the postal strike to throw my office-work badly out of joint. On the whole, however, if a story is not returned within a week or so, the implication is that it is being seriously considered for publication. Naturally, I like to hold onto things until press-day in the hopes of something more suitable in length or contents turning up.

I have also to apologise for not being able to produce the promised cover by Haro: next time, we hope.

Finally, may I express my pleasure at welcoming Thomas Burnett Swann back to Science Fantasy with, I believe, his finest work yet. I appreciate the arguments against a three-part serial in a magazine of this kind but THE BLUE MONKEYS was far too good to miss.

The first three chapters of a distinguished new novel by the author of "Where is the Bird of Fire?" To be completed in two more parts.

THE BLUE MONKEYS

by Thomas Burnett Swann

PREFACE

In 1952, when the young cryptographer, Michael Ventris, announced his partial decipherment of the clay tablets found in the ruins of Knossos, archaeologists, linguists, and laymen greeted his announcement with enthusiasm and expectation. Since the excavations of Sir Arthur Evans at the turn of the century, the island of the fabulous Sea Kings had piqued the imagination with its snake-goddesses and bull games, labyrinths and man-killing Minotaurs. But instead of a Cretan Iliad, the tablets revealed a commonplace inventory of palace-furniture and foodstuffs, with occasional names of a town, a god, or a goddess. In a word, they confirmed the already accepted facts that the ancient Cretans had lived comfortably, worshipped conscientiously, and kept elaborate records. Those who had hoped for an epic, a tragedy, or a history—in short, for a work of literature to rival the Cretan achievements in architecture and fresco painting—were severely disappointed.

1960, however, an American expedition from Florida Midland University excavated a cave on the southern coast of Crete near the ancient town of Phaestus and discovered a long scroll of papyrus, sealed in a copper chest from the depredations of thieves and weather. I myself commanded that expedition and wrote the article which

announced our find to the public. At the time of my article, we had barely begun to decipher the scroll, which I prematurely announced to be the world's earliest novel, the fanciful story of a war between men and monsters. But as we progressed with out decipherment, we marvelled at the accurate historical framework, the detailed descriptions of flora and fauna, the painstaking fidelity to fact in costume and custom. We began to ask ourselves: Were we dealing, after all, with a novel, a fabrication, a fantasy? Then, last year, in the same cave, one of my colleagues discovered an intaglio seal ring of lapis lazuli which depicted a field of crocuses, a blue monkey, and a young girl of grave and delicate beauty. The discovery gave us pause: The identical ring had been described in the scroll, and its faithfully-rendered subjects, the monkey and the girl, were both participants in the so-called War of the Beasts.

My colleagues and I are scholars, objective and factual; the least romantic of men. We do not make extravagant claims. We do suggest, however, that our manuscript, instead of the world's first novel, is one of its first histories, an authentic record of several months in the Late Minoan Period soon after the year 1500 B.C., when the forests of Crete were luxuriant with oak and cedars and ruled by a race who called themselves the Beasts. We realize that the consequences of such a suggestion are breathtaking and may, in time, necessitate a complete re-examination of classical mythology, since many of our so-called "myths" may in fact be sober history. What is more, folk-lorists may find in the scroll the prototype for a famous fairy tale long believed to have originated in the Middle Ages. Now, with considerable doubts and a rare, unscholarly excitement, we present to you the first English text of the manuscript which we have designated *The Blue Monkeys*. Wherever possible, proper names have been modernized for the convenience of the layman.

T. I. MONTASQUE, Ph.D., Sc.D., L.L.D.
Florida Midland University,

July 29, 1964.

CHAPTER I.

My history belongs to the princess Thea, neice of the great king Minos, and to her brother Icarus, named for the ill-fated son of Daedalus who drowned in the sea when his glider lost its wings. I, the author, am a poet and craftsman and not a historian, but at least I have studied the histories of Egypt and I will try to imitate their terse, objective style. You must forgive me, however, if now and then I digress and lose myself in the glittering adjectives which come so readily to my race. We have always been rustic poets, and I, the last of the line, retain an ear for the well-turned phrase, the elegant (yes, even the flowery) epithet.

Thea and Icarus were the only children of the Cretan prince, Aeacus, brother to Minos. As a young warrior, Aeacus had led a punitive expedition against a band of pirates who had raided the coast and taken refuge in the great forests of the interior. For three years no one heard of him. Returning at last to Knossos, he brought with him, instead of captured pirates, two small children. His own, he told the court. By whom? By a lady he had met on his wanderings. And where had be wandered? Through the Country of the Beasts, a forest of cypress and cedar shut from the rest of the island by the tall limestone ridges which humped from the range of Ida. Cynics concluded that Thea and Icarus were the offspring of a peasant; romanticists questioned if a mere peasant could have given birth to children as strange as they were beautiful, with neatly pointed ears and hair whose luminous brown held imitations of green. Thea took pains to hide her ears behind a cluster of curls, but she could not hide the color of her hair. Icarus, on the other hand, displayed his ears with a mixture of shyness and pride; he allowed no wisp of hair to cover their tips, though his head was a small meadow of green-glinting curls.

The children grew up in a troubled court. The power of the island kingdom had become a thin crescent of its ancient fulness. Gargantaun earthquakes had damaged the manay-palaced cities. The famous fleet, scattered by tidal waves, had fallen into disrepair or come to be

manned by mercenaries from Egypt. The bronze robot Talos, guardian of the coast, lay rusting beside the Great Green Sea, and no one remembered how to repair him. As the brother of Minos, Aeacus spent most of his time in the royal palace at Knossos, and after Minos' death he assumed the throne. A wise if somewhat forbidding ruler, he correctly guessed that the barbarous Achaeans, who lived in the rock-built citadels of Pylos, Tiryns, and Mycenae on the mainland to the north of Crete, were building ships to attack his people. The Achaeans worshipped Zeus of the Lightning and Poseidon, the Thunderer, instead of the Greath Mother; their greatest art was war; and their raids on the Cretan coast resembled small invasions, with a dozen eagle-prowed ships descending on a town in the dead of night to steal gold and capture slaves.

Foreseeing the eventual fall of Knossos, Aeacus sent his children—Thea was ten at the time, Icarus nine—to his mansion called Vathypetro, ten miles south of Knossos, a small, fortified, and self-sufficient palace which included a kiln, an olive press, and a weaving shop. Poised on the roof in the arm of a catapult lay one of the gliders devised by the late scientist, Daedalus. In case of seige, Aeacus's servants had orders to place the children on the fish-like body and strike the bronze trigger which, releasing the catapult, would propel them to relative safety in the heart of the island.

Six years after her arrival in Vathypetro, when invasion had become a certainty instead of a possibility, and the great palace at Mallia had fallen to pirates, Thea was picking crocuses in the North Court. The bright yellow flowers, known to poets as the cloth-of-gold, covered the earth like a rippling fleece, except where a single date-palm broke the flowers with its bending trunk and clustered, succulent fruit. She could hear, in the next court, the sounds of the olive-press, a granite boulder crushing the black kernels, the mush being poured into sacks and pressed under wooden levers weighted with stones. But the workers, the old and the very young who had not been called to the army defending Knossos, did not sound joyful; they did not sing their usual praises to the

Great Mother. For want of sufficient pickers, the fruit had been left too long on the trees and its oil was crude and strong.

She wore a lavender kilt and a blouse embroidered at the neck with beads of amethyst. Though a young woman of sixteen, with shapely, swelling breasts, she did not like the open bodices worn by the ladies of the court. Five brown-green curls, artfully arranged by the hand-maiden Myrrha, poised over her forehead, and three additional curls concealed each ear like grapevines hiding a trellis. Fresh and flower-like she looked, with the careful cultivation of a garden in a palace courtyard, rather than the wildness of a meadow or a forest; soft as the petals of a crocus, slender as the stem of a tall Egyptian lotus. But the green-flecked brown of her hair and the bronze of her skin resembled no flower in any earthly garden. Perhaps in the Lower World, where the Griffin Judge presides on his onyx throne, there are gardens with flowers like Thea.

And yet she was more than merely decorative. A firmness tempered here fragility. Like the purple murex, she looked as if she had come from the sea, fragrant and cleansed, with the shell's own hue in her eyes and its hard strength in her limbs. A sandal can crush a flower but not a murex.

She was picking the crocuses for her father, who, she hoped, was coming from Knossos to visit her. She saw him reflected in the pool of her mind: Aeacus, the warrior-king. Tall for a Cretan, with broad shoulders tapering to a narrow waist, he looked like a young man until you saw the lines around his eyes, running like rivulets into his battle-scars, the v-shaped mark of an arrow, the cleft of a battle-ax. She needed his strength to hush her fears of an invasion, she needed his wisdom to help her manage Icarus, who sometimes acted as if he were five instead of fifteen and liked to vanish from the palace on mysterious journeys which he called his "snakings."

A blue monkey scampered out of the tree, snatched a crocus, and tossed it into the wicker basket at her feet. She laughed and caught him in her hands. Though a

maiden of marriageable years, she did not resent the fact that for friends she had only a monkey, a handmaiden, and a lovable but exasperating brother; that instead of bull games and tumblers and moonlit dances besides the Kairatos River, she had for amusement a distaff to wind with flax and linen robes to dye. Escaping from her hands, the monkey, whose name was Glaucus, snatched her basked and carried it up the trunk of the palm. In the top of the tree, he dislodged a swarm of bees and waved the basket to advertise his theft.

She shook her fist as if she were very angry; she shook the tree and roared like an angry lion. It was part of their game. She remained, however, Thea; she did not feel remotely leonine. When Icarus turned himself into a bear, he growled, he stalked, he actually hungered after honey, berries, and fish. But even as a small child, the practical Thea had not liked to pretend herself into other shapes. "But why should I pretend to be a dolphin? " she had once asked a playmate. "I'm Thea." It was neither smugness nor lack of imagination, but a kind of unspoken acceptance, a quiet gratitude for the gifts of the Great Mother.

Always in the past, the monkey had dropped the basket at her feet and she, happily subsiding from a lion into maiden, had rewarded him with a date or a honey cake. Today, however, she sank to the ground and, hunched among the flowers as if she had fallen from a tree, began to cry. It was not part of their game. She had heard the talk of the servants, their whispers when she approached, their abrupt silences when she tried to join them. She had seen the strain in her father's face the last time he came from Knossos. Against the unnatural pallor of his skin, his scars had glowed like open wounds. If my father comes, she thought, I will not let him return to Knossos. I will keep him safe with us in Vathypetro. If he comes—

The monkey descended the trunk, lifted the basket into her lap, and chattering amiably put his arm around her neck. She looked at him with surprise. Even at sixteen she was used to comforting instead of being comforted. Quickly she dried her eyes on a handkerchief of blue linen,

with flying fish cavorting about its edges, and returned to picking.

"These are for my father," she said to Glaucus. "Do you suppose he will like them?" But she was not really thinking about the flowers. She was thinking about invasion. "If the walls are breached," her father had said, "you will go with Icarus to the Winged Fish. Myrrha will strap you to the board which is shaped like a mullet, and Icarus will hold to your back. Once in the air, you can shift your weight and help to change direction, climb or dip. Head for the mountains. Whatever you do, try not to land in the Country of the Beasts." He paused. He had spoken an ominous name, the part of the island where he had met their mother. It was hard to tell if he spoke with fear or with anguished longing for something which he had lost and did not want his children to find and also lose. "Pass over the forest before you land. By leaning heavily forward, you can bring the craft down. There are friendly villagers who will give you shelter."

She looked above the roofline of the mansion. To the north, Mt. Juktas reared the gentle crags which, viewed from the sea, resembled the features of a sleeping god and barred the way to Knossos. Achaean invaders would come from the sea and around the mountain. To the west lay the hills, terraced with olive trees and vineyards, which climbed gradually into the Range of Ida and the Country of the Beasts, the forest which no-one mentioned without a shudder, much less entered; the haunt, it was said by the cook, the gatekeeper, and the gardener, of the Minotaur, the Bull That Walks Like a Man. "Try not to land in the Country of the Beasts": she would not forget her father's warning.

Myrrha, the handmaiden, exploded into the garden. At the same instant, Thea heard sounds beyond the walls. Marching feet, the clank of armour, the voices of men who march with such confidence that they want the whole countryside to hear their coming.

"Achaeans," Myrrha gasped. "We must go to the glider." She was black of skin, a Libyan born into slavery among the Cretans, and fearful of everything: monkeys, snakes, bats, mice, strangers, and as for the Achaeans:

well, they were giants who boiled their captives in olive oil and ate them to the last finger. Thea did not know her age; it was doubtful whether Myrrha knew. Fifty? Sixty? But her face was as smooth as a girl's until, as now, it fell into wrinkled terror and her eyes seemed ready to burst from her head like overripe figs.

Myrrha seized her hand as if to comfort the girl, but it was Thea who imparted the strength and soothed the woman's fears. " The walls are strong. We may not need the glider." But privately she thought: the Achaeans come from the sea and from Knossos. There has been a battle; perhaps my father is dead.

She sprang up the stairs to the roof and surveyed the olive grove between the house and Mt. Juktas. The green-silver limbs of the trees, some of them laden with fruit, glinted like the wings of dragonflies in the morning sun. But much of the glitter did not belong to the trees. Warriors, perhaps a hundred, advanced through the grove. Armoured in leathern tunics, bronze cuirasses and crested helmets, with shields of bull's hide, they carried swords and spears, and their beards looked so coarse and pointed that they too might have been weapons. Sharp men, bristling men; yellow-bearded killers. Happily, the walled house was built to withstand a seige. The gate was hewn from cedar, and men in the flanking towers could harass attackers with relative impunity.

But the towers, it appeared, were no longer manned. The slaves and servants had begun to desert the house and trail down the road of cobblestones which led to the olive grove. They were laden with bribes for the conquerers—amphorae of wine, yellow cheeses on platters of beaten gold, wicker baskets heaped with linen and wool. Thea's impulse was to hurry after them and order them back by name: Thisbe, who had woven her kilt, Sarpedan, the porter, who called her " Green Curls," Androgeus . . . Surely they would listen, they who had seemed to love her and whom she had loved? No, there was not time. There was only time in which to find Icarus.

She ran along corridors with walls of porous ashlars and roofs supported by red, swelling columns like up-

turned trees. Her sandals clattered on the gray ironstone tiles. She ran until she came to the Room of the Snake. The room was empty except for a low, three-legged table with four grooves which met in the middle and held a small cup, its rim on a level with the surface of the table. The snake's table. The grooves were to rest his body, the cup to hold his food. But the snake Perdix, protector of the mansion and, in the view of Icarus and the servants, a reincarnated ancestor, was not to be found on his table, nor in his sleeping quarters, a terracotta tube with cups attached to its ends. He lay in her brother's hand.

With utmost leisure, Icarus ambled toward her: a boy of fifteen, chunky rather than plump, with a large head and a tumult of hair and enormous violet eyes which managed to look innocent even when he was hiding Perdix in Myrrha's loom or telling Thea that she had just swallowed a poisonous mushroom. He never hurried unless he was leaving the house.

Thea embraced him with sisterly ardour. He submitted with resignation and without disturbing his snake. His sister was the only female he would allow to embrace him. Even as a small boy, he had spurned the arms of Myrrha and various ladies of the court at Knossos. Under normal circumstances—had he remained at court, for example—he could hardly have remained a virgin to the age of fifteen. He might be married; certainly he would be betrothed. For the last five years, however, most of his playmates had been animals instead of boys and girls. The birth of a lamb, the mating of bull and cow: these were the familiar and hardly shocking facts of life to him. But he strenuously resisted the knowledge that men and women propagated in the same fashion.

"Perdix is ill," he explained. "I'm feeding him dittany leaves. They're good for cows in labor. Why not snakes with indigestion?"

"The Achaeans have come." She spoke the words in quick, breathless gasps. "Outside the palace. We must go to the glider." Myrrha by now had overtaken them.

His eyes widened but not with fear. "I will stay and fight them. You and Myrrha go."

She heard a scuffling in the outer chambers, the shouts of Cretans, the oaths of Achaeans: "Poseidon!" "Athene!" A few of the servants, it appeared, had chosen to fight. A man screamed, and the scream became a groan. Never had she heard such a sound except when her cat, Rhadamanthus, had been crushed by the stone wheel of a farmer's cart.

She fought back the nausea which clawed at her throat. "There are too many to fight."

"I will bring Perdix," he said. That flatness of his statement allowed no argument. A remarkable bond united the boy and his snake. For three years Icarus had squeezed and dropped him without arousing his wrath. The boy insisted that Perdix was the avatar of his great-great-uncle who had once sailed around the vast continent of Libya and returned with six pythons and a male gorilla.

"Yes. He will bring us luck."

And the blue monkey, Glaucus? Why had she not remembered to bring him from the garden? His little weight would not have slowed their flight.

They climbed the last stairs and burst into sunlight like breathless divers from the bottom of the sea. Raised on a catapult such as besiegers use to storm a city, the glider poised like a monster from the Misty Isles. Its wings were those of an albatross, with a framework of peeled willow rods covered by tough canvas; its wooden body was that of a fish with round, painted eyes and upturned tail. When the trigger of the catapult was struck with a hammer, two twisted skeins, made from the sinews of a sheep, would start to unwind and propel the craft upward along a trough at a 45-degree angle and into the air. There was room for two passengers, one on top of the other.

Myrrha was stooped with terror. She had started to mumble an incantation in her native tongue, a plea, no doubt, to the gods of the jungle.

"You and Icarus go," said Thea, touching the woman's shoulder. "I will strike the trigger."

But Myrrha shook her head and the terror ebbed from her face. She lifted the girl in her arms (for Cretans are

little people, and Thea, although she had reached her full height, was less than five feet tall) and strapped her to the glider, securing leather straps to her arms and ankles. With a single, larger strap, she fastened Icarus to Thea's back.

"Hold to your sister," she ordered with unaccustomed authority. "The strap may break."

"How can I hold my snake at the same time?"

She took the snake, of which she was mortally afraid, and settled him in the pouch at the front of Icarus' loin cloth. "He will think it's his tube," she reassured the boy.

They did not hear the arrow. Myrrha was speaking to Icarus; then, without a scream, she settled onto the roof and almost deliberately seemed to stretch her limbs in an attitude of sleep. The arrow was very small and nearly hidden in the folds of her robe. With its feathered tail, it looked like a bird gathered to her breast.

Icarus freed their straps and slid with Thea onto the roof. He knelt beside his nurse and kissed her cheek for the first and last time. She lay with her usual expression of doubt and perplexity. Thea stifled a sob; there was no time for tears. She jerked Icarus to his feet. She herself would have to strike the trigger and send him to safety without her.

He saw her intention. "No," he protested. "I am a man. It is you who must go." She was always surprised when her brother issued commands; in his placid times, people forgot his stubbornness. He shoved her towards the glider.

She slapped him across the mouth. "Do you want us both to die?" she cried. "Now do as I say. Remember, you are not to land in the Country of the Beasts."

A giant had barred their path. An Achaean, though not the deadly bowman. The topmost rung of his ladder leaned against the edge of the roof. A bronze helmet, crested with peacock feathers, concealed his forehead, but she saw his blond eyebrows and beardless cheeks; he was very young. There was blood on his hands and on the sword which he raised above his head. She smelled the leather of his tunic as he strode toward her. With a speed which belied his great, clumsy-looking arms, he

dropped the sword and locked both children in a fierce hug. They wriggled like netted tunnies and slid to the floor, gasping for breath—fish spilled on a beach.

He knelt beside them and brushed the curls from Thea's ears. She shuddered at the touch of his fingers.

He grinned. "Pointed ears," he said in the rich Achaean tongue which she had learned at court, a strangely musical language for a race of warriors. "You are not Cretan at all. I think you have come from the woods, and it's time you returned." his eyes were as blue as the feathers of a halcyon, the bird which nests on the sea and borrows its colour from the waves; and a faint amber down had dusted his cheeks. She thought with a wave of tenderness: he is trying to raise a beard and resemble his bristling comrades. In spite of his size and strength, he seemed misplaced in armour.

He placed them on the glider and fastened their thongs. "You had better go. My friends are rough."

He struck the trigger with the hilt of his sword. She hoped that his friends would not be angry with him.

She could not breathe; her brother's body seemed a weight of bronze. Up, up, they shot; up into sunlight and lapis lazuli, where Daedalus had flown, and that other Icarus, for whom her brother was named, until he lost his wings and plunged in the sea like a stricken albatross.

She opened her eyes. The wind's invisible cobwebs had ceased to sting. She felt like a Dancer in the Games of the Bull, swimming the air above the deadly horns; or a dolphin, leaping a wave for the sheer joy of sun above him and sea below him, and air around him like a coolness of silk.

Then she saw their direction.

"Shift," she cried to Icarus. "We are heading for the coast!"

Silence.

"Icarus, listen to me. You mustn't be afraid. You must help me steer for the mountains!"

"Afraid?" he protested. "I wasn't afraid. I was thinking about birds. Now I know what it means to get a bird's-eye view!"

"Shift," they cried in unison, abandoning themselves to the breathless joy of flight.

"SHIFT!"

Below them the captured palace twinkled its giant mosaic—the blue-black clay of the roofs, the red gypsum of the courtyards, punctuated by gardens and fountains and swelling toadstools of smoke which did not come from the hearth in the kitchen. Scarlet blades of flame began to probe among the mushrooming blacknesses. So, too, she thought, has burned the palace of Knossos. Capture, pillage, and burn: that is the way of Achaeans. And her father? She blanched to think of him among such flames.

Grief froze in her like water in a pool, and high among the clouds, time too seemed frozen, as if all the water clocks had turned to ice and the shadows on all the sundials were fixed to a certain hour. And yet they moved. Time and pain were frozen but not the earth, which changed below them from stone villages linked by roads to hamlets linked by footpaths; from vineyards and olive groves to pastures scattered with thickets and shepherd's huts and undulating upwards, upwards toward the Mountains of Ida.

A peak surged toward them like an agry whale.

"Shift!"

They skirted the snow-capped crags, and winds lashed them like spray from a wintry sea.

And then, cupped in the arms of the old, white-haired mountains, lay a green forest, its single egress a narrow strip to the south which faced toward the rich Messara Valley and the great city of Phaestus.

The Country of the Beasts.

They began to descend, gently but irrevocably, toward the forest. Cypresses, bronze in the afternoon sun; cedars as old as the time when the infant Zeus had been nursed in these very mountains; pines and firs, and lesser trees which they did not recognize, wafting a strange fragrance up to meet them, sweet and acrid at once (myrrh? sandarac?): a green immensity of trees, with grassy glades and a stream of flawless malachite, and there, there—was it a town or only a natural clearing with stunted trees like

houses and a ditch like a girdling moat? No man except their father was known to have entered the Country of the Beasts. Shepherds, following sheep, had skirted the southern boundary and seen among the shadows boys with the hooves of goats, winged females with staring golden eyes, and yes, the Minotaur, the Bull That Walks Like a Man.

"Thea," whisphered Icarus, a hushed eagerness in his voice. "Why don't we try to land in the forest?"

"No," she cried with sudden vehemence. "You know what Father said."

"But nothing happened to him. And he left our mother in there."

"Our mother is dead. Now *shift.*"

She threw her weight to the left, but Icarus stared at the forest and did not move.

"Icarus!"

"Yes," he said quietly. "Yes, Thea."

The treetops, soft from a distance, bristled with gnarled fingers to puncture their wings; but together they managed to guide their craft beyond the forest to a clearing of grass and yellow, early-blooming asphodels. They struck with such a thud that they broke their straps and tumbled onto the ground. The lily-like asphodels cushioned their fall.

"Thea, look!" whispered Icarus. "There is something watching us." She looked to the edge of the forest and saw the face.

"Her ears," said Icarus, forgetting to whisper. "They're just like ours!"

"No," said Thea quickly. "Hers are furry. Ours are merely pointed. And besides, she has—paws!"

The face eclipsed itself behind a tree. "We frightened her away." siged Icarus.

"It was something else that frightened her."

Achaeans. At least a score of them, issuing onto the meadow.

"We can follow the girl," cried Icarus.

"No," said Thea. "Better Achaeans than Beasts."

CHAPTER II:

THE MINOTAUR

His helmet of boar's tusk glittered yellowly in the light from the clerestory windows. His bronze cuirass fell below his thighs; he removed his greaves, grunting with easeful release, and his huge, hairy legs resembled trees rising from the undergrowth of his rawhide boots. To Thea, he looked elderly; he must have been forty. He lifted the helmet from his sweat-matted hair and faced his young captives. In the hall of a Cretan nobleman's captured mansion, Thea and Icarus awaited his judgment. His name was Ajax; his men had taken them beside their glider.

On the frescoed walls, blue monkeys played in a field of crocuses. Red-stained columns, swelling into bulbous capitals, supported the roof, and the alabaster floor was divided by strips of red stucco. A riot of color and movement, freedom and playfulness: unutterably foreign to the hardbitten conquerers with their shields and swords. They seemed to sense their unwelcome; they stood gingerly on foam-white alabaster and stared at the painted walls as if they expected the monkeys to drown them with derisive chattering.

She sought her brother's hand and felt his returning pressure. A warmth of tenderness, like the current from a glowing brazier, enveloped her; then a chill of remorse, as if the brazier had been extinguished. It was she who had caused their capture, preferring known barbarians to unknown Beasts.

Ajax sighed and slumped in a chair with a back of carved griffins. To such a man, thought Thea, fighting is not an art but a livelihood; he is not a hero but a strong, stupid, reasonably brave animal who fights because he is too lazy to plant crops or sail a ship.

A small, wedge-shaped wound glowed in his forehead. "You Cretans," he said, pointing to the wound. "For such little creatures you have sharp claws. The lady of the house gave me this." He laughed. "She was suitably punished." He motioned Thea and Icarus to approach

his chair.

Icarus stepped in front of his sister. "You are not to harm her."

"Harm her? Not if she pleases me," Ajax grunted without rancour, disclosing a gap in place of his middle teeth. His voice was high and thin; it squeaked from his hulking body like a kitten's mew from a lion. But he gestured and flared his nostrils as if her were Zeus, the sky-god. "My men saw your ship come down. You almost landed in the Country of the Beasts."

"I wish we had," said Icarus.

"Do you?" laughed Ajax. "You'd like for the Minotaur to get your sister? He takes his pleasure with girls and then he eats their brothers. A Cretan boy like you would make one good bite—except for your head. That might stick in his throat."

"Does he live in the woods where we landed?" asked Icarus, totally uncowed.

A young warrior, both of whose ears had been sliced from his head as neatly as mushroom from a log, anticipated his leader. "His lair is a cave a little to the west. The people hereabouts offer him lambs and calves so he won't come out and eat their children. When we took this house, they called his curse down on us."

Ajax silenced the speaker with an oath. "To Hades with Cretan curses! They're no more potent than Cretan goddesses. Now take these children to the Room of the Dolpins and see that the girl has the means to bathe and change."

She felt his eyes on her wind-dishevelled hair and instinctively reached a hand to rearrange her curls.

"Pointed ears," he remarked, apparently noticing for the first time. "And your brother as well. Are *you* from the forest?"

Angrily Thea restored her curls. "We are Cretans, not Beasts. If I *were* a Beast, my ears would be tipped with fur."

"Well then, my girl with the furless ears, I will come to see you within the hour. See that you robe yourself as becomes a woman and not a child. I have no wish to be reminded of my daughter."

The Room of the Dolphins was small, like most of the rooms in the sprawling palaces of Crete. It was intimate and gaily decorated, with terracotta lamps, as yet unlit, perched like pigeons in wall-niches; folding chairs of fragrant citrus wood; and a raised stone platform billowing cushions of goose feather. On one end, it opened between two columns into a lightwell with a black wooden pillar to honour the Great Mother; on the other, into a bathroom with a sunken floor and a small clay bathtub around whose sides an impudent painted mouse pursued a startled cat. In the centre of the room stood an open chest whose contents were strewn on the floor like a treasure cast from the sea: golden pendants aswarm with amber bees, sandals of blue kidskin, gowns of wool, leather, and linen with wide, flaring skirts. The earless Xanthus pointed to the dresses, nodded to Thea, and paused with eager expectancy, hoping no doubt to watch her disrobe in front of him. Because they display their breasts, the ladies of Crete are sometimes thought to be shameless.

She could not be cross with the man in spite of his impudence. There was something pathetic about his missing ears; without them, his head looked undressed. She smiled tolerantly and pushed him toward the door. The merest touch of her hand impelled him to motion, and he moved before her like a ship before a breeze.

Leaving Icarus to admire the fresco of dolphins, she climbed in the tub and turned a frog-shaped spigot to immerse her body with hot, steaming water. In the larger mansions, rain was trapped on the roof, heated by a brazier, and carried to the bathrooms through pipes of terracotta. Cretan plumbing was admired even in Egypt. She drowsed and forgot to lament the past or dread the future; anxieties flowed from her body along with dust and sweat and the stains of grass and flowers.

A sound awoke her, a lapping of water.

" Thirsty," said Icarus. He had knelt by the tub to offer Perdix a drink, and the snake's forked tongue was narrowly missing her arm.

She shrank to the rear of the tub. She was not embarrassed in front of her brother—often they had bathed or

swum together without clothes—but she did not wish to be bitten by her great-great uncle. Though none of the snakes of Crete were poisonous, some like Perdix possessed sharp fangs.

"Does he have to drink *now*?" she cried.

"He likes it hot, you know. It reminds him of underground springs." When the snake had drunk his fill, Icarus raised him from the water and held him as casually as one might hold a piece of rope or a few links of chain. "I chose a gown for you," he continued. "Hurry up and dress before the water gets cold. Perdix and I want a bath too."

Icarus and Perdix possessed the vacated tub, which lacked a drain and would have to be emptied by Ajax's attendants before it could be refilled. While Icarus splashed in the tub and complained about slow sisters who let the water cool, Thea examined the gown he had chosen for her. It was very bold. The crimson skirt was embroidered with golden heads of gorgons, the puffed sleeves with matching serpents. The bodice was open to reveal the breasts. She smiled at Icarus' taste and chose a more decorous gown which covered her breasts with a thin, diaphanous gauze. Sleeves of saffron fell to her elbows, and the skirt, supported by hoops, flared like an amethyst bell.

"He is going to be disappointed," said Icarus, entering the room. "He wanted you to dress 'as becomes a woman.'"

"Haven't I?"

"You know very well what he meant. He wanted to see your breasts. Myrrha always said they were like melons, and if they kept on growing they would soon be pumpkins. I expect he feels like gardening."

"He can see enough of them now."

"I know, but you've *diminished* them. Perhaps you could paint your nipples with carmine.

"Do you want me to look like a Moabite temple girl?" she protested, though nipples were also painted in worldly Knossos.

"It can't hurt to pacify him," said Icarus realistically.

She thought with a start: He does not suspect what

Ajax really wants of me. He still believes that a woman pleases a man only by showing her breasts and perhaps giving him a kiss.

"You see," he went on, "if he likes your dress, he may not make you kiss him."

"If he likes my dress, he *will* make me kiss him."

Icarus looked surprised. "But that seems greedy. Must he get everything the first night?"

"Achaeans are greedy men. That's why they've come to Crete."

"Of course," he admitted. "You are right then to veil your breasts." From the contents of the chest he selected a pendant of amber and placed it protectively around her neck. "This," he said, "will diminish them even more."

She arranged her curls with the help of copper pins, their heads like tiny owls; reddened her cheeks with ochre; and darkened her eyes with kohl. She was not vain; she was fastidious. She did not dress to make herself beautiful, but to perform an indispensable ritual by which she emphasized the degree and discipline of her ancient civilization. The application of cosmetics was an affirmation of order in a world which, because of earthquakes and Achaeans, threatened to grew disorderly to the point of chaos.

Hardly had she finished her toilet when Xanthus invaded the room with a swollen platter of grapes, figs and pomegranates, withdrew, and returned with a copper flagon of wine and two cups, which he placed on a three-legged table of stone. Then, with the help of coals from a portable brazier, he lit the flaxen wicks of the clay lamps and went to fetch his master.

"Xanthus," said Ajax, entering the room with the leer of a man who is about to enjoy a woman and be envied by other men, "stand guard at the door with Zetes and don't disturb us." Withdrawing, Xanthus returned the leer, and Thea ceased to pity him for his severed ears.

"You will sleep in there," Ajax said to Icarus. He handed the boy a cushion and indicated the floor of the bathroom, beside the tub. "Your sister and I are going

to dine."

"I'm not sleepy," said Icarus. "The evening is still youthful. However, I *am* hungry."

"Help yourself to the fruit, but eat it in the bathroom."

Icarus eyed the fruit without enthusiasm and eyed his sister as if he hoped for a sign. It was plain to see that Ajax had kisses in mind. What should they do?

But Thea could not help him. Fear had left her speechless. A disagreeable adventure threatened to become a disaster. Ajax could break her back with the fingers of one hand.

"You know," continued Icarus valiantly, "It's not the food I want so much as the conversation. My great-great uncle Perdix used to say: 'Good company is worth a broiled pheasant, a flagon of wine, and all the honey cakes you can get on a platter.'"

Thea recovered her speech. "Icarus wold enjoy eating with us. You see, he hasn't known any warriors except his father. You could show him how to handle a dagger."

"Yes," said Icarus, reaching toward the dagger in Ajax's belt, a bronze blade with a crystal hilt. "It's the biggest I ever saw. Why, even a wild boar—"

Before he could finish his sentence, Ajax had swallowed him in his massive arms and swept him toward the door to the bathroom. There was something almost paternal about the scene. In the giant's embrace, the chunky Cretan looked like a small boy being carried to bed by an irate, but loving father. Thea remembered that Ajax had mentioned a daughter.

When Ajax returned, the door shutting behind him on its vertical wooden pivot, Thea had formed a plan. At the age of eleven in Knossos, before she had gone with Icarus to Vathypetro, she had learned to parry the advances of amorous boys; on sun-dappled Crete, young bodies ripened like succulent dates and love came with first adolescence.

Smiling, she motioned Ajax to a chair. "He's a lonely child," she said, gesturing toward the closed door behind which she did not doubt that Icarus had knelt to listen. "He misses a man's company. You see, our father was

killed by pirates three years ago."

"Achaean?"

"Yes," she sighed. "They attacked the ship on which he was sailing to Zakros." It was not hard to invent a touching story. "Women have raised us. Not our mother, who died when Icarus was born, but servants and aunts. Always woman. How we have missed a man." She offered him a cup of wine. He touched the brim to his lips, tasting gingerly, as if he suspected poison. She walked behind him and placed her hand on his forehead.

"You must let me bathe your wound," she said. "Pretend that I am your own daughter. Before he was killed, I used to tend my father with soft unguents and comb his wind-tossed hair. Like you, he was a fighter and often hurt."

He seized her wrist with unpaternal roughness and drew her into his lap. "The skirt becomes you," he said, draining his cup in one continuous swallow. "But not the blouse." With a single and surprisingly deft movement for such a ponderous hand, he tore the gauze from her breasts. His body reeked of leather and sweat. He could not have bathed in weeks, possibly months; he had doffed his armour but he wore the same tunic which he had worn in battle (in several battles, she decided; it was stained with blood, dirt, and food). Furthermore, he was densely wooded with hair: his legs, his arms, even the tops of his sandalled feet. He reminded her of a large, hirsute goat, and like a goat he seemed to her foolish rather than threatening. She had not yet learned that a strong fool is the most dangerous of men.

"You need more wine," she said, trying to disengage herself. Perhaps she could incapacitate him with drink. According to a universal proverb, variously claimed by Cretans, Egyptians, and Babylonians, drinking increases desire but limits performance.

"Not wine. This." He buried her mouth with a kiss which tasted of onions. She remembered that Achaean soldiers chewed them as they marched. She felt as if heavy masculine boots were trampling the delicate offerings—murex, coquina, starfish—in a seaside shrine to the Great Mother. It was not that she feared dis-

honour, like the god-fearing women of Israel, the faraway kingdom of shepherd patriarchs. As a Cretan girl, she was realistic enough to recognize that there was nothing dishonourable if he took her, a woman and a captive, against her will. It was his dirt she feared, his ugliness, his hairiness, his affront to her feminine pride (remember, the Cretans worship a goddess as their chief deity). It was the supreme disorder of being forced to do what seemed to her not a wicked but an ugly and demeaning thing.

His kiss grew more impassioned. She clenched her teeth to withstand his probing tongue. Loathing burned in her like a black, bitter fire of hemlock roots.

"I lost my snake," said a loud and determined voice from the door. Ajax leaped to his feet, and Thea embraced the hard but welcome coolness of the floor. Rising to her knees, she watched the advance of the snake. He was neither large nor poisonous but, flickering his forked tongue, he somehow managed to look as sinister as an asp from the deserts of Egypt. Ajax seized a stool and assumed the martial stance of a soldier defending a bridge against an army.

But Icarus intervened before they could meet. "You mustn't scare him," he said, restoring the snake to his pouch. "It makes him nervous, and then he bites."

"Guard!"

Xanthus appeared in the door beyond the light well. As usual, he looked expectant; perhaps he hoped for an orgy.

"Xanthus, you will take this brat and his snake into the bathroom and keep them there, if you have to drown them in the tub."

The door to the bathroom closed with abrupt finality.

"You Cretan girls," sneered Ajax. He came toward her, shaggy and menacing. "You tease and mince and show your breasts, and then you say, 'No, you hairy old barbarian, you shan't touch me!' Barbarians, are we? Well, we know what to do with a woman!"

"My father will kill you if you touch me." The words stabbed the air like little daggers of ice.

"Oh? He's back from Hades, is he? Indeed, I should fear a man who escapes Persephone!"

In spite of his golden beard, he seemed all darkness and evil, a black whirlwind of fire and rock. The smell of him bit her nostrils like volcanic ash. She knotted her fists in tiny impotence.

Then she remembered the pins in her hair.

* * *

She watched their torch-bearing captors recede in the distance like fishing boats into the night and leave them to darkness that seemed to smother their senses like a shroud of black wool. The air was rank with the droppings of bats. Icarus clutched her hand, half in protection, half in fear. She too was afraid; much more than he, she guessed, since caves and cliffs and roaring rivers, all of the fierce faces of nature, had long been familiar to him from his roving near Vathypetro.

"Possibly," said Icarus without reproach, "If you had struck him somewhere else, he wouldn't have been so angry."

"Nowhere else would have stopped him."

"He certainly had to be stopped," agreed Icarus. "I heard him screaming at you. And all for a kiss."

It was hardly the time to tell him the facts which he had resisted from Myrrha. The cave, of course, belonged to the Minotaur.

She drew him close to her and felt his big head against her shoulder. "Forgive me," she said. "Forgive me, little brother."

"But I *wanted* to come to the Country of the Beasts," he reminded her, not yet frightened enough for a sentimental exchange of endearments. "Now we've come."

"You didn't want the Cave of the Minotaur."

"Perdix will bring us luck."

"Not against the Minotaurs. They are much too big."

"Maybe this one is out to dinner."

"I'm afraid he dines at home. Shhhhh," said Thea. "I hear— "

They heard a padding of feet (or hoofs?), and then a low, long-drawn wail which deepened and reverberated into the curdling bellow of an enraged bull. Nausea crept

to her throat like the furry feet of a spider.

"Mother Goodness, he's coming!" groaned the boy.

"We must separate," said Thea. "Otherwise, he will get us both at once. We'll try to slip past him in the dark and meet at the mouth of the cave."

"Won't he be able to see us? This is his lair."

"He can't chase us both at once."

"Let him chase me first. If he's a slow eater, you may have a chance."

"He will make his own choice." She both expected and hoped to be chosen before her brother. If the Minotaur added the instincts of a man to those of a bull, he ought to prefer a girl to a boy.

She loosened Icarus' hand. His fingers lingered; he hugged her in a quick, impulsive embrace and darted ahead of her, moving from darkness to darkness, scraping his sandals on the floor of the cave. She started to call his name. No, she must not alert the Minotaur. She began to feel her way along the walls; their dampness oozed like blood between her fingers. Once, she stumbled and cut her knee on stalagmites, for she wore her kilt and not the bell-shaped skirt in which she had greeted Ajax. A stench pervaded the air, rancid and sweet at the same time: putrescent flesh and dried blood. She stopped often to catch her breath; fear had drained her as if she had breasted a strong, outgoing tide and washed on the beach with driftwood and shells. Little by little, her eyes became used to the darkness and distinguished the pronged stalactites which hung from the roof like seaweed floating above a diver's head.

Why, she asked herself, do I fear the Minotaur more than Ajax and his killers? At Knossos, she had often attended the Games of the Bull; once, it is true, she had seen a boy impaled, but the bull had not been vicious. The boy had tried to somersault over his back but landed on his horns. The bull had seemed surprised instead of murderous; he had lowered his horns to help the attendants remove the body.

Sounds, muffled and dim (Icarus' voice, perhaps?). Then, again, the long-drawn, chilling roar.

A bull that walks like a man, that was the terror. Walks

on two legs. Thinks with a man's cunning, hates with a man's calculated cruelty. A hybrid of man and beast, monstrous to the eye and monstrous of heart, and roaring with cold malevolence.

A yearning for Icarus hushed her fears. The tentative touch of his hand, restless to dart away like a plump woodmouse. The big head, not really big except for its wreath of hair, and the pointed ears which he did not allow the hair to conceal. His childish games and hardly childlike courage. She bit her tongue to keep from calling his name. She rounded a turn and looked up and up into the eyes of the minotaur, and his red, matted hair.

* * *

When I entered the cave, I was hungry as a bull. Once a week the farmers outside the forest bring me a skinned animal. Bellowing lustily to justify my reputation, I fetch the meat and take it home with me to cook in my garden. They call me the Minotaur, the Bull That Walks Like a Man. In spite of my seven feet, however, I am not a freak, but the last of an old and illustrious tribe who settled the island before the Cretans arrived from the East. Except for my pointed ears (which are common to all of the Beasts), my horns (which are short and almost hidden by hair), and my unobtrusive tail, I am far more human than bovine, though my generous red hair, which has never submitted to the civilising teeth of a comb, is sometimes mistaken for a mane.

As I said, I came into the cave with a hearty appetite. I also came harassed by a trying day in my workshop. My lapidaries, the Telchines, had quarreled and bruised each other with chisels and overturned a vat of freshly fermented beer. My stomach rumbled with anticipation of the plump, neatly skinned lamb (perhaps two) which would soon be revolving on the spit in my garden.

Almost at once I heard the noises. I stopped in my tracks. Had my dinner been brought to me unkilled, unskinned, and uncleaned? Intolerable! It looked as if I would have to prowl the countryside after dark and

strike terror into the hearts of the shiftless peasants.

But no. The sounds were voices and not the ululations of animals. I stalked down the twisting corridors of what is called the Cave of the Minotaur but which might better be called his Pantry. I paused. I peered. I sniffed. Man-scent was strong in the air. A trap? Well, they were not likely to trap a Minotaur. I could see in the dark, and my nose was as keen as a bear's. I advanced warily but confidently hoof over hoof. I—

Crunch!

A rock struck my outstretched hoof. I roared with pain, hobbled on the other leg, and looked up to face my attacker, who was crouched on an overhanging ledge and readying another rock.

I saw a chunky boy of about fifteen, with a large and very engaging head, a thicket of greenish hair, and pointed ears. The ears, to say nothing of the hair, marked him as a Beast. At least, half of him. I liked both halves. He was the kind of boy that one would like to adopt as a brother. Teach him to carve a bow from the branches of a cedar tree and spear fish with a sharpened willow-rod and, at the proper time, introduce him to the Dryad, Zoe, and her free-living friends, who could teach him about a boy's way with a wench.

"Come down from there," I cried. "What do you think you are, a blue monkey? I won't hurt you."

"Oh," he said, surprised. "You can talk, and in Cretan too."

"What did you expect me to do, moo or speak Hittite? As a matter of fact, *your* people learned their language from *my* people several hundred years ago."

"Till now I have only heard you bellow." He was already climbing down from his ledge.

I reached out and seized hold of him and, suddenly mischievous, delivered my heartiest bellow right in his face. He trembled, of course, but looked me straight in the eye.

"You shouldn't have come down so quickly," I chided. "I might have been luring you down to eat."

"But you said you wouldn't hurt me."

"Don't believe everything you're told. If I had been

a Cyclops, I would have smiled and coaxed and stirred you in the pot!"

"What should I have done?"

"Argued a bit. Asked for proof of my good intentions. Found out what I meant to do with you."

"But you *didn't* eat me, and I saved time and questions. I want you to meet my sister."

My heart sank like a weight from a fisherman's net. The sister of such a brother was certain to be a lady. Let me say at once: wenches have always liked me, but ladies shut their doors. I would frighten her, she would call me (or, being a lady, think me) uncouth and uncivilized. She would want me to comb my hair, shave my chest, and trim my tail. She would wince when I swore, glare if I tippled beer, and disapprove of my friends, Zoe, the Dryad, and Moschus, the Centaur.

"Oh," I said, "I don't think she will want to meet me."

"She will be delighted. She thought she was going to have to pleasure you."

We walked to meet her while Icarus told me about their adventures. The meeting was to change my life.

CHAPTER III:

THE TRUNCATED TREE

Do you know the pottery called Kamares Ware? Thin as an egg-shell, swirling with creatures of the sea: anemones, flying fish, and coiling octopi. You would think that the merest touch would crack the sides, and yet in a hundred years the same cup can still hold flowers or wine or honey. That was Thea. The littleness of her, the soft fragility, stirred me to tenderness. At the same time, I saw her strength. Her slender waist, slim as the trunk of a young palm tree, rose into powerful breasts like those of an Earth Mother; her tiny hands were clenched and raised like weapons.

Icarus ran ahead of me and took her hand. "Don't

be afraid," he cried. "He wants to be our friend." He added, rather proudly: "Even though I bashed him with a rock."

I stood awkwardly, shifting my weight from hoof to hoof, and wondered what I could say to reassure her. "He's right," I blurted. "I want to be your friend, and you won't have to pleasure m-m-me." I stammered into silence. To mention pleasuring to a lady—well, it was just such tactless remarks, together with my physiognomy, which had branded me as a boor for most of my twenty-six years. I awaited the lifted eyebrow, the frigid smile, the stinging slap.

She took my hand—paw, I should say, since her small fingers could not encircle its girth. I returned the pressure as shyly as if I were holding a thrush's egg.

"Sir," she said, "we have come to your cave without invitation. May we remain as grateful guests?"

"I don't live *here*," I cried with some vexation. "I have a comfortable house in the forest." Had she been the Dryad Zoe, words would have tripped from my tongue with the ease of fruit from an upturned cornucopia, and my own eloquence would have put me in mellow spirits. As it was, I was desperately frightened of her and trying to hide my fear with a show of petulance.

"May we then—" she began.

"Follow me," I growled, turned my back, and strode toward the mouth of the cave. When I did not hear them directly behind me, I paused and looked over my shoulder. They were limping and stumbling across the rough stalagmites. Thea had bruised her knee and Icarus had taken her hand. I went back to them, lifted her in my arms, and ordered Icarus to ascend my back.

"You don't mind carrying a snake too?" he asked.

"Snakes," I said, "are symbols of fertility and domesticity. They bring growth to the fields and fortune to the house. Besides that, they are somebody's ancestors."

"Great-great-uncles," said Icarus. He started to wave his arms and shout "Giddyap!"

"With *two* riders, I am doing well to lope," I said. "If you want to gallop, I suggest you find a Centaur. Bend down now or you'll bump your head."

" Better than goose feathers," he mumbled, making a pillow out of my hair, and Thea lay in my arms as lightly as a sleeping child. It came to me with startling suddenness that I had gone to the cave in search of dinner and found a family. To a confirmed and somewhat dissolute bachelor like myself, the new responsibility was terrifying.

At the mouth of the cave, I set them down on the moss and caught my breath.

" What big trees," cried Icarus, looking at the forest which stretched around us like tall Egyptian obelisks. " Big enough to hold houses in their branches."

" Or in their trunks," I said. " That's where the Dryads live." There were cedars with clustered needles and small, erect cones; wide-spreading, many-acorned oaks, with bark like the cracked, discarded skin of a snake; and cypresses, lithe and feminine, their leaves misting with sunlight.

" How sad they look," said Thea, pointing to the cypresses. " Like women. The women of all ages who have known the wrenchings of childbirth or the caged swallow which is unrequited love."

" And yet," I said, " they look as if they have borne these things proudly and willingly. It is courage you see as well as sadness."

" Of course," she agreed. " You must forgive me for sounding morbid. Ever since we lost our home, I have felt as if—as if sadness had fallen on me like a hunter's net! "

I understood her needs. She wanted a house to shut her from forests, Achaeans, and—who knows?—Minotaurs? She wanted a warm hearth, a father, and perhaps a husband (for she was ripe for marriage).

" Little princess," I said. " We will soon be safe in my house. There you will not feel lost."

She smiled at me with a sweetness older than Babylon, older than the pyramids at Gizeh which house the mummified bodies of Egyptian pharaohs. The sun of the late afternoon kindled her hair to a smoky radiance. Why do you fight the forest, I thought. The brown of your hair is the rich soil from which the barley grows;

It is the trunk of a tree or the wing of a thrush. The green is the first tentative blade that reaches for sunlight; it is leaves and grass and the young grape. Brown and green. Earth's two colours. Why do you fear the forest?

Then, through the blue smoke of time, I remembered my own boyhood. In the branches of a tree, I saw a small girl weeping, and a small boy who laughed and waved his pink fist, and the Dryad, their mother, who leaned to the sunlight and combed her hair. And him, not a Beast, but a Man.

To reach my house, we followed a secret path whose signs were a woodpecker's nest and a mound of yellow hill-ants, a stone in the shape of a fist and a blackened stump. Sometimes we walked in a darkness of tangled limbs which withheld the sun except for a few golden icicles; in a closeness of air which dampened and weighted us as if we were walking the bottom of the sea. High in the trees, blue monkeys flickered like fish, and only their cries reminded us that we walked in a forest of trees instead of coral and holothurians. Thea waved to them gaily and coaxed their leader to sit on her shoulder, draping his tail like a necklace around her throat.

"I had one in Vathypetro," she smiled. "They don't seem part of the forest. They are tame like Egyptian cats."

"Too tame for their own good," I said. "Sometimes they get themselves eaten by bears."

"Look," cried Icarus suddenly. "A sea of flowers and a little brown fort in the middle."

"Yellow gagea," I said, adding modestly, "the fort is my house."

The house had once been a mountainous oak, broad as the Ring of the Bulls at Knossos, but thanks to a bolt of lightning, only the trunk remained to a height of twenty feet, like the walls of a palisade with a walkway and narrow embrasures near the top in case of a siege. I went to the door and rang the sheep's bell which hung above the lintel. Behind the red-grained oak I heard the quick pattering steps of a Telchin as he came to raise the bolt. In the forest, it was always necessary to lock

one's door. According to an old proverb, " Where locks are not, the Thriae are." The shy Telchin did not wait to greet us. He and his race are frightened of strangers, though among themselves they boast and wench and fight at the drop of a toadstool.

I had hollowed the trunk of my tree to encompass a garden, which held a folding chair of citrus wood, a large reed parasol like those of the Cretan ladies when they walk by the sea, a clay oven for bread and honey cakes, a grill for roasting meat, and a fountain of hot spring water which served as my bath and also to wash my dishes. Around the fountain grew pumpkins, squashes lentils, a grape vine hugging a trellis, and a fig tree with small but shapely branches and very large figs. Between the hearth and the parasol grew my favourite flowers, scarlet-petaled, black-hearted poppies, and Zeus help the weed which stole their sunlight or the crow which bruised their buds!

I have always felt that a garden should extend and not circumscribe nature; I plant my flowers haphazardly instead of in rows, and sometimes I scatter my tools in pleasant disorder, like branches under a tree. But Thea was used to the tidiness of palace courtyards. I felt rebuked by her look and hurried to pick up a rake, muttering, " I wonder how *this* got there," though of course I had laid it there myself three weeks ago and stepped around it every morning.

We descended a wooden staircase which coiled below the garden like the winding heart of a conch shell and opened abruptly into my den. One of my Telchines had lit a lamp, which hung from the ceiling by a chain of electrum and swayed in the breeze from the stairs. The walls of the den were roots, twisted and smoothed into shape; and sturdier roots, resembling gnarled pillars, divided the room into separate nooks or dells. You could almost say that I had captured a little corner of the forest. No, not captured. I had never liked that word. Rather, I had trusted myself to the forest, given my safety into the keeping of her labyrinthine roots, which held the earth above my head and below my feet, supported and sustained me. There was

beauty in them as well as utility. Just as the convolutions of an old piece of driftwood may leap to colour when thrown in a fire, so the brown roots of my house glowed malachite, amber, and lapis lazuli—sea-colour, woods-colour, sky-colour—in the light of a clay lamp. Like Thea's hair, you could say, for brown is not colourless but the reservoir of many colours, which only need to be awakened by the soft fingers of light.

The roots, being dead, were neither moist nor clammy, and the reed mats on the floor, together with a pair of open and gently glowing braziers, lent to the room the warmth and intimacy of a squirrel's nest. Many a night I had tippled beer with my friends until the roots seemed to writhe above us like big friendly snakes, guardian spirits intent on their good offices of cheering and protecting. On other nights, I preferred to read. Of all the room's possessions, my favourite, I think, was the low, cylindrical chest of scrolls—*The Isles of the Blest: Are They Blessed?, Centaur Songs, Hoofbeats in Babylon*—which I read to compensate for my very limited travels (you see, I had never left the forest). As Icarus' great-great uncle might have said, "An untraveled Minotaur is a hungry Minotaur, and reading feedeth him like beer and honey cakes."

But comfortable rooms are rarely neat, and today, hardly expecting guests, I had stacked my cooking utensils, a platter with scraps of bread and a tripod which had held a bird's-nest stew, beside the hand-mill where I ground my grain and occasionally (as today) spilled some flour.

"I will have to see about supper," I said. Remember, I had found no meat in my cave. The carnivorous Telchines would rather turn cannibal than resort to vegetables. "First I will show you your room. I will sleep in here, and you may have my bedroom."

It lay at the foot of a ladder: round and snug as a rabbit's burrow; small enough for me but large for Thea and Icarus. The floor was carpeted with moss and the down of bird's nests. There was no furniture except for a three-legged stool and a citron chest in which I kept a tunic to wear on cold days and a pair of round sandals

to wear when I went to gather gemstones in the quarry.

Icarus threw himself on the floor and uttered a cry like the neigh of a donkey which has pulled a cart since sunrise and come home at dusk to a bed of straw. "Soft as clover," he said, snuggling into the down and releasing Perdix to find his own nest.

Thea, I saw, did not share his enthusiasm. I had rather expected a compliment on my room, but she thrust an explorative toe into the down to see if it were clean. Suddenly I realized that the room was not designed for a woman.

"We'll find you some toilet articles tomorrow," I promised. "I have a friend with a Babylonian mirror. Shaped like a swan, with the neck for handle."

"Your room is charming," she said with well-meant insincerity. "You must forgive me if I appear unappreciative. I'm very tired."

"I'll bring you a tub of hot water."

Escaping up the ladder, I remembered the time a fastidious Dryad (not Zoe) had told me that I needed a haircut: all over. Unkempt, I thought. That's what I am, and so is my house.

In the garden, I found the tub which I used for washing vegetables and, thrusting it under the fountain, began to plan my dinner. I could pick some figs and squashes in my garden; I could bake a loaf of bread and gather mushrooms and woodpecker-eggs for an omelette. But what would I do for meat? Perhaps I had time before dark to shoot some hares—

It was then that I heard the scream. When a woman screams, sometimes she means: I need some help but there is no real hurry. It's just my way of attracting attention and pointing up my helplessness. But Thea's scream was sheer, spontaneous terror; it bubbled onto the air like the black poison of hemlock. I jumped down the stairs in three large leaps, slid down the ladder almost without touching the rungs, and found a Telchin crouched at the foot, waving his feelers in consternation. Behind him, Thea was brandishing the three-legged stool and shouting, "Out, out!"

It was, of course, her first meeting with a Telchin,

a three-foot ant with almost human intelligence and with six skillful legs which make him the best lapidary in the world; he can carve and set gems more delicately than the surest human craftsman. But Thea saw only the great bulbous head, the many-faceted eyes, the black, armoured skin.

"It crawled down the ladder," she said in a whisper. "Then it came at me, waving its feelers."

"He didn't come at you, he came looking for me," I snapped, emphasizing the *he*, for I saw that her scornful *it* had hurt his feelings. "And he understands every word you say." He is quite harmless except to other Telchines." I stroked his antennae. He indicated pacification with a pleased buzzing which vibrated through my fingers. Icarus, belatedly rousing himself from his nap, climbed to his feet and walked without hesitation to the trembling Telchin. He knelt and leaned his head against the creature's armor.

"What's his name?" he asked.

"Telchines hide their names except from their mates. I call him Bion."

"Bion," said Icarus. "I want you to meet Perdix." The pleased buzzing became a roar.

Thea, meanwhile, had started to cry.

"Don't cry," I said. "He's forgiven you now."

"But I'm still afraid. Of—of everything in the forest!"

"Of me?"

She looked at me for a long moment before she spoke. "At first, in the cave. Even after Icarus said you were friendly. Not any more, though. Not since I saw your flowers. But the forest terrifies me. I thought I was safe down here, and then I saw Bion, and it seemed as if the forest had followed me."

"It had," I said, "but the good part. The forest is like a Man or a Beast, with many moods. Bion would rather eat his brother than hurt my guests. Wouldn't you, Bion?"

"I'm a terrible coward, Eunostos."

"You were very brave when you met me in the cave. You waved your fist in my face."

" I seemed to be brave, but I wasn't really. My heart was jumping like a startled quail."

" It doesn't matter what your heart does so long as your feet stand still. In the last two days your heart has had good reason to jump. You have lost your home, crashed in a glider, fallen in the clutches of Ajax, and faced the Minotaur in his cave. But all those things are behind you."

" Yes," she smiled. " You will protect me here. I see that now."

She was the first real lady to look on me for protection. I did not know, however, that she planned to improve my manners and redecorate my house.

—To be continued.

A new writer takes a long grim look at what life might really be like in the interminable distances of space.

PERIOD OF GESTATION

by Thom Keyes

By the seventh year of the voyage Wrenn had also gone mad, and in the tradition had sweated himself out of it. That meant that everyone was mad except for Berry, and of course he was the craziest of the lot. But then that was the seventh year, when there were no others to help as there had been in the first year when they did not speak to each other, or the tenth when they were finally all mad together. In that tenth year, when no incident was other than normal, quite unexpectedly, what might have been called a hidden panel opened in the wall, timed to do so (as they discovered) on a ten-year switch, and inside there were magazines and books and chocolates and things like that. So it was only to be expected that they should lose all remaining control. The designers probably thought that this would be a tremendous gift to them to relieve their boredom, but they did not realize that there was no boredom, since that state came after reading the same magazines over and over again. The terrible crisis which occurred when the last bar of chocolate had been eaten, and the even worse crisis when Newman produced a bottle of brandy in the eighth year to celebrate half time; those were years, and those were just incidents, and now each of them had passed all conceptions of boredom, and those thousands of tattered magazines had been decorously jettisoned, and life with them. So since it had been

eight years since they had seen a picture of anything human they tore into this hoard of magazines, until Prokosch found an article about themselves. There was a photograph of Trencher, whom they had all loved, in the middle of them, looking wonderfully brave and comic and happy, and even smiling, and they thought at the same time of Trencher when he had died, and how they had to cremate him and then block up the rear window, so that they could not even imagine that they saw the ashes there, hugging close to the wall. Then they dodged down the corridor, and frantically tore up the unread paper into little pieces. The action not really convincing as anger, so much as shreds of the self-awareness which they had been sublimating for so long. When they returned they found Berry in a heap of silver paper—chocolate saliva dribbled out of his mouth, chocolate covered his teeth and chin and cheeks, his whole face was an orgy of chocolate. He sat rubbing his lips with a nervous jerking movement, engraining warm, melting chocolate into his cheek. When they had finished beating him up, and the blood from his cut lips and cut face wetted the hardened chocolate to fall on the white floor in rusty pools, then they were all sick, but Berry was sick the worst.

Why the floor was white anyway was nobody's business, other than that some misplaced ex-professor had been bribed into industry to form a psycho-therapeutic plastics department and had chosen white as the most clinical and least varying shade for living with over sustained periods, even down to the automatic night lighting, which glowed over the floor with a soft white light through the prescribed seven hours. White did not really help at all.

"Smile," said Wrenn. He said this every morning in his bright conditioned way, and no-one heard him at all, unless their inner selves responded to that conditioning, because they would all smile, or rather grin, for a smile is something else again. Prokosch's face had born that permanent grin since he had first bubbled over the shallow pan of sanity. Now the current was only lowered and simmered, just waiting.

Wrenn had a tawny smooth face. What, at one time, had been lines of worry were gone now, except round his eyes and the loose rings of his neck. But however smooth that Wrenn was, next to Berry he was old and ugly and obscene. Berry was a darling boy, a sort of Botticellian Lucretia Borgia, who had let his hair grow long after his first madness, when they had all convinced him that he was Jesus Christ. They learned that this was a dangerous game to play. Berry had an ideally pale skin for the picture as well, because he refused to sit under the sun lamps as they all did as part of their daily ritual. His face was roundedly thin, and the cheekbones were high, and his long hair fell fair. So whether they bullied Berry or whether they slept with him, it was all the same to them, because he was a lower form of life in some way, like a woman.

The two others of the team, Prokosch and Newman, had their masculinity hung loosely as the sole security remaining to them from their teaching. If they wore their hair so short that it was practically scalp, it was because this had been the way at the academy. Their formalized callisthenics in the morning were an unconsidered gesture towards keeping their muscles huge and rippling. They were both almost seven feet tall and were chosen because they were impotent.

Wrenn was the one. Rather the wily one, although Prokosch it was you had to watch, since it was he that had the ideas. But Wrenn could get anything that he wanted because that had always been the way with him. There were certainly things to want. Most of all you wanted quiet, and then you could try to sleep without hearing everyone in the room breathing. That was when you could get the private room all to yourself if you were careful. Or again, when you had to have noise and when you had to talk to someone, or try to laugh or tell old dirty jokes, then, if you were Wrenn, you could get people to talk with you or sleep with you.

You would think that after sixteen or fifteen years people would really hate each other, or would degenerate in some way into beasts and would kill one another in no time at all, and that would partly be right; and you

might think that they would have had the horrors when they had any contact, like brushing by each other, or hands, or feet. This too would not be all that inaccurate. But there was love there too. You loathed Berry as a man, as a companion, as a fellow scientist, but he was there as something else that they all loved, and that could not be just set aside, because if anything was clear to them it was their relationship with each other. Sometimes when the men would talk together and when Berry was in the private room, as this was the way that things went most often, they would talk about the families they might have had, though with Prokosch and Newman this was unlikely, and they would fall into that terribly wistful sort of talk that depends on 'if.' There had been a whole year near the beginning when the word had been taboo. And a literal sort of taboo that was built into the ritual that they lived, for their day was divided into a series of religious and semi-religious ceremonies based on food or hygiene or eating or sleeping. Even speaking. This was the way things had to work and the way that it later appeared, when the log books were read and re-read in an attempt to reconstruct those sixteen years. But then the scientists had almost forgotten and did not really care, although they would be remembered sporadically by their families in the In Memoriam column of *The Times* or in the personal column along with the notices of good wines and new restaurants and all that went with a forgotten life.

In the final year that all those big books have been written about, Wrenn had written, 'We are worried about Berry' and that was the beginning for then or ever.

Prokosch was the first to notice, and when it was pointed out they waited, and watched, and said nothing for a few weeks while they discussed it, decided that it was the radiation, or it was the lighting somehow, or some contamination, or the thousand and one psychosomatic influences that could change physical properties in the human body.

In any case, it was seen that, without a doubt, Berry was pregnant.

There had always been tension among them, but never

the sort of hostility that was growing up now. Berry, of course, was obviously trying to pretend that he knew nothing about this at all. And the rest of them decided that this was the best course to follow in their relations with him; to act as if there was nothing wrong, and that they had not even noticed. Prokosch tried to work out how far gone he was, and after careful observation and tabulation they decided on two months. Prokosch tried to set himself up as the father and acted like a complete bastard all the time, and would lie awake all the night and worry, and then he tried to bully Wrenn and Newman until they ganged up on him and nearly kicked him to death in order to keep him in place.

They had to decide then that they were all the father, and that was the nearest to the truth.

In the third month they completely forgot that they would soon be home, because home was an alien concept now, and home meant family, which was being provided here, with passion and ties of kinship of such strength that the weakened familiar relationships which home as such had to offer meant nothing. Again in that third month Prokosch forgot himself again and nearly told Berry that they all knew about his secret, and he was silent in bed for a week because they nearly castrated him. He seemed to whimper at night when the night lights automatically dimmed, and the sound of the others comforted each of them and put them to sleep.

Suddenly there was nothing more that they could say to each other, and they would all sit on different sides of the room in prolonged meditation as they had been taught at the academy, so that they would never resort to violence or savagery with each other as they might have without their training. But this life which each of them had built up, and even their communal life had no place in it for a baby. Babies were squalling windy creatures, noising their strugglings against those unknowns which they were fighting themselves. Babies could not be treated as delicate scientific instruments; they had to be fed and changed and burped. The love that babies needed was more than just careful handling. The position required

thought and re-adjustment, and hence the meditation through the continued watching. There was for them the humour that the white Christ shift which they had made for Berry now served the dual purpose of a maternity gown.

Since they had first seduced Berry he had no longer taken showers with them in the morning, and that mainly was why he never went under the sun-ray lamp which followed the showers. So apart from seeing that he did not become anaemic they also saw to it that he was kept clean. There was. of course, no dirt, or dust or even odd floating bacteria, but there was the sort of filthy sweat which the human body creates for itself. So, gently, he was persuaded to take showers by himself, even though this was not programmed into the present pattern of the system.

Berry, for the most part, remained completely smug and aloof to their kindnesses. They would bring him his food in the private room, and they would no longer bother him with their nightly excursions down the glowing corridor. All the while Berry seemed to them plumper and plumper, and his mammaries took on a drooping paleolithic air, as though he was about to give birth to quadruplets, or to a new life form, or to a new human race. To see the end of this, to leave behind their off-spring, that was the main desire.

The urge for procreation can be the most consuming of all wants. The urge misapplied offers little solace in its pathos. Was it for them to worry about Berry and his misdirected desire to take off what he mutteringly called ' the puppy fat I've been putting on,' or was this another facet of his changed temperament; his appetites that were so strained and strange, his pettish and peckish-ness, or was it just that they were more aware of him now? He would only eat the black pills which were dis-pensed to them on Sundays, so that they all knew that it was Sunday and could thank the Lord for their life, as they had been told to do at the Academy. The pills with the tremendous racy effect on the head and the bloodstream. Once Newman had gone on a frenetic jag and saved them for weeks and had nearly died in

convolutions of ecstasy and depression. They had lived a lot for their black pills and Berry ate them all, because he realized that he could get away with it. That stopped when he began to get liverish, and with relief they cut down their liberality towards him. Then his temperament, which had always been of a schizoid nature, was now jumping and turning with alternate longings for affection and irritable shrewishness. Only now they loved it and cherished it in him, waiting and watching until their eyes were bloodshot with nightly staring down the shimmering floor of the corridor and thinking about it.

A son or daughter to them. Someone to live on to bear witness of their sixteen-year exile. A child to light the way of the human race, as all parents expect their children to do, but mostly something to live for. You cannot exist without the thought of continuation. Families may die, nations themselves may cease to exist in huge sweeps of invasion, but the human race will continue and there is no worry. When you are so alone you are the very last of all, and you cannot die without your own spirit, your blood, your kind, left in the vacuum. What you want most to remain for a while is your memory.

In the fifth month they noticed blood on the shift and worried about a miscarriage, but they still kept Berry's secret, and smiled behind him at the long blond hair and thought wonderfully happy thoughts about motherhood. The blood on the shift did not become any more noticeable, and so they thought that it could have been only some sort of cut or stretching. In this month they too started to get troubled, pacing up and down as shadows in their shadowless rooms. The three, always so disembodied and impersonal were now as one worried mind and in a Gestalt binding held tight to their one purpose of watching over the life in the private room. When they imagined the baby kicking in Berry's stomach, they felt a pleasure that was their own.

Then Berry noticed. He realized as he had never realized before that they were watching him, and watching him most nastily. He did not panic at once because he could not understand why they should be watching him at all. Then he thought of the way that they had been

treating him since, on thinking back, they had started to have this way of keeping an eye on him. The way that he had not had any visits from them for months; for seven months, giving him all the while everything he wanted. This could not be dismissed as he might have thought before, by the insisted fact that he was Christ, because even in the darkest moments he had known that this was not true. Now he thought how fat he had become, and how he had seemingly lost all contact with the others, even the twisted contact he had had before. In this night his mind bent in dreams that shook him into forgotten awareness. Traumas shook him with the hot sweats which had before pulled him only from one kind of madness to another as a nervous reaction, now they left him awake and aware and sane. When they were still asleep he cut his hair short, and went into the steam room and sat under the sun lamps for quite a while, then he put away his shift and pulled out his old academy uniform which fitted him still easily because of its elasticity, and went to sleep like that.

There was that shock for them in the morning. Sane that morning, yet they still watched him, savouring.

It was now Berry who gave orders, seeing that the main log-book was kept filled out in the regulation manner. He reminded them of their duties as scientists, lapsed now for years. Though there was little to let lapse; no life beyond this present worldless world which they made. Of the other worlds which Berry mentioned nothing existed for them, even he only now remembering. He talked about home and the automatic navigation, and the time being just a matter of months. Then they slavishly agreed, and laughing at that, smiled with each other, and waited. Now Berry knew that he had lasted the years, that it could be done, and that most of all he had done it. Soon to be home, that meant something to him at least, when it seemed to mean less and nothing to the others.

In the last month he noticed the eyes on him, bright sparks of pupil fever staring, and he thanked God and their training that they were at least alive and had not killed each other at this latest moment. So very soon

they could be home to receive treatment.

Yes, they watched their baby; it was theirs and they had every right to watch it. What was there to worry about in the new Berry? He was just showing signs of panic, frightened of the birth, talking the sort of nonsense which they had once talked in the beginning, before time itself, those sixteen years.

Wrenn was the first to say what they had all been thinking; how will the baby be born? They had thoughts that frightened them about this, until they had to come to a decision, as they did when the time pressed their calendared calculations. Berry watched their hands now that fidgeted more, and grew to hate their looks at him in the showers since he had joined them there in the mornings, because he knew what they were looking at.

Then it was nine months, and home was practically on the radio, and the baby was almost born to them, and it was frightening. Berry, so sane now that he had to be locked in the private room to keep him rested, since he still insisted on the silent game of denial of his state. All the time they would ask Berry how he was and he would humour them, unknowingly, because someone had to bring in the automatic pilot, or adjust the directional beam that would do it at least. The chance was there that they would be missed and so miss completely.

Then it was time, yes, it was time, and they all knew what they had to do. They made the knife out of a piece of the frail locker door which was one of the few surfaces not of plastic, since it was magnetized. They bent the door back and forth until it broke off and had a bent edge and was pretty sharp. Wrenn hid the knife until they got Berry into the refectory, since that was the room with the brightest lights and also the most hygienic. The big wooden table as the psychological centre for the family circle.

Berry screamed pretty horribly, and really did not understand when they grabbed him and held him down across the table, pulling. He pretended not even to understand when they shouted out his secret. The sad secret that never was known to him. They tried to explain as Wrenn ripped the clothes off him and Prokosch and

Newman held him down. He even shouted to them about the pilot, as brave as that. They had never seen so much blood before. So much red all over them, because it spurted on the table and on the floor where it flowed. But it could be nothing other than a caesarian section. The blade snagged into the wood, directly beneath the body—probing uselessly for the glistening offspring, then hacking more worriedly.

Wrenn stood back, heavy with sweat, and started to wipe the blood off his elbows. Then he looked down and tried to think.

—THOM KEYES.

Two early episodes from the hellish career of—

ANITA

Anita protested feebly. " But I'm sure I'm not ready yet, Gran. I just don't *feel* ready. Can't it wait till next summer? "

The old lady snorted. She was already stirring the big spell-pot, sniffing from time to time at the far from aromatic steam that arose. She said " Never 'eard nothink *like* it." She added a pinch of black powder to the brew and shook in a few frog's legs from a polythene bag. The fumes intensified. She said " 'Ere y'are then, sit yer down. I ent got orl night. Bring that there chair uvver." The contents of the pot had begun to solidify; she withdrew a horible-looking blob on the end of a stick. She said " Undo the top o' yer dress then. Look smart."

Anita wailed " Oh, no! " She clapped a hand to her throat. Granny Thompson's eyes gimleted at her. She said " Git it *orf*. Clean on yisdey, that were. Think I got nothink to do but wosh for y' all day? Wan' it all done for yer, you young 'uns do. Oh Satan spare us, the gel's all thumbs. Come 'ere, let me." She undid the little fastening at the neck and opened the dress across Anita's shoulders. She said testily " Well, '*old* it then, else it'll all a-flop back." She picked up the stick again and advanced. Anita said faintly " Can't I have gas? "

Granny Thompson said " Oh, 'old still. The fuss you young 'uns *mek* uvver a little thing." She dabbed the stick on her grand-daughter's forehead and throat. Anita yelped. The brew was still decidedly hot. Grandma said " Fillet of a fenny snake, in the cauldron boil an' bake; eye of noot, an' toe o' frog, wool of bat an' tongue o'

dog; adder's fork, an' blindwumm's sting . . . I kent remember ner more. Kent see the book neither, om a-lorst me glasses agin. Anyways 'E wunt bother. Long as yer Made Up, that's the thing. Disgustin', I calls it. Gel o' yore age, an' not even *confirmed*." She hobbled back to the cauldron elaborating her criticism of the Great Enemy.

"Time was when the Old Man 'ud come regular, just fer a chat like. But not ner more. Oh, no." She prodded the fire beneath the pot and added a couple of handfuls of powder. The first made the flames leap up magenta, the second sent them bright blue. Anita sat with her eyes closed, rigid in a web of polychrome shadow. "Oo does 'e send now then?" asked Granny vindictively. "All these jumped up kids, that's all. Area managers they 'as the cheek ter call themselves. Never 'eard nothink like it. Enough ter send yer 'Oly. Course I know what 'E's at. Tearin' about doin' all these tomb robbings an' such." She wagged a great black ladle in the general direction of her grand-daughter. "Now I don't mind a bit of old-fashioned sacrilege now an' agin. 'Oo dunt? But it's all fer show reely. Flashy. Like these noo-fangled business notions. It's good solid work that counts, the year round. But that jist dunt git done. Just a few old' uns like me keepin' things a-gooin.' An' precious little thanks *we* git fer it neither. I dun't serpose you'll be a sight better. Yer tired now, an' you 'ent even *started*." She topped up the cauldron with fluid from a big stone jar and its contents promptly went green and started to bubble again. She lifted the ladle and stumped back to her grand-daughter. Anita tensed herself, expecting a scalding, but for some reason the liquid felt ice-cold. Granny said rapidly "Liver o' blasphemin' Joo, gall o' goat and slips of yoo sliver'd in the moon's eclipse, nose o' Turk and Tartar's lips—"

Anita said "Oo, it's running!"

"Will yer keep still? Finger o' birth-strangled babe, ditch-deliver'd by a drab—"

"But I've got all clean things on!"

"They wun't *'urt*, I tell yer."

"But Gran, it's all going *down!*"

Granny said " Oh . . . 'ere." She put a towel into her victim's hands. " No, dunt wipe it all *orf,* it 'ent *took* yit! Weer were I? Finger o' ditch-strangled babe, om done that. Summat or other orf a tiger, any'ow. I reckon that's all on 'em. No, dunt git up. I ent finished." She took a cocoa tin from the shelf, removed the lid and dipped her finger inside. The contents were certainly not cocoa. She began to draw cabalistic signs on her granddaughter. Anita screwed up her eyes and nose as if she was being tortured. The old lady said grimly. " Whin I were done, I were done like this *all uvver.* 'Ave summat ter goo on about yer would, if yer were done proper." She stood back to view her handiwork. She said " 'Spect that'll 'ave to answer." Anita opened large, reproachful eyes. Granny Thompson said " That stops till yer gits undone ternight. Yer can wash it orf then; it's fresh sheets."

Anita buttoned her dress gingerly. She said sullenly " It feels all sticky and beastly. I'm not keeping it on a minute longer than I— "

Her grandmother turned in the act of lifting down the cauldron, and glittered at her again. She said " *Wot* were that I thort I 'eard? " Anita gulped and said " Nothing, Gran."

" Orlright then. See to it it waddn't. Well then gel, *goo on!* "

Anita said " G-go where, Gran? "

The old lady propelled her toward the door of the cottage. She said " *Out,* o' course. Goo on out an' *do* summat. Yer Made Up now. Yer can do anythink. Change summat. Turn summat inter summat else wuss. Try some shapeshiftin'. Yer know y'ent much good at that. Satan, I can turn meself inter more than wot you can an' I'm got me sciatica. Yer a witch now, yer can do *anythink.* Goo on out an' try. Dunt come back 'ere until y'ave. Time you started earnin' yer livin', my gel. I 'ad to afore I were yore age." She opened the old wooden door and shoved Anita outside. She pointed up at the turquoise sky. " Look, it's just a-right. Night's a-comin'. Couldn't be better. An' mind; I want ter feel some magic gooin' on afore mornin', or you'll get it, my gel. Dunt think yer

too big . . . an' mind where yer walk. You get them there shoes in a state again, you'll clean 'em. Tired o' runnin' about arter yer." The cottage door closed with an emphatic bang.

Anita stood and pouted for a moment then she took off the offending shoes and flung them at the door, taking care they fell short. She walked off barefoot through the little copse that surrounded her home, scrinching her toes in the leaf-mould under the trees. She emerged in the meadow beyond, where the cool grass stroked her ankles.

She hardly knew where to begin. She had never visited the outside world; she had never worked a really malicious spell, and apart from her granny she had not seen another human being for years. She did not greatly feel like growing up but somehow before morning she had to be bad, and justify her witch-hood into the bargain. She felt very small and afraid. When she had gone a few more yards she sensed an owl in the distance and called him up but he was too busy to bother. He sent back a cryptic message, 'Big mouse,' and went off the air. Anita crouched by the brook and washed herself disobediently clean. Then she stood up, took a deep breath and stopped the current. The little stream was deep here and moved fast between tall reed beds. The water foamed most satisfactorily, gleaming in the August dusk. Anita soon tired though. The trick made her giddy and in any case it was nothing new. She had been able to do it when she was six. She persuaded a grass snake to slither a little way with her but he soon turned back, unwilling to get too far from his beloved water. Anita did not really mind. He was not very nice to be with, his thoughts were too long and wriggly. A little farther on she opened a gate for herself from about twenty-five yards, but the effort made her feel quite ill. She had to sit down to recover. She was sure she would never become a really good witch.

The sky was deep blue now, with the first stars showing. The evening was warm and very still. Anita lay back and opened her mind to everything. The countryside was alive with rustlings and squeakings, pouncings

and little sharp hunting-thoughts as the night creatures went about their affairs. Anita heard these things with her ears as well as her sixth, seventh and eighth senses. Her ears swivelled slightly from time to time. They were wide and pointed, and until recently had had delicate hair-tufts on their tips; but in these days you can do wonderful things with skin creams . . .

Above her, very high in the night, she heard the clatter of a dragonfly, the scrape and clang as something bunled into the jointed cage of his legs. She warned the dragonfly he was out too late but the insect, who was not very coherent, sent back something vague about killing and sped on. Nearer at hand a weasel scuttered along the hedge bottom, quick and dangerous as a brown flame. He paused to glare at Anita and she shuddered at what he was thinking. She levitated a stone and tried to drop it on him but as usual she was not quick enough. The malevolence faded into the distance, leaving behind one last horrible thought. " If only I were bigger . . . " Anita shivered, then pricked her ears again.

It took a few moments for her to recognise the call-sign, for it was very distant. When she did she answered joyfully. It was a bat, the nocturne who lived in the church over the hill. She waited until he came zigging across the moon to her, then got up and walked on with the little animal circling above her head. She talked to him as she went. He always intrigued her. His mischievous little mind was full of strange thoughts about glow-worms and bells, and spires so old God had forgotten them. They crossed several fields together, then Anita saw lights in the distance. They were white, yellow and red and they moved very rapidly. She wondered what they could be. She had never been as far from home as this in her life. She moved on toward them, tensed up and ready to bolt but very curious as well. It was only when she got quite close she realized she had come to the road.

The bat became suddenly alarmed and turned away. Anita called him but he would not answer. When his sonar had vanished in the distance she felt very lonely again and almost turned back herself, but the curiosity

was still there. She crept to the gate by the road and stood looking over it for a long time, dodging back into the shadow of the hedge as each car glared at her with the bright eyes of its headlights. Then she became bold. After all she was not an ordinary country girl; she was a witch. She tossed her head, climbed the gate and stepped down onto the road. It was like a soft black river. The macadam still held the heat of the day and felt warm and comfortable to her feet. She began to walk along it, turning to stare at each car as it swooped toward her . . .

She got back to the cottage in the still, chill-dark time time just before Dawn. The dew was lying heavily on the grass and Anita swished slowly along feeling that she was made of electricity from head to toes. She picked up her shoes from the step and carried them inside with her. Granny Thompson was still up, dozing by the fireplace. When Anita closed the door she woke with a jerk. She said sharply " Where yer bin, gel? Where yer *bin*? "

Anita smiled dreamily and sat down with some care. She was thinking about that big Aston Martin. The warmth and cosiness of it and the smell of leather and tobacco and petrol and summer dust. She was still trying to decide whether she had really liked its young driver or not. She said " I've been out, Gran. I've been doing some magic."

The old lady wrose in wrath. She said " Thet you 'ev *not*, my gel. Thet you 'ev not done at all. Not one bit did I feel, noweere about. Look at yer. Orter be ashamed, y'ad straight. Ter see all the trouble I took mekkin' y'up. Yer washed all the magic *orf*, ter start with. Arter what I tole yer, an' all. That's the 'ole trouble wi' you young 'uns. Allus was. You 'ent got no gratitude an' you 'ent got no thort . . . 'ere am I, doin' me best for yer, an' all yer kin do is traipse about 'arf the night while I sits 'ere wonderin' if yer've fell into summat an' bin drowned, or what's 'appened to yer . . . "

Anita drew herself up. She said " It's allright, Gran. I told you, I did some magic."

" Weer? " asked the old woman fiercely. " An' wot? I dunt know as I b'leeves yer. Ter rights I should 'ave

felt it goo orf. Did yer change summat? "

Anita looked far away, and smiled again. She said " Yes, Gran, I did change something. I turned a perfectly lovely motor-car straight into a lay-by . . . "

II

Anita could always tell when there were humans by the lake because everything went quiet. The breeze still shifted the leaves, the rushes whispered as their tall heads bobbed at the water, but the little tingling voices that spoke to her were silent. She watched the young folk who came to the spot for many weeks but they never saw her. The boy was rather fine. He was a Romany from the camp on the other side of Foxhangar wood and he wore beautiful shirts of lilac and russet. Anita did not know the girl. She was fair and tall and she moved as gracefully as grass bowed by the wind.

One evening the girl was there on her own. Anita, peeping through the leaves, saw her sitting by the edge of the lake dabbling at the water with a stick. Anita sensed sad-feelings and crept toward her. She came so silently that the girl heard nothing. When she turned round Anita was squatting beside her. The girl jumped and put her hand to her throat. She said " Gosh, you did frighten me. Where on earth did you come from? "

Anita said " Sorry." She spoke a little awkwardly because she saw so few human beings. She pointed at some distant woods. She said " I came from over there. You're always here, aren't you? I've seen you."

The girl blushed a little. Anita, studying her candidly, wondered why. The girl said " How do you know I come here? "

Anita shrugged. " You stop things. That's how I can tell."

" What things? "

" Just things."

The girl started to get up. She said " I'm sorry. I didn't know I disturbed you. I only came because it was quiet."

Anita put her hand on her arm. She said " You needn't go, I don't mind you being here. You are sad,

aren't you? "

The girl smiled. She said "I suppose I am. Where do you live? "

Anita pointed again. "Over there."

"Where's there? What's the name of the place? "

Anita frowned. "I don't know. It's just where I live."

"Is it Foxhangar? "

"No."

The girl said curiously "You don't know much, do you? "

Anita pouted. She said "Of course I do. I know about lots of things."

"What? "

Anita considered. "Well, I can make clothes and plant things so they grow. And I know there's a church over there that no-one goes to any more and I can show you where the bee-orchids grow and . . . and I know about red motors with boys in them." She finished with a rush.

The girl laughed. The sound tinkled on the water. She said "You're funny." Anita narrowed her eyes. She was not used to being laughed at. Momentarily she considered doing several nasty things that would make the girl sorry. Then she found the laughter was infectious and began to smile herself. And so a friendship was born. The girl's name was Ruth Clothier.

The next time Anita found her alone she asked about the Romany. Ruth said simply "We're in love." Anita was puzzled. She asked a very basic question and Ruth coloured furiously then got up and walked away. Anita had to run after her to explain. She said "I'm sorry. I didn't want to upset you. That's what I do when I like boys. I thought that was what you meant."

Ruth looked at her very oddly. She said "You are the strangest girl, Anita. You aren't like anybody else I've ever met."

Anita stuck out her chest. She said with some pride "I know. I'm a witch." Then a shadow crossed her face. She said "Least, I could be if I tried really hard. Gran says it's still sort of dormant. I think I could be a good witch. Gran is terribly clever."

Ruth merely laughed.

Anita told Granny Thompson about her new friend. The old lady snorted. She was trying with the aid of an ancient pair of glasses to fill in her weekly football coupon. She only did the pools for kicks as she could have levitated a thousand smackers from a bank as easily as she floated the coupon to the village postbox. She said " 'Ent wuth the bother, these 'oomans. Lets yer down evry time. Satan, I could tell yer some tales. Bad as these 'ere teams 'ere. Look at this 'uns. Worrum . . . summat or other. Lorst be thirty they did last week, an I'd got 'em fer a banker. I dunt reckon yer kin esspect nothink else orf these Orstralyerns."

Anita said "I don't care. She's nice. She's in love with a Romany."

Granny Thompson whooped. "Dunt you git yer 'ead full o' stuff like that else I knows wun what's a-gooin' ter knock it out agin, smartish. Yore got enough ter do my gel, keepin' yerself up ter the mark. Call yerself a witch? Soured four churns o' milk, you 'ave, in the larst six months. An' then yer went an' lorst 'art an' turned it orl back orlright agin. Shent stick up fer yer ner more when that young area chap comes pokin' 'is nose, that I shent. 'Ave the Old Man down on yer neckit you will, afore yer done. Then you'll know summat." She dabbed in a line of crosses and said " 'Ere, tek this fer a walk. Gettin' sorft you are, sittin' round 'ere moonin' about love an' such. Never 'eard the like."

But the advice came a little late. Anita already loved Ruth; she never had a friend before.

She saw her every night now, even when the Romany came. Strangely enough Jem did not mind her company. Anita had a trick of being there and yet not being there, so the lovers could talk and laugh as if they were really alone. Anita learned a lot from them. She already knew about Jem, and snaring rabbits and making clothes pegs and how to light a fire in the wind and the best way to polish brass. These were things she had in common with his folk. Ruth's life was a mystery to her. She lived in a new Development two miles away across the fields. Here there were bungalows and little houses that thrust out in lines across the grass like the arms of a

stubby dark-pink octopus. One night Ruth persuaded Anita to walk back with her so she could see her home. When the houses came into sight Anita stopped and refused to go any farther. She said "They aren't like mine. They're just not proper places to live. Where do you grow food?"

Ruth laughed. "We don't grow anything. We just buy it. Or at least Mummy does. There's a van that comes round on Tuesdays. We put a lot of things in the refrigerator. They keep for ages like that." Anita winced. She thought she had never heard anything so sinful.

From Ruth she learned a new vocabulary and a new way of thinking. She found out the cost of putting up a garage, and how Ruth's father wouldn't have the walls rendered because it was too expensive although the man next door had complained then written to the council because the bricks were unsightly and the council had said there was nothing they could do because it was a private estate. And what Mr. Daniels across the road had said to Ruth's father because when there was a drought and the people had come round asking everyone not to use too much water Mr. Daniels had turned his hose on the garden that same night and Ruth's father had told him off about it and how Mr. Clothier had paid him back for what he said because the laundryman always used to leave the Daniels' laundry in the Clothiers' shed and Mr. Clothier had put the bundle out in the rain so it got all wet before anyone knew it was there. And how bad it was when the tube went in the telly because it was only a week outside the guarantee but the shop wouldn't even meet them half-way. And what happens to fibre-board ceilings when storage tanks burst and what the Clothiers had said to the gas people because the central heating cost more than it ought. As she listened Anita's frown got deeper and deeper. Several times she mentioned what she had learned to her Granny but the old lady's reply was always the same.

"'Oomans. 'Ent wuth a candle."

One night Anita asked Jem and Ruth about love again. To her surprise Ruth burst into tears and Jem looked very angry. It seemed he could not go to Ruth's

house because he was a Romany and therefore beneath her station. Nor could Ruth see him except unofficially. When she came to the lake she was supposed to be visiting a friend from the office. Anita sat with her mouth open. She had never heard anything so extraordinary. She said " But when I want a boy I just— " She stopped, remembering Ruth's sensitivity. She said " Well, I don't think about things like that. That's horrid."

Jem nodded. " That's the way on it though miss.'

Anita frowned. She said " Can't you run away or something? You know, just go off? You could come home with me but Gran doesn't like humans. She might do something nasty."

Ruth shook her head. " It wouldn't work. You see I'm Under Age. It would just get us all into trouble."

The next night Jem did not come and Ruth cried again. Anita put her arms round her and felt most peculiar as a result. She was not supposed to be sorry for humans, only hinder and impede them. At this rate she would not go to Hell at all but to the Other Place. Mimicking her Granny, she said " 'Ere, 'old 'ard. I kent stand orl this sniftin ." It made Ruth laugh and she began to talk again. But it was all about unhappy things; how her father had told her the Romanies were no good because they had lice and even if Jem's folk got a house on the council estate she could not see him because he was only a Gippo and would never do an honest day's work, and how would she like looking after a dozen kids while he was down in the pub swigging his money away and anyhow he was sure to beat her. She told Anita how her parents wanted her to go out with someone on the estate because he was more Her Class but Ruth didn't like him because all he could talk about was his father's company and it was not a nice company anyway it was a little firm that dealt in electro-plating.

Ruth sat up and wiped her face. She said " I don't know what to do, Anita. I thought this thing with Jem would go off but it's getting worse. Things like this aren't supposed to last but I must be different or something because it keeps getting worse and worse all the time." She looked at the lake, the ripples moving far

out on the surface in the fading light. She said " There's only . . . well, the water; and I mean . . . well, it wouldn't matter any more then would it? Not afterwards? "

Anita was shocked. There are two ways to be evil, knowingly and unknowingly. The latter is worse because it gives you such a time afterwards. There is Limbo and it goes on for centuries. Anita knew a lot about such things from the texts her Granny kept all neatly printed on the outside covers of Bibles. She could see that Ruth did not believe her. After her friend had gone Anita crept to where she could see the little houses and glared at them. She was beginning to hate the people who lived there. She had never hated before because she had never loved. The feelings had come together like the two sides of a coin.

Ruth was a sensitive creature and the clapboard jungle was destroying her. As the evenings grew shorter Jem came less and less often and she knew he was losing interest in her. It was not his fault, you could not expect him to come creeping up to the lake night after night when he could go with some other girl and have a good time and not be afraid to show his face. There were times when Anita did not come either; even she seemed to have deserted her. This was not strictly true. Anita was always there watching from the undergrowth just along the bank but when she sensed the pain waves she kept away as an animal will from something it doesn't understand. Anita was hurt too, because her life had begun to centre on the girl by the lake. She had no idea what she would do if she had to be on her own again and did not try to imagine. Her anger against the little houses and the whole half-understood cult of suburbanism was like a steady flame.

One night when Ruth could stand her solitude no longer she went to the Romany camp. It was deserted; there were not even markers to show others the way the people had gone. Jem had taught her to read such things and she would have seen them had they been there. She went home, not really knowing how or why. Her father saw her face and laughed. He said " What's this, then, just found out the Gippos have done a bunk? I could have

told you that a week ago, my girl. The police cleared 'em off the common. Damn good thing too, now perhaps you'll believe me when I tell you they aren't any good."

Ruth stood staring, feeling how complicated everything was. She said "I think I hate you."

Something went 'biff' across her ear and her hair flew up and her head started to ring. Her father said "And that's for going there after I'd warned you off. Now get to bed. And don't let me hear any more from you. We've always tried to bring you up right my girl, and here you've been acting like a tuppeny little trollop. I know you've been seeing him again . . ."

But it was all so sordid and horrible. Unbearable. Ruth was through the door and away before her father could stop her. He shouted after her down the path but she did not hear the words because she was panting with her running.

At the end of the lane she slowed down. She thought how queer it was that when you knew you were really going to die you were not afraid any more. She headed for the lake. When she reached it she did not stop for any great last thoughts but walked steadily into the water. She was surprised at the depth of the mud. The lake was quite dangerous. She sank to her knees almost at once and then to her thighs. Her skirt floated out in a circle pushing aside the leaves and scum that floated on the surface. Old branches snagged at her and she stumbled, still instinctively trying to keep her balance. The water was icy and knifed at her as it rose above her waist but she only noticed it in a detached fashion. Soon she was half-swimming, kicking awkwardly to push herself into the deep places at the centre. She felt sorry for her parents, for Jem, for Anita and herself but she would have to do it now. To go back muddy to her neat home would be worse than not going back at all. Soon her clothes became heavy with water and began to pull at her like hands urging her toward the mud of the lake bottom. She relaxed, feeling herself drawn down to the dead leaves that waited there, and apart from the first few moments it was not too bad at all.

Walking toward the lake Anita felt the quietness that

meant Ruth was ahead of her. As she neared the water there was a little surge of fear from the animals there, then silence again, then a great uproar. Scores of messages piped at her as if her mind was a radio set tuned to all wavelengths at once. There was the shriek that a weasel always made when something died and a softer thought from an owl who had seen a strange thing. There were quick sounds from beetles and night birds and all manner of creatures, even spiders and worms, and a panic-thought from a fish about hair and clothes waving in the water of the lake. Anita started to run, knowing she was too late.

She stood on the edge of the dull grey water clenching her hands and feeling drums roll inside her head. Then everything went red and started to flash and when she could see the lake again there was a furrow in the water like that made by a plough in a field and Ruth was walking up it toward her. She came jerkily, swinging her arms and legs like a puppet and with her eyes staring straight ahead. Anita felt a little bit of her mind that was still alive saying 'Had to, had to,' then even that was gone and there was nothing. Bright tear tracks shone on Anita's face and she could hardly see as she wiped the mud and weed from Ruth. She said "Why did you have to, Ruth? Why did you have to?" There was no answer. Ruth stood there stiffly and Anita finally realized she was dead.

She sat on the bank for a long time with her head down and when she looked up again her face was quite different. She stood and pointed at the middle of the water and there was a crash and something like a bolt of lightning. Steam rose in a column and the animal-thoughts piping all round were shocked into silence. Anita moved Ruth's hands and feet one by one to make sure she had control then capered away from the lake with Ruth jerking stiffly along behind. As Anita ran she shouted. "Come on, Ruth. Come on, little soldier. Pick 'em up; one-two, one-two. That's the style. Chin up and swing those arms. We don't care about the little houses, do we? We don't care!" she sang and Ruth joined in, bubblingly because of the water in her lungs. She called "Dance,

Ruth. You wanted to be a dancer, didn't you? Now's your chance. Dance away, little dancer. Let's see those pretty legs! " And Ruth turned stiffly, swirling the material of her dress and filling the night lane with the smell of ponds.

It was late before they reached Ruth's home because Anita had turned in great circles through the fields, flushing the coverts ahead of her and sending foxes and badgers and roosting birds squealing away in fear. Her dress was torn and Ruth's legs were ragged where the brambles had scraped the flesh that could no longer bleed. Nearly all the lights of the little houses were out and the cars stood in the drives, patient humps waiting for the morning. Anita squealed to the sky. " Come on, 'oomans, up yer gits. Jump about! " She took Ruth's cold hand and skipped in a mad imitation of gaiety. " See wot om brought for yer! "

She stopped by the hedge that bordered the lane and glared with eyes that were phosphorescent with rage; then she summoned all her power and sent the zombie running awkwardly across the road and through the first gate to fumble and beat at the door. Then the next and the next. " You tell them " choked Anita. " Tell them who sent you. Tell them what I am. Say I'll come in the night. I'll be the thing that jumps in the river when all the fish have gone. The bush on the common that isn't there in the morning. The bird that screeches when the owls are in their holes. The branch that bumps the roof when they've cut down all the trees. Tell them I'll kill them all! " And Ruth went bang-bang-banging along the doors while inside saucepans danced with pressure-cookers and mincers and dinner-mats and old stacks of women's magazines burst into flames in their cupboards and the tubes of Murphys and rented Cossors imploded and refrigerators vomited their scraggy contents and wept ammonia, while spillholders and plastic roses jumped from their shelves and the hardboard backs burst from cheap wardrobes and shiny city suits leaped in the air and lights and screams came on in every little house . . .

Granny Thompson shot out of her bed as if propelled

by a charge of explosive. " Satan a' mercy " she cried to the darkness. " Wot were that? "

The familiars crowded round the cottage scratching and whimpering and explaining all in different tones. There were foxes and badgers, rats and voles, snakes and little Hodges with their prickles quivering with shock. Granny Thompson began feverishly to invest herself with the various bands, the strappings, the corsettings, the voluminous and mysterious garments suited to her age and dignity. She said " Orlright, orlright, om a-comin'. 'Old *still*, wunt yer, yer'll 'ave them *panes* in. Dang me if the gel 'ent gorn orf 'er 'ead." She tottered downstairs grabbing for coat and shoes, for stick and old felt hat. She flung open the kitchen door and bats and moths exploded at her face. " I kent 'elp 'ow you 'oller " said Granny firmly. " I kent be ner *quicker*." She headed down the path through the wood feeling the air round her crackle with hate and magic. " Served out proper, I am " panted the old lady. " 'Ood a' thought she 'ad it in 'er? Never 'eard sich carryin' on, sich a squawk an' kerfuffle in all me born days. Got the 'ole place a-gooin' she 'es." An extra-heavy buffet swung her completely round and she crammed her hat desperately back on her head. " Good Lor' a-daisy! " she gasped. " If ever I should say so." And then to her distant granddaughter, " Tek it steady, yer'll a-*bust* summat. An' I dunt want none o' yer *chelp*, neither! Oo, you little *varmint*. You wait till I gits my 'ands onter you . . . "

Behind Foxhangar there was another copse called Deadmans because once a great huntsman broke his neck there, and it was toward this that Granny Thompson headed. Anita had gone to earth in the little wood. As the old lady panted up the slope to it she breasted waves of hate and violence like a swimmer in a rough sea. Under the shadow of the tree she stopped, gasping. She raised her stick and sent out a thought that was like a great invisible sword. " Silence! " roared Granny. " Silence, or I'll bring the legions of 'Ell down on yer! " Then she picked her way forward, guided by ordinary hearing toward a sound of sobbing.

Anita was curled beneath a bush. She was whimpering

and quivering like a dynamo for she had done more to herself than to all the inhabitants of all the little houses. Granny Thompson lifted her chin and scrubbed with nobbly fingers at the tears on her face, the twigs and leaves in her hair. "'Ere now," said the old woman tenderly. "I told yer 'oomans wadn't wuth botherin' uvver. Not wuth a tinker's cuss they 'ent. Come on gel, yer kent goo on like this. We're gotta get you 'um. Right dance yore led me, I dunt know." She made Anita sit up, then stand, and soon she was able to walk. They got to the cottage an hour later, but the dawn was in the sky before the last of the magic died away.

—KEITH ROBERTS

DUMMY RUN

by Colin Hulme

Percival Winkley was hardly the man one would have expected to save the world from a Martian invasion. In fact, one would never have expected him to do anything, beyond earning his living. And when the flying saucer scooped him up in its dangling net he was not even doing that. Percival had just been informed by the manager that his services were no longer required, as the old theatre was being turned into a bingo hall at the end of the month. No more dwindling audiences would applaud his act, in the theatre where he had appeared every summer for the past twenty years. All over the country it was the same, and Percy had no idea where he would go to earn his living now. He was trudging back to his lodgings for the last time, quite oblivious of the dark shadow across the path until there was a swish and he felt his legs pulled from under him. The net went quickly upwards, and before he had time to realise what was happening he was inside the flying saucer and the hatch had closed behind him. Percy looked around himself in some surprise. This was most unusual. As far as he knew, there wasn't a war on—so what was this all about? More to himself than to anyone else, he said:

" Well well, here's a pretty kettle of fish."

There were four creatures sitting (or were they standing?) round him, and one of them muttered something into a microphone beside him. They were a dark chocolate colour, and looked like a species of bear with pointed heads. They were in a large room with curved silver walls, and in the middle was a vast array of switches, buttons, dials and screens. The net had apparently dematerialised, and Percy was sitting on a low couch towered over by the other occupants, who were ten feet tall.

The one with the microphone, evidently the spokesman, said in excellent English:

"Good afternoon. We are Martians, and this is a flying saucer. We have brought you here to perform certain tests on you, and then tomorrow we shall conquer the world."

"Oh yes?" said Percy. He could think of no suitable comment, and if the Martians had hoped to draw any conclusions from his reply they were disappointed.

"I am Thlandor, Chief Commander of the Martian Conquest Fleet. In case you were thinking of doing anything foolish, there is an invisible ray barrier around you, and if you move more than six inches in any direction it will kill you, Mr. . . er . . ."

"Winkley, Percival Winkley," replied Percy to the half-asked question.

"Well, Mr. Winkley, I have a lie detector focussed on you, and if you choose not to answer my questions we have ways of making you talk."

"Not at all, please ask away," answered Percy, still rather confused.

"Thank you. You will appreciate that we like to size up our opposition before committing ourselves to an all-out attack. May I ask your profession, Mr. Winkley?"

"I'm a ventriloquist."

The word was not in Thlandor's vocabulary, but naturally he could not admit this to the prisoner, so he passed on to his next question.

"I see you have a large suitcase by your feet. What is inside it?" The first few questions were merely designed to put the prisoner at his ease.

"A spare suit of clothes, and my dummy."

Again Thlandor's vocabulary failed him. Surely a dummy was an object which Earth-children sucked. He pulled the case towards him using a long stick, and Percy's face paled. His dummy was about the only thing he had left, and it had been an expensive model. Also he had become rather attached to it. Then the case clicked open, and if Thlandor had been made like a man his face would also have paled. Instead he jerked his pointed head back from the open case. What was

this? The dead body of a man, shrunken perfectly to a height of just over two feet? For centuries the Martians had been searching for a method of preserving their ancestors in a shrunken state, in order to display them in a glass cabinet. Now it seemed that these ignorant savages on Earth had already perfected the technique. He prodded at the still figure with fourteen bony fingers.

"Hey, watch what you're doing!" shouted out Percy, and he jumped over to the case. Percy, of course, had forgotten that there was supposed to be a death ray between himself and the Martians, but this action had a great effect on Thlandor, who again mumbled something into his microphone. They had considered that an imaginary barrier would prove a good enough threat. Men who had no fear of death were something they had not reckoned with. Meanwhile Percy had grabbed hold of the case and returned to his couch, to the great relief of Thlandor. The Fleet Commander was a very timid Martian.

"What it that?" he asked, quickly recovering his composure

"This is Harry," answered Percy, clutching the case to him.

"You show great reverence for your dead, Mr. Winkley," said Thlandor.

"Dead? Harry isn't dead. We act together." Quickly Percy pulled the dummy out of the case and sat it on his knee. The astonished Martians saw the still figure suddenly come to life, and talk to their prisoner in a high voice. Although out of work, he was a good ventriloquist, and not a twitch of his lips betrayed him. Percy, of course, was unaware of the sensation he had created. A world where they had no ventriloquists was beyond his imagining.

"Has—has Harry been that size all his life?"

This seemed like a silly question to Percy. "Harry's not alive," he said.

"Not alive? Then he is a robot."

"Well—yes, in a way."

Thlandor glanced at the lie detector, which was still recording 'Absolute Truth." "Does he eat or breathe?"

he asked.

"Of course he doesn't." Really, thought Percy, these Martians are ignorant.

"And you work together?"

"That's right." Memories of the successes which he and Harry had shared flooded over him. "We used to kill 'em," he said, smiling.

This time Thlandor was visibly shaken. "Kill them? Could you kill us?"

Percy thought back over his act. The script was still fresh in his mind, and even Martians would have to laugh at some of the jokes. "Of course we could," he replied. "Shall we?"

"No!" shouted Thlandor. He suddenly found that he was shaking, and when he looked around he saw that the other three were in a similar state. Death-dealing robots? How could the preliminary survey have missed this? Controlling his voice with difficulty, he asked: "How many Harrys are there in the world?"

To Percy, numbers above a hundred were rather meaningless. "Oh, millions I suppose," he said vaguely. The four Martians began to talk animatedly among themselves, and feeling a bit out of the conversation Percy began to chat with Harry.

"Well Harry, what do you think about all this?"

"I don't know, Percy. Mrs. Grant will be wondering where we are soon."

"Yes we'd better be going in a minute."

"Why not ask them if they've finished questioning you?" suggested the dummy.

"Yes, that's a good idea, Harry." He looked up. "Is there anything else you want, Mr. Thlandor, or can we go?"

The four Martians were quick to catch the completely non-existent threat behind this innocent question. The Earthman and his killer-robot had them completely at his mercy. He was playing with them, pretending that he was a guest of theirs. Their enthusiasm to capture the Earth had suddenly evaporated, and in its place was the determination to put their dangerous prisoner back on the ground and withdraw the whole fleet to Mars as

quickly as possible. The next ten years would have to be spent in fortifying Mars from the attack which would come the moment that space-travel developed far enough on Earth.

"Mr. Winkley, be merciful with us," begged the Martian leader. "What harm can we do against weapons such as yours? Tell me, where would you like us to set you down?"

Percy sighed. He had enjoyed his little chat with the Martians, even if they were extremely ignorant when it came to ventriloquism. The mention of weapons had baffled him, but he decided not to worry about it. Now it was back to Mrs. Grant's revolting cooking until the end of the week—and then what? He had no job, no money. "Are you going as far as the High-road?" he asked.

"We can take you anywhere, anywhere on Earth."

"Anywhere? repeated Percy unbelievingly. A youthful dream of sailing to the South Seas came back to him. "What about a South Sea island?" he asked, without much hope.

"Certainly Mr. Winkley, which one?"

"Oh, I don't mind so long as it's inhabited."

It took the flying saucer exactly seven and a half seconds to cover the distance, and soon Percy was being lowered onto a sandy beach fringed with palm trees. With a gasp of relief Thlandor closed the hatch, and the flying saucer shot away at top speed.

On a remote island in the South Seas lives a man who saved Earth from conquest by the Martians. He never tells anyone.

He doesn't know himself.

—COLIN HUME

AS EASY AS A.B.C.

by Rudyard Kipling

(1912)

The A.B.C., that semi-elected, semi-nominated body of a few score persons, controls the Planet. Transportation is Civilisation, our motto runs. Theoretically we do what we please, so long as we do not interfere with the traffic and all it implies. *Practically, the A.B.C. confirms or annuls all international arrangements, and, to judge from its last report, finds our tolerant, humorous, lazy little Planet only too ready to shift the whole burden of public administration on its shoulders.*

'With the Night Mail.' [1]

Isn't it almost time that our Planet took some interest in the proceedings of the Aerial Board of Control? One knows that easy communications nowadays, and lack of privacy in the past, have killed all curiosity among mankind, but as the Board's Official Reporter I am bound to tell my tale.

At 9.30 a.m., August 26, A.D. 2065, the Board, sitting in London, was informed by De Forest that the District of Northern Illinois had riotously cut itself out of all systems and would remain disconnected till the Board should take over and administer it direct.

Every Northern Illinois freight and passenger tower was, he reported, out of action; all District main, local, and guiding lights had been extinguished; all General Communications were dumb, and through traffic had been diverted. No reason had been given, but he gathered unofficially from the Mayor of Chicago that the District complained of 'crowd-making and invasion of privacy.'

As a matter of fact, it is of no importance whether

[1] *Actions and Reactions.*

Northern Illinois stay in or out of planetary circuit; as a matter of policy, any complaint of invasion of privacy needs immediate investigation, lest worse follow.

By 9.45 A.M. De Forest, Dragomiroff (Russia), Takahira (Japan), and Pirolo (Italy) were empowed to visit Illinois and 'to take such steps as might be necessary for the resumption of traffic and *all that that implies*.' By 10 A.M. the Hall was empty, and the four Members and I were aboard what Pirolo insisted on calling 'my leetle godchild'—that is to say, the new *Victor Pirolo*. Our Planet prefers to know Victor Pirolo as a gentle, grey-haired enthusiast who spends his time near Foggia, inventing or creating new breeds of Spanish-Italian olive-trees; but there is another side to his nature—the manufacture of quaint inventions, of which the *Victor Pirolo* is, perhaps, not the least surprising. She and a few score sister-craft of the same type embody his latest ideas. But she is not comfortable. An A.B.C. boat does not take the air with the level-keeled lift of a liner, but shoots up rocket-fashion like the 'aeroplane' of our ancesters, and makes her height at top-speed from the first. That is why I found myself sitting suddenly on the large lap of Eustace Arnott, who commands the A.B.C. Fleet. One knows vaguely that there is such a thing as a Fleet somewhere on the Planet, and that, theoretically, it exists for the purposes of what used to be known as 'war.' Only a week before, while visiting a glacier sanatorium behind Gothaven, I had seen some squadrons making false auroras far to the north while they manœuvred round the Pole; but, naturally, it had never occurred to me that the things could be used in earnest.

Said Arnott to De Forest as I staggered to a seat on the chart-room divan: 'We're tremendously grateful to 'em in Illinois. We've never had a chance of exercising all the Fleet together. I've turned in a General Call, and I expect we'll have at least two hundred keels aloft this evening.'

'Well aloft?' De Forest asked.

'Of course, sir. Out of sight till they're called for.'

Arnott laughed as he lolled over the transparent chart-table where the map of the summer-blue Atlantic slid

along, degree by degree, in exact answer to our progress. Our dial already showed 320 m.p.h. and we were two thousand feet above the uppermost traffic lines.

'Now, where is this Illinois District of yours?' said Dragomiroff. 'One travels so much, one sees so little. Oh, I remember! It is in North America.'

De Forest, whose business it is to know the out districts, told us that it lay at the foot of Lake Michigan, on a road to nowhere in particular, was about half an hour's run from end to end, and except in one corner, as flat as the sea. Like most flat countries nowadays, it was heavily guarded against invasion of privacy by forced timber—fifty-foot spruce and tamarack, grown in five years. The population was close on two millions, largely migratory between Florida and California, with a backbone of small farms (they call a thousand acres a farm in Illinois) whose owners come into Chicago for amusements and society during the winter. They were, he said, noticeably kind, quiet folk, but a little exacting, as all flat countries must be, in their notions of privacy. There had, or instance, been no printed news-sheet in Illinois for twenty-seven years. Chicago argued that engines for printed news sooner or later developed into engines for invasion of privacy, which in turn might bring the old terror of Crowds and blackmail back to the Planet. So news-sheets were not.

'And that's Illinois,' De Forest concluded. 'You see, in the Old Days, she was in forefront of what they used to call "progress," and Chicago——'

'Chicago?' said Takahira. 'That's the little place where there is Salati's Statue of the Nigger in Flames? A fine bit of old work.'

'When did you see it?' asked De Forest quickly. 'They only unveil it once a year.'

'I know. At Thanksgiving. It was then,' said Takahira, with a shudder. 'And they sang MacDonough's Song, too.'

'Whew! De Forest whistled. 'I did not know that! I wish you'd told me before. MacDonough's Song may have had its uses when it was composed, but it was an infernal legacy for any man to leave behind.'

'It's protective instinct, my dear fellows,' said Pirolo, rolling a cigarette. "The Planet, she has had her dose of popular government. She suffers from inherited agoraphobia. She has no—ah—use for crowds.'

Dragomiroff leaned forward to give him a light. 'Certainly,' said the white-bearded Russian, 'the Planet has taken all precautions against crowds for the past hundred years. What is our total population today? Six hundred million, we hope; five hundred we think; but—but if next year's census shows more than four hundred and fifty, I myself will eat all the extra little babies. We have cut the birth-rate out—right out! For a long time we have said to Almighty God, "Thank You, Sir, but we do not much like Your game of life, so we will not play."'

'Anyhow,' said Arnott defiantly, 'men live a century apiece on the average now.'

'Oh, that is quite well! I am rich—you are rich—we are all rich and happy because we are so few and live so long. Only *I* think Almighty God He will remember what the Planet was like in the time of Crowds and the Plague. Perhaps He will send us nerves. Eh, Pirolo?'

The Italian blinked into space. 'Perhaps,' he said, 'He has sent them already. Anyhow, you cannot argue with the Planet. She does not forget the Old Days, and—what can you do?'

'For sure we can't remake the world.' De Forest glanced at the map flowing smoothly across the table from west to east. 'We ought to be over our ground by nine tonight. There won't be much sleep afterwards.'

On which hint we dispersed, and I slept till Takahira waked me for dinner. Our ancesters thought nine hours' sleep ample for their little lives. We, living thirty years longer, feel ourselves defrauded with less than eleven out of the twenty-four.

By ten o'clock we were over Lake Michigan. The west shore was lightless, except for a dull ground-glare at Chicago, and a single traffic-directing light—its leading beam pointing north—at Waukegan on our starboard bow. None of the Lake villages gave any sign of life; and inland, westward, so far as we could see, blackness

lay unbroken on the level earth. We swooped down and skimmed low across the dark, throwing calls county by county. Now and again we picked up the faint glimmer of a house-light, or heard the rasp and rend of a cultivator being played across the fields, but Northern Illinois as a whole was one inky, apparently uninhabited, waste of high, forced woods. Only our illuminated map, with its little pointer switching from county to county, as we wheeled and twisted, gave us any idea of our position. Our calls, urgent, pleading, coaxing or commanding, through the General Communicator brought no answer. Illinois strictly maintained her own privacy in the timber which she grew for that purpose.

'Oh, this is absurd!' said De Forest. 'We're like an owl trying to work a wheat-field. Is this Bureau Creek? Let's land, Arnott, and get hold of some one.'

We brushed over a belt of forced woodland—fifteen-year-old maple sixty feet high—grounded on a private meadow-dock, none too big, where we moored to our own grapnels, and hurried out through the warm dark night towards a light in a verandah. As we neared the garden gate I could have sworn we had stepped knee-deep in quicksand, for we could scarcely drag our feet against the prickling currents that clogged them. After five paces we stopped, wiping our foreheads, as hopelessly stuck on dry smooth turf as so many cows in a bog.

'Pest!' cried Pirolo angrily. 'We are ground-circuited. And it is my own system of ground-circuits too! I know the pull.'

'Good evening,' said a girl's voice from the verandah. 'Oh, I'm sorry! We've locked up. Wait a minute.'

We heard the click of a switch, and almost fell forward as the currents round our knees were withdrawn.

The girl laughed, and laid aside her knitting. An old-fashioned Controller stood at her elbow, which she reversed from time to time, and we could hear the snort and clank of the obedient cultivator half a mile away, behind the guardian woods.

'Come in and sit down,' she said. 'I'm only playing a plough. Dad's gone to Chicago to—Ah! Then it was

your call I heard just now! '

She had caught sight of Arnott's Board uniform, leaped to the switch, and turned it full on.

We were checked, gasping, waist-deep in current this time, three yards from the verandah.

' We only want to know what's the matter with Illinois,' said De Forest placidly.

' Then hadn't you better go to Chicago and find out? ' she answered. ' There's nothing wrong here. We own ourselves.'

' How can we go anywhere if you won't loose us? ' De Forest went on, while Arnott scowled. Admirals of Fleets are quite human when their dignity is touched.

' Stop a minute—you don't know how funny you look! ' She put her hands on her hips and laughed mercilessly.

' Don't worry about that,' said Arnott, and whistled. A voice answered from the *Victor Pirolo* in the meadow.

' Only a single-fuse ground circuit! ' Arnott called. ' Sort it out gently, please. '

We heard the ping of a breaking lamp; a fuse blew out somewhere in the verandah roof, frightening a nest full of birds. The ground-circuit was open. We stopped and rubbed our tingling ankles.

' How rude—how very rude of you! ' the maiden cried.

' Sorry, but we haven't time to look funny,' said Arnott. ' We've got to go to Chicago; and if I were you, young lady, I'd go into the cellars for the next two hours, and take mother with me.'

Off he strode, with us at his heels, muttering indignantly, till the humour of the thing struck and doubled him up with laughter at the foot of the gangway ladder.

' The Board hasn't shown what you might call a fat spark on this occasion,' said De Forest, wiping his eyes. ' I hope I didn't look as big a fool as you did, Arnott! Hullo! What on earth is that? Dad coming home from Chicago? '

There was a rattle and a rush, and a five-plough cultivator, blades in air like so many teeth, trundled itself at us round the edge of the timber, fuming and sparking

furiously.

'Jump!' said Arnott, as we bundled ourselves through the none-too-wide door. 'Never mind about shutting it. Up!'

The *Victor Pirolo* lifted like a bubble, and the vicious machine shot just underneath us, clawing high as it passed.

'There's a nice little spit-kitten for you!' said Arnott dusting his knees. 'We ask her a civil question. First she circuits us and then she plays a cultivator at us!'

'And then we fly,' said Dragomiroff. 'If I were forty years more young, I would go back and kiss her! Ho! Ho!'

'I,' said Pirolo, 'would smack her! My pet ship has been chased by a dirty plough; a—how do you say?—agricultural implement.'

'Oh, that is Illinois all over,' said De Forest. 'They don't content themselves with talking about privacy. They arrange to have it. And now, where's your alleged fleet, Arnott? We must assert ourselves against this wench.'

Arnott pointed to the black heavens.

'Waiting on—up there,' said he. 'Shall I give them the whole installation, sir?'

'Oh, I don't think the young lady is quite worth that,' said De Forest. 'Get over Chicago, and perhaps we'll see something.'

In a few minutes we were hanging at two thousand feet over an oblong block of incandescence in the centre of the little town.

'That looks like the old City Hall. Yes, there's Salati's Statue in front of it,' said Takahira. 'But what on earth are they doing to the place? I thought they used it for a market nowadays! Drop a little, please.'

We could hear the sputter and crackle of road-surfacing machines—the cheap Western type which fuse stone and rubbish into lava-like ribbed glass for their rough country roads. Three or four surfacers worked on each side of a square of ruins. The brick and stone wreckage crumbled, slid forward, and presently spread out into white-hot pools of sticky slag, which the levelling-rods smoothed more or less flat. Already a third of the big

block had been so treated, and was cooling to dull red before our astonished eyes.

'It is the Old Market,' said De Forest. 'Well, there's nothing to prevent Illinois from making a road through a market. It doesn't interfere with traffic, that I can see.'

'Hsh!' said Arnott, gripping me by the shoulder. 'Listen! They're singing. Why on earth are they singing?'

We dropped again till we could see the black fringe of people at the edge of that glowing square.

At first they only roared against the roar of the surfacers and levellers. Then the words came up clearly—the words of the Forbidden Song that all men knew, and none let pass their lips—poor Pat MacDonough's Song, made in the days of the Crowds and the Plague—every silly word of it loaded to sparking-point with the Planet's inherited memories of horror, panic, fear and cruelty. And Chicago—innocent, contented little Chicago—was singing it aloud to the infernal tune that carried riot, pestilence and lunacy round our Planet a few generations ago!

> 'Once there was The People—Terror gave it birth;
> Once there was The People, and it made a hell of earth!'

(Then the stamp and pause):

> 'Earth arose and crushed it. Listen, oh, ye slain!
> Once there was The People—it shall never be again!'

The levellers thrust in savagely against the ruins as the song renewed itself again, again and again, louder than the crash of the melting walls.

'I don't like that,' he said. 'They've broken back to the Old Days! They'll be killing somebody soon. I think we'd better divert 'em, Arnott."

'Ay, ay, sir.' Arnott's hand went to his cap, and we heard the hull of the *Victor Pirolo* ring to the command: 'Lamps! Both watches stand by! Lamps! Lamps! Lamps!'

'Keep still!' Takahira whispered to me. 'Blinkers, please, quartermaster.'

'It's all right—all right!' said Pirolo from behind, and to my horror slipped over my head some sort of rubber helmet that locked with a snap. I could feel thick colloid bosses before my eyes, but I stood in absolute darkness.

'To save the sight,' he explained, and pushed me on to the chart-room divan. 'You will see in a minute.'

As he spoke I became aware of a thin thread of almost intolerable light, let down from heaven at an immense distance—one vertical hairsbreadth of frozen lightning.

'Those are our flanking ships,' said Arnott at my elbow. 'That one is over Galena. Look south—that other one's over Keithburg. Vincennes is behind us, and north yonder is Winthrop Woods. The Fleet's in position, sir'—this to De Forest. 'As soon as you give the word.'

'Ah no! No!' cried Dragomiroff at my side. I could feel the old man tremble. 'I do not know all that you can do, but be kind! I ask you to be a little kind to them below! This is horrible—horrible!'

> 'When a Woman kills a Chicken,
> Dynasties and Empires sicken,'

Takahira quoted. 'It is too late to be gentle now.'

'Then take off my helmet! Take off my helmet!' Dragomiroff began hysterically.

Pirolo must have put his arm round him.

'Hush,' he said, 'I am here. It is all right, Ivan, my dear fellow.'

'I'll just send our little girl in Bureau County a warning,' said Arnott. 'She don't deserve it, but we'll allow her a minute or two to take mamma to the cellar.'

In the utter hush that followed the growling spark after Arnott had linked up his Service Communicator with the invisible Fleet, we heard MacDonough's Song from the city beneath us grow fainter as we rose to position. Then I clapped my hand before my mask lenses, for it was as though the floor of Heaven had been riddled and all the inconceivable blaze of suns in the making was poured through the manholes.

'You needn't count,' said Arnott. I had had no thought

of such a thing. 'There are two hundred and fify keels up there, five miles apart. Full power, please, for another twelve seconds.'

The firmament, as far as the eye could reach, stood on pillars of white fire. One fell on the glowing square at Chicago, and turned it black.

'Oh! Oh! Oh! Can men be allowed to do such things?' Dragomiroff cried, and fell across our knees.

'Glass of water, please,' said Takahira to a helmeted shape that leapt forward. 'He is a little faint.'

The lights switched off, and the darkness stunned like an avalanche. We could hear Dragomiroff's teeth on the glass edge.

Pirolo was comforting him.

'All right, all ra-ight,' he repeated. 'Come and lie down. Come below and take off your mask. I give you my word, old friend, it is all right. They are my siege-lights. Little Victor Pirolo's leetle lights. You know *me*! I do not hurt people.'

'Pardon!' Dragomiroff moaned. 'I have never seen Death. I have never seen the Board take action. Shall we go down and burn them alive, or is that already done?'

'Oh, hush,' said Pirolo, and I think he rocked him in his arms.

'Do we repeat, sir?' Arnott asked De Forest.

'Give 'em a minute's break,' De Forest replied. 'They may need it.'

We waited a minute, and then MacDonough's Song, broken but defiant, rose from undefeated Chicago.

'They seem fond of that tune,' said De Forest. 'I should let 'em have it, Arnott.'

'Very good, sir,' said Arnott, and felt his way to the Communicator keys.

No lights broke forth, but the hollow of the skies made herself the mouth for one note that touched the raw fibre of the brain. Men hear such sounds in delirium, advancing like tides from horizons beyond the ruled foreshores of space.

'That's our pitch-pipe,' said Arnott. 'We may be a bit ragged. I've never conducted two hundred and fifty

performers before.' He pulled out the couplers, and struck a full chord on the Service Communicators.

The beams of light leapt down again, and danced, solemnly and awfully, a stilt-dance, sweeping thirty or forty miles left and right at each stiff-legged kick, while the darkness delivered itself—there is no scale to measure against that utterance—of the tune to which they kept time. Certain notes—one learnt to expect them wtih terror—cut through one's marrow, but, after three minutes, thought and emotion passed in indescribable agony.

We saw, we heard, but I think we were in some sort of swooning. The two hundred and fifty beams shifted, re-formed, straddled and split, narrowed, widened, rippled in ribbons, broke into a thousand white-hot parallel lines, melted and revolved in interwoven rings like old-fashioned engine-turning, flung up to the zenith, made as if to descend and renew the torment, halted at the last instant, twizzled insanely round the horizon, and vanished, to bring back for the hundredth time darkness more shattering than their instantly renewed light over all Illinois. Then the tune and lights ceased together, and we heard one single devastating wail that shook all the horizon as a rubbed wet finger shakes the rim of a bowl.

'Ah, that is my new siren,' said Pirolo. 'You can break an iceberg in half, if you find the proper pitch. They will whistle by squadrons now. It is the wind through pierced shutters in the bows.'

I had collapsed beside Dragomiroff, broken and snivelling feebly, because I had been delivered before my time to all the terrors of Judgment Day, and the Archangels of the Resurrection were hailing me naked across the Universe to the sound of the music of the spheres.

Then I saw De Forest smacking Arnott's helmet with his open hand. The wailing died down in a long shriek as a black shadow swooped past us, and returned to her place above the lower clouds.

'I hate to interrupt a specialist when he's enjoying himself,' said De Forest. 'But, as a matter of fact, all Illinois has been asking us to stop for these last fifteen

seconds.'

'What a pity.' Arnott slipped off his mask. 'I wanted you to hear us really hum. Our lower C can lift street-paving.'

'It is Hell—Hell!' cried Dragomiroff, and sobbed aloud.

Arnott looked away as he answered:

'It's a few thousand volts ahead of the old shoot-'em-and-sink-'em game, but I should scarcely call it *that*. What shall I tell the Fleet, sir?'

'Tell 'em we're very pleased and impressed. I don't think they need wait on any longer. There isn't a spark left down there.' De Forest pointed. 'They'll be deaf and blind.'

'Oh, I think not, sir. The demonstration lasted less than ten minutes.'

'Marvellous!' Takahira sighed. 'I should have said it was half a night. Now, shall we go down and pick up the pieces?'

'But first a small drink,' said Pirolo. 'The Board must not arrive weeping at its own works.'

'I am an old fool—an old fool!' Dragomiroff began piteously. 'I did not know what would happen. It is all new to me. We reason with them in Little Russia.'

Chicago North landing-tower was unlighted, and Arnott worked his ship into the clips by her own lights. As soon as these broke out we heard groanings of horror and appeal from many people below.

'All right,' shouted Arnott into the darkness. 'We aren't beginning again!' We descended by the stairs, to find ourselves knee-deep in a grovelling crowd, some crying that they were blind, others beseeching us not to make any more noises, but the greater part writhing face downward, their hands or their caps before their eyes.

It was Pirolo who came to our rescue. He climbed the side of a surfacing-machine, and there, gesticulating as though they could see, made oration to those afflicted people of Illinois.

'You stchewpids!' he began. 'There is nothing to fuss for. Of course, your eyes will smart and be red to-morrow. You will look as if you and your wives had

drunk too much, but in a little while you will see again as well as before. I tell you this, and I—*I* am Pirolo. Victor Pirolo!'

The crowd with one accord shuddered, for many legends attach to Victor Pirolo of Foggia, deep in the secrets of God.

'Pirolo?' An unsteady voice lifted itself. 'Then tell us was there anything except light in those lights of yours just now?'

The question was repeated from every corner of the darkness.

Pirolo laughed.

'No!' he thundered. (Why have small men such large voices?) 'I give you my word and the Board's word that there was nothing except light—just light! You stchewpids! Your birth-rate is too low already as it is. Some day I must invent something to send it up, but send it down—never!'

'Is that true?—We thought—somebody said——'

One could feel the tension relax all round.

'You *too* big fools,' Pirolo cried. 'You could have sent us a call and we would have told you.'

'Send you a call!' a deep voice shouted. 'I wish you had been at our end of the wire.'

'I'm glad I wasn't,' said De Forest. 'It was bad enough from behind the lamps. Never mind! It's over now. Is there any one here I can talk business with? I'm De Forest—for the Board.'

'You might begin with me, for one—I'm Mayor,' the bass voice replied.

A big man rose unsteadily from the street, and staggered towards us where we sat on the broad turf-edging, in front of the garden fences.

'I ought to be the first on my feet. Am I?' said he.

'Yes,' said De Forest, and steadied him as he dropped down beside us.

'Hello, Andy. Is that you?' a voice called.

'Excuse me,' said the Mayor; 'that sounds like my Chief of Police, Bluthner!'

'Bluthner it is; and here's Mulligan and Keefe—on their feet.'

‘Bring ’em up please, Blut. We’re supposed to be the Four in charge of this hamlet. What we say, goes. And, De Forest, what do you say?’

‘Nothing—yet,’ De Forest answered, as we made room for the panting, reeling men. ‘*You’ve* cut out of system. Well?’

‘Tell the steward to send down drinks, please,’ Arnott whispered to an orderly at his side.

‘Good!’ said the Mayor, smacking his dry lips. ‘Now I suppose we can take it, De Forest, that henceforth the Board will administer us direct?’

‘Not if the Board can avoid it,’ De Forest laughed. ‘The A.B.C. is responsible for the planetary traffic only.’

‘*And all that that implies.*’ The Big Four who ran Chicago chanted their Magna Charta like children at school.

‘Well, get on,’ said De Forest wearily. ‘What is your silly trouble anyway?’

‘Too much dam’ Democracy,’ said the Mayor, laying his hand on De Forest’s knee.

‘So? I thought Illinois had had her dose of that.’

‘She has. That’s why. Blut, what did you do with our prisoners last night?’

‘Locked ’em in the water-tower to prevent the women killing ’em,’ the Chief of Police replied. ‘I’m too blind to move just yet, but——’

‘Arnott, send some of your people, please, and fetch ’em along,’ said De Forest.

‘They’re triple-circuited,’ the Mayor called. ‘You’ll have to blow out three fuses.’ He turned to De Forest, his large outline just visible in the paling darkness. ‘I hate to throw any more work on the Board. I’m an administrator myself, but we’ve had a little fuss with our Serviles. What? In a big city there’s bound to be a few men and women who can’t live without listening to themselves, and who prefer drinking out of pipes they don’t own both ends of. They inhabit flats and hotels all the year round. They say it saves ’em trouble. Anyway, it gives ’em more time to make trouble for their neighbours. We call ’em Serviles locally. And they are apt to be tuberculous.’

'Just so!' said the man called Mulligan. 'Transportation is Civilisation. Democracy is Disease. I've proved it by the blood-test, every time.'

'Mulligan's our Health Officer, and a one-idea man,' said the Mayor, laughing. 'But it's true that most Serviles haven't much control. They *will* talk; and when people take to talking as a business, anything may arrive—mayn't it, De Forest?'

'Anything—except the facts of the case,' said De Forest, laughing.

'I'll give you those in a minute,' said the Mayor. 'Our Serviles got to talking—first in their houses and then on the streets, telling men and women how to manage their own affairs. (You can't teach a Servile not to finger his neighbour's soul.) That's invasion of privacy, of course, but in Chicago we'll suffer anything sooner than make crowds. Nobody took much notice, and so I let 'em alone. My fault! I was warned there would be trouble, but there hasn't been a crowd or murder in Illinois for nineteen years.'

'Twenty-two,' said his Chief of Police.

'Likely. Anyway, we'd forgot such things. So, from talking in the houses and on the streets, our Serviles go to calling a meeting at the Old Market yonder.' He nodded across the square where the wrecked buildings heaved up grey in the dawn-glimmer behind the square-cased statue of The Negro in Flames. 'There's nothing to prevent any one calling meetings except that it's against human nature to stand in a crowd, besides being bad for the health. I ought to have known by the way our men and women attended that first meeting that trouble was brewing. There were as many as a thousand in the market-place, touching each other. Touching! Then the Serviles turned in all tongue-switches and talked, and we——'

'What did they talk about?' said Takahira.

'First, how badly things were managed in the city. That pleased us Four—we were on the platform—because we hoped to catch one or two good men for City work. You know how rare executive capacity is. Even if we didn't it's—it's refreshing to find any one interested enough in our job to damn our eyes. You don't know

what it means to work, year in, year out, without a spark of difference with a living soul.'

'Oh, don't we!' said De Forest. 'There are times on the Board when we'd give our positions if any one would kick us out and take hold of things themselves.'

'But they won't,' said the Mayor ruefully. 'I assure your, sir, we Four have done things in Chicago, in the hope of rousing people, that would have discredited Nero. But what do they say? "Very good, Andy. Have it your own way. Anything's better than a crowd. I'll go back to my land." You *can't* do anything with folk who can go where they please, and don't want anything on God's earth except their own way. There isn't a kick or a kicker left on the Planet.'

'Then I suppose that little shed yonder fell down by itself?' said De Forest. We could see the bare and still smoking ruins, and hear the slagpools crackle as they hardened and set.

'Oh, that's only amusement. 'Tell you later. As I was saying, our Serviles held the meeting, and pretty soon we had to ground-circuit the platform to save 'em from being killed. And that didn't make our people any more pacific.'

'How d'you mean?' I ventured to ask.

'If you've ever been ground-circuited,' said the Mayor, 'you'll know it don't improve any man's temper to be held up straining against nothing. No, sir! Eight or nine hundred folk kept pawing and buzzing like flies in treacle for two hours, while a pack of perfectly safe Serviles invades their mental and spiritual privacy, may be amusing to watch, but they are not pleasant to handle afterwards.'

Pirolo chuckled.

'Our folk own themselves. They were of opinion things were going too far and too fiery. I warned the Serviles; but they're born house-dwellers. Unless a fact hits 'em on the head, they cannot see it. Would you believe me, they went on to talk of what they called "popular government?" They did! They wanted us to go back to the old Voodoo-business of voting with papers and wooden boxes, and word-drunk people and printed for-

mulas, and news-sheets! They said they practised it among themselves about what they'd have to eat in their flats and hotels. Yes sir! They stood up behind Bluthner's double ground-circuits, and they said that, in this present year of grace, *to* self-owning men and women, *on* that very spot! Then they finished '—he lowered his voice cautiously—' by talking about "The People." And then Bluthner he had to sit up all night in charge of the circuits because he couldn't trust his men to keep 'em shut.

'It was trying 'em too high,' the Chief of Police broke in. 'But we couldn't hold the crowd ground-circuited for ever. I gathered in all the Serviles on charge of crowd-making, and put 'em in the water-tower, and then I let things cut loose. I had to! The District lit like a sparked gas-tank!'

'The news was out over seven degrees of country,' the Mayor continued; 'and when once it's a question of invasion of privacy, good-bye to right and reason in Illinois! They began turning out traffic-lights and locking up landing-towers on Thursday night. Friday, they stopped all traffic and asked for the Board to take over. Then they wanted to clean Chicago off the side of the Lake and rebuild elsewhere—just for a souvenir of "The People" that the Serviles talked about. I suggested that they should slag the Old Market where the meeting was held, while I turned in a call to you on the Board. That kept 'em quiet till you came along. And —and now *you* can take hold of the situation.'

'Any chance of their quieting down?' De Forest asked.

'You can try,' said the Mayor.

De Forest raised his voice in the face of the reviving crowd that edged in towards us. Day was come.

'Don't you think this business can be arranged?' he began. But there was a roar of angry voices:

'We've finished with Crowds! We aren't going back to the Old Days! Take us over! Take the Serviles away! Administer direct or we'll kill 'em. Down with The People!'

An attempt was made to begin MacDonough's Song.

It got no further than the first line, for the *Victor Pirolo* sent down a warning drone on one stopped horn. A wrecked side-wall of the Old Market tottered and fell inwards on the slag-pools. None spoke or moved till the last of the dust had settled down again, turning the steel case of Salati's Statue ashey grey.

'You see you'll just *have* to take us over,' the Mayor whispered.

De Forest shrugged his shoulders.

'You talk as if executive capacity could be snatched out of the air like so much horse-power. Can't you manage yourselves on any terms?' he said.

'We can, if you say so. It will only cost those few lives to begin with.'

The Mayor pointed across the square, where Arnott's men guided a stumbling group of ten or twelve men and women to the lake front and halted them under the Statue.

'Now I think,' said Takahira under his breath, 'there will be trouble.'

The mass in front of us growled like beasts.

At that moment the sun rose clear, and revealed the blinking assembly to itself. As soon as it realised that it was a crowd we saw the shiver of horror and mutual repulsion shoot across it precisely as the steely flaws shot across the lake outside. Nothing was said, and, being half blind, of course it moved slowly. Yet in less than fifteen minutes most of that vast multitude—three thousand at the lowest count—melted away like frost on south eaves. The remnant stretched themselves on the grass, where a crowd feels and looks less like a crowd.

'These mean business,' the Mayor whispered to Takahira. 'There are a goodish few women there who've borne children. I don't like it.'

The morning draught off the lake stirred the trees round us with promise of a hot day; the sun reflected itself dazzlingly on the canister-shaped covering of Salati's Statue; cocks crew in the gardens, and we could hear gate-latches clicking in the distance as people stumblingly resought their homes.

'I'm afraid there won't be any morning deliveries,'

said De Forest. 'We rather upset things in the country last night.'

'That makes no odds,' the Mayor returned. 'We're all provisioned for six months. *We* take no chances.'

Nor, when you come to think of it, does any one else. It must be three-quarters of a generation since any house or city faced a food shortage. Yet is there house or city on the Planet to-day that has not half a year's provisions laid in? We are like the shipwrecked seamen in the old books, who, having once nearly starved to death, ever afterwards hide away bits of food and biscuit. Truly we trust no Crowds, nor system based on Crowds!

De Forest waited till the last footstep had died away. Mean time the prisoners at the base of the Statue shuffled, posed and fidgeted, with the shamelessness of quite little children. None of them were more than six feet high, and many of them were as grey-haired as the ravaged, harassed heads of old pictures. They huddled together in actual touch, while the crowd, spaced at large intervals, looked at them with congested eyes.

Suddenly a man among them began to talk. The Mayor had not in the least exaggerated. It appeared that our Planet lay sunk in slavery beneath the heel of the Aerial Board of Control. The orator urged us to arise in our might, burst our prison doors and break our fetters (all his metaphors, by the way, were of the most mediaeval). Next he demanded that every matter of daily life, including most of the physical functions, should be submited for decision at any time of the week, month, or year to, I gathered, anybody who happened to be passing by or residing within a certain radius, and that everybody should forthwith abandon his concerns to settle the matter, first by crowd-making, next by talking to the crowds made, and lastly by describing crosses on pieces of paper, which rubbish should later be counted with certain mystic ceremonies and oaths. Out of this amazing play, he assured us, would automatically arise a higher, nobler, and kinder world, based—he demonstrated this with the awful lucidity of the insane—based on the sanctity of the Crowd and the villainy of the single person. In conclusion, he called loudly upon God

to testify to his personal merits and integrity. When the flow ceased, I turned bewildered to Takahira, who was nodding solemnly.

'Quite correct,' said he. 'It is all in the old books. He has left nothing out, not even the war-talk.'

'But I don't see how this stuff can upset a child, much less a district,' I replied.

'Ah, you are too young,' said Dragomiroff. 'For another thing, you are not a mamma. Please look at the mammas.'

Ten or fifteen women who remained had separated themselves from the silent men, and were drawing in towards the prisoners. It reminded one of the stealthy encircling of the quarry, of wolves round musk-oxen in the North. The prisoners saw, and drew together more closely. The Mayor covered his face with his hands for an instant. De Forest, bareheaded, stepped forward between the prisoners and the slowly, stiffly moving line.'

'That's all very interesting,' he said to the dry-lipped orator. 'But the point seems that you've been making crowds and invading privacy.'

A woman stepped forward, and would have spoken, but there was a quick assenting murmur from the men, who realised that De Forest was trying to pull the situation down to ground-line.

'Yes! Yes!' they cried. 'We cut out because they made crowds and invaded privacy! Stick to that! Keep on that switch! Lift the Serviles out of this! The Board's in charge! Hsh!'

'Yes, the Board's in charge,' said De Forest. 'I'll take formal evidence of crowd-making if you like, but the Members of the Board can testify to it. Will that do?'

The women had closed in another pace, with hands that clenched and unclenched at their sides.

'Good! Good enough!' the men cried. 'We're content. Only take them away quickly.'

'Come along up!' said De Forest to the captives. 'Breakfast is quite ready.'

It appeared, however, that they did not wish to go. They intended to remain in Chicago and make crowds.

They pointed out that De Forest's proposal was gross invasion of privacy.

'My dear fellow,' said Pirolo to the most voluble of the leaders, 'you hurry, or your crowd that can't be wrong will kill you!'

'But that would be murder,' answered the believer in crowds; and there was a roar of laughter from all sides that seemed to show the crisis had broken.

A woman, stepped forward from the line of women, laughing, I protest, as merrily as any of the company. One hand, of course, shaded her eyes, the other was at her throat.

'Oh they needn't be afraid of being killed!' she called.

'Not in the least,' said De Forest. 'But don't you think that, now the Board's in charge, you might go home while we get these people away?'

'I shall be home long before that. It—it has been rather a trying day.'

She stood up to her full height, dwarfing even De Forest's six-foot-eight, and smiled, with eyes closed against the fierce light.

'Yes, rather,' said De Forest. 'I'm afraid you feel the glare a little. We'll have the ship down.'

He motioned to the *Pirolo* to drop between us and the sun, and at the same time to loop-circuit the prisoners, who were a trifle unsteady. We saw them stiffen to the current where they stood, The woman's voice went on, sweet and deep and unshaken:

'I don't suppose you men realise how much this—this sort of thing means to a woman. I've borne three. We women don't want our children given to Crowds. It must be an inherited instinct. Crowds make trouble. They bring back the Old Days. Hate, fear, blackmail, publicity, "The People"—*That! That! That!*' She pointed to the Statue, and the crowd growled once more.

'Yes, if they are allowed to go on,' said De Forest. 'But this little affair——'

'It means so much to us women that this—this little affair should never happen again. Of course, never's a big word, but one feels so strongly that it is important to stop crowds at the very beginning. Those creatures'—

she pointed with her left hand at the prisoners swaying like seaweed in a tideway as the circuit pulled them—'those people have friends and wives and children in the city and elsewhere. One doesn't want anything done to *them*, you know. It's terrible to force a human being out of fifty or sixty years of good life. I'm only forty myself. *I* know. But, at the same time, one feels that an example should be made, because no price is too heavy to pay—if these people and *all that they imply* can be put an end to. Do you quite understand, or would you be kind enough to tell your men to take the casing off the Statue? It's worth looking at.'

'I understand perfectly. But I don't think anybody here wants to see the Statue on an empty stomach. Excuse me one moment.' De Forest called up to the ship, 'A flying loop ready on the port side, if you please.' Then to the woman he said with some crispness, 'You might leave us a little discretion in the matter.'

'Oh, of course. Thank you for being so patient. I know my arguments are silly, but——' She half turned away and went on in a changed voice, 'Perhaps this will help you to decide.'

She threw out her right arm with a knife in it. Before the blade could be returned to her throat or her bosom it was twitched from her grip, sparked as it flew out of the shadow of the ship above, and fell flashing in the sunshine at the foot of the Statue fifty yards away. The outflung arm was arrested, rigid as a bar for an instant, till the releasing circuit permitted her to bring it slowly to her side. The other women shrank back silent among the men.

Pirolo rubbed his hands, and Takahira nodded.

'That was clever of you, De Forest,' said he.

'What a glorious pose!' Dragomiroff murmured, for the frightened woman was on the edge of tears.

'Why did you stop me? I would have done it!' she cried.

'I have no doubt you would,' said DeForest. 'But we can't waste a life like yours on these people. I hope the arrest didn't sprain your wrist; it's so hard to regulate

a flying loop. But I think you are quite right about those persons' women and children. We'll take them all away with us if you promise not to do anything stupid to yourself.'

'I promise—I promise.' She controlled herself with an effort. 'But it is so important to us women. We know what it means; and I thought if you saw I was in earnest——'

'I saw you were, and you've gained your point. I shall take all your Serviles away with me at once. The Mayor will make a list of their friends and families in the city and the district, and he'll ship them after us this afternoon.'

'Sure,' said the Mayor, rising to his feet. 'Keefe, if you can see, hadn't you better finish levelling off the Old Market? It don't look sightly the way it is now, and we shan't use it for crowds any more.'

'I think you had better wipe out that Statue as well, Mr. Mayor,' said De Forest. 'I don't question its merits as a work of art, but I believe it's a shade morbid.'

'Certainly, sir. Oh! Keefe! Slag the Nigger before you go on to fuse the Market. I'll get to the Communicators and tell the District that the Board is in charge. Are you making any special appointments, sir?'

'None. We haven't men to waste on these backwoods. Carry on as before, but under the Board. Arnott, run your Serviles aboard, please. Ground ship and pass them through the bilge-doors. We'll wait till we've finished with this work of art.'

The prisoners trailed past him, talking fluently, but unable to gesticulate in the drag of the current. Then the surfacers rolled up, two on each side of the Statue. With one accord the spectators looked elsewhere, but there was no need. Keefe turned on full power, and the thing simply melted within its case. All I saw was a surge of white-hot metal pouring over the plinth, a glimpse of Salati's inscription, 'To the Eternal Memory of the Justice of the People,' ere the stone base itself cracked and powdered into finest lime. The crowd cheered.

'Thank you,' said De Forest; 'but we want our breakfasts, and I expect you do too. Good-bye, Mr. Mayor!

Delighted to see you at any time, but I hope I shan't have to, officially, for the next thirty years. Good-bye, madam. Yes. We're all given to nerves nowadays. I suffer from them myself. Good-bye, gentlemen all! You're under the tyrannous heel of the Board from this moment, but if you ever feel like breaking your fetters you've only to let us know. This is no treat to us. Good luck! '

We embarked amid shouts, and did not check our lift till they had dwindled into whispers. Then De Forest flung himself on the chartroom divan and mopped his forehead.

'I don't mind men,' he panted, 'but women are the devil! '

'Still the devil,' said Pirolo cheerfully. 'That one would have suicided.'

'I know it. That was why I signalled for the flying loop to be clapped on her. I owe you an apology for that, Arnott. I hadn't time to catch your eye, and you were too busy with our caitiffs. By the way, who actually answered my signal? It was a smart piece of work.'

'Ilroy,' said Arnott; 'but he overloaded the wave. It may be pretty gallery-work to knock a knife out of a lady's hand, but didn't you notice how she rubbed 'em? He scorched her fingers. Slovenly, I call it.'

'Far be it from me to interfere with Fleet discipline, but don't be too hard on the boy. If that woman had killed herself they would have killed every Servile and everything related to a Servile throughout the district by nightfall.'

'That was what she was playing for,' Takahira said. 'And with our Fleet gone we could have done nothing to hold them.'

'I may be ass enough to walk into a ground-circuit,' said Arnott, 'but I don't dismiss my Fleet till I'm reasonably sure that trouble is over. They're in position still, and I intend to keep 'em there till the Serviles are shipped out of the district. That last little crowd meant murder, my friends.'

'Nerves! All nerves! ' said Pirolo. 'You cannot argue with agoraphobia.'

'And it is not as if they had seen much dead—or

is it? ' said Takahira.

'In all my ninety years I have never seen death.' Dragomiroff spoke as one who would excuse himself. 'Perhaps that was why—last night—— '

Then it came out as we sat over breakfast, that, with the exception of Arnott and Pirolo, none of us had ever seen a corpse, or knew in what manner the spirit passes.

'We're a nice lot to flap about governing the Planet,' De Forest laughed. 'I confess, now it's all over, that my main fear was I mightn't be able to pull it off without losing a life.'

'I thought of that too,' said Arnott; but there's no death reported, and I've inquired everywhere. What are we supposed to do with our passengers? I've fed 'em.'

'We're between two switches,' De Forest drawled. 'If we drop them in any place that isn't under the Board, the native will make their presence an excuse for cutting out, same as Illinois did, forcing the Board to take over. If we drop them in any place under the Board's control they'll be killed as soon as our backs are turned.'

'If you say so,' said Pirolo thoughtfully, 'I can guarantee that they will become extinct in process of time, quite happily. What is their birth-rate now? '

'Go down and ask 'em,' said De Forest.

'I think they might become nervous and tear me to bits,' the philosopher of Foggia replied.

'Not really? Well? '

'Open the bilge-doors,' said Takahira with a downward jerk of the thumb.

'Scarcely—after all the trouble we've taken to save 'em,' said De Forest.

'Try London,' Arnott suggested. 'You could turn Satan himself loose there, and they'd only ask him to dinner.'

'Good man! You've given me an idea. Vincent! Oh, Vincent! ' He threw the General Communicator open so that we could all hear, and in a few minutes the chartroom filled with the rich, fruity voice of Leopold Vincent, who has purveyed all London her choicest amusements for the last thirty years. We answered with expectant grins, as though we were actually in the stalls

of, say, the Combination on a first night.

'We've picked up something in your line,' De Forest began.

'That's good, dear man. If it's old enough. There's nothing to beat the old things for business purposes. Have you seen *London, Chatham, and Dover* at Earl's Court? No? I thought I missed you there. Im-mense! I've had the real steam locomotive engines built from the old designs and the iron rails cast specially by hand. Cloth cushions in the carriages, too! Im-mense! And paper railway tickets. And Polly Milton.'

'Polly Milton back again!' said Arnott rapturously. 'Book me two stalls for to-morrow night. What's she singing now, bless her?'

'The old songs. Nothing comes up to the old touch. Listen to this, dear men.' Vincent carolled with flourishes:

> Oh, cruel lamps of London,
> If tears your light could drown,
> Your victim's eyes would weep them,
> Oh, lights of London Town!

'Then they weep.'

'You see?' Pirolo waved his hands at us. 'The old world always weeped when it saw crowds together. It did not know why, but it weeped. We know why, but we do not weep, except when we pay to be made to by fat, wicked old Vincent.'

'Old, yourself!' Vincent laughed. 'I'm a public benefactor, I keep the world soft and united.'

'And I'm De Forest of the Board,' said De Forest acidly, 'trying to get a little business done. As I was saying, I've picked up a few people in Chicago.'

'I cut out. Chicago is——'

'Do listen! They're perfectly unique.'

'Do they build houses of baked mudblocks while you wait—eh? That's an old contact.'

'They're an untouched primitive community, with all the old ideas.'

'Sewing machines and maypole-dances? Cooking on coal-gas stoves, lighting pipes with matches, and driving

horses? Gerolstein tried that last year. An absolute blow-out! '

De Forest plugged him wrathfully, and poured out the story of our doings for the last twenty-four hours on the top-note.

' And they do it *all* in public,' he concluded. You can't stop 'em. The more public, the better they are pleased. They'll talk for hours—like you! Now you can come in again! '

' Do you really mean they know how to vote? ' said Vincent. ' Can they act it? '

' Act? It's their life to 'em! And you never saw such faces! Scarred like volcanoes. Envy, hatred, and malice in plain sight. Wonderfully flexible voices. They weep, too.'

' Aloud? In public? '

' I guarantee. Not a spark of shame or reticence in the entire installation. It's the chance of your career.'

' D'you say you've brought their voting props along—those papers and ballot-box things? '

' No, confound you! I'm not a luggage-lifter. Apply direct to the Mayor of Chicago. He'll forward you everything. Well? '

' Wait a minute. Did Chicago want to kill 'em? That 'ud look well on the Communicators.'

' Yes! They were only rescued with difficulty from a howling mob—if you know what that is.'

' But I don't,' answered the Great Vincent simply.

' Well then, they'll tell you themselves. They can make speeches hours long.'

' How many are there? '

' By the time we ship 'em all over they'll be perhaps a hundred, counting children. An old world in miniature. Can't you see it? '

' M-yes; but I've got to pay for it if it's a blow-out, dear man.'

' They can sing the old war songs in the streets. They can get word-drunk, and make crowds, and invade privacy in the genuine old-fashioned way; and they'll do the voting trick as often as you ask 'em a question.'

' Too good! ' said Vincent.

'You unbelieving Jew! I've got a dozen head aboard here. I'll put you through direct. Sample 'em yourself.'

He lifted the switch and we listened. Our passengers on the lower deck at once, but not less than five at a time, explained themselves to Vincent. They had been taken from the bosom of their families, stripped of their possessions, given food without finger-bowls, and cast into captivity in a noisome dungeon.

'But look here,' said Arnott aghast; 'they're saying what isn't true. My lower deck isn't noisome, and I saw to the finger-bowls myself.'

'My people talk like that sometimes in Little Russia,' said Dragomiroff. 'We reason with them. We never kill. No!'

'But it's not true,' Arnott insisted. 'What can you do with people who don't tell facts? They're mad!'

'Hsh!' said Pirolo, his hand to his ear. 'It is such a little time since all the Planet told lies.'

We heard Vincent silkily sympathetic. Would they, he asked, repeat their assertions in public—before a vast public? Only let Vincent give them a chance, and the Planet, they vowed, should ring with their wrongs. Their aim in life—two women and a man explained it together—was to reform the world. Oddly enough, this also had been Vincent's life-dream. He offered them an arena in which to explain, and by their living example to raise the Planet to loftier levels. He was eloquent on the moral uplift of a simple, old-world life presented in its entirety to a deboshed civilisation.

Could they—would they—for three months certain, devote themselves under his auspices, as missionaries, to the elevation of mankind at a place called Earl's Court, which he said, with some truth, was one of the intellectual centres of the Planet? They thanked him, and demanded (we could hear his chuckle of delight) time to discuss and to vote on the matter. The vote, solemnly managed by counting heads—one head, one vote—was favourable. His offer, therefore, was accepted, and they moved a vote of thanks to him in two speeches—one by what they called the 'proposer' and the other by the 'seconder.'

Vincent threw over to us, his voice shaking with

gratitude:

'I've got 'em! Did you hear those speeches? That's Nature, dear men. Art can't teach *that*. And they voted as easily as lying. I've never had a troupe of natural liars before. Bless you, dear men! Remember, you're on my free lists for ever, anywhere—all of you. Oh, Gerolstein will be sick—sick!'

'Then you think they'll do?' said De Forest.

'Do? The Little Village'll go crazy! I'll knock up a series of old-world plays for 'em. Their voices will make you laugh and cry. My God, dear men, where *do* you suppose they picked up all their misery from, on this sweet earth? I'll have a pageant of the world's beginnings, and Mosenthal shall do the music. I'll——'

'Go and knock up a village for 'em by to-night. We'll meet you at No. 15 West Landing Tower.' said De Forest. 'Remember the rest will be coming along to-morrow.'

'Let 'em all come!' said Vincent. 'You don't know how hard it is nowadays even for me, to find something that really gets under the public's damned iridium-plated hide. But I've got it at last. Goodbye!'

'Well,' said De Forest when we had finished laughing, 'if anyone understood corruption in London I might have played off Vincent against Gerolstein, and sold my captives at enormous prices. As it is, I shall have to be their legal adviser to-night when the contracts are signed. And they won't exactly press any commission on me, either.'

'Meantime,' said Takahira, 'we cannot, of course, confine members of Leopold Vincent's last-engaged company. Chairs for the ladies, please, Arnott.'

'Then I go to bed,' said De Forest. 'I can't face any more women!' And he vanished.

When our passengers were released and given another meal (finger-bowls came first this time) they told us what they thought of us and the Board; and, like Vincent, we all marvelled how they had contrived to extract and secrete so much bitter poison and unrest out of the good life God gives us. They raged, they stormed, they palpitated, flushed and exhausted their poor, torn nerves, panted themselves into silence, and renewed the senseless,

shameless attacks.

'But can't you understand,' said Pirolo pathetically to a shrieking woman, 'that if we'd left you in Chicago you'd have been killed?'

'No, we shouldn't. You were bound to save us from being murdered.'

'Then we should have had to kill a lot of other people.'

'That doesn't matter. We were preaching the Truth. You can't stop us. We shall go on preaching in London; and *then* you'll see!'

'You can see now,' said Pirolo, and opened a lower shutter.

We were closing on the Little Village, with her three million people spread out at ease inside her ring of girdling Main-Traffic lights—those eight fixed beams at Chatham, Tonbridge, Redhill, Dorking, Working, St. Albans, Chipping Ongar, and Southend.

Leopold Vincent's new company looked, with small pale faces, at the silence, the size, and the separated houses.

Then some began to weep aloud, shamelessly—always without shame.

This story, from "A Diversity of Creatures," is reprinted by kind permission of Mrs. Bambridge, Rudyard Kipling's daughter.

A very short story by an Oxford don whose special field is medieval literature. Its quality makes me hope that he will soon offer us something longer.

SYMBIOTE

by George Rigg

Lephas felt life stir within him; a quickening of the blood, a slight flexing of the muscles. From afar off he sensed the impulses pouring down upon him, raining from heaven into his insubstantial shadow. Soon his long sleep would be over; again he would join his brothers and rejoice with them for their new life. The sensations he felt were not just those of awakening from sleep; somehow his whole form seemed to fill out, to become more substantial, as though he had acquired a new dimension in space. The source of the life-bringing rays was a mystery to him; he felt sure they somehow emanated from the Creature. The presence of this vast animal, if such it was, was always associated with the periods of his most dynamic Being, and indeed he could scarcely remember life without it. The nature of the Creature was even more of a puzzle; it towered over his universe, from the heights to the depths; it seemed to consist of a substance more gross, more solid than his own; its movements were jerky and rambling. What it was, or where it had come from, he could never hope to guess. He wondered if the thicker, harder substance of which it was composed somehow leaked out into the atmosphere and gave mass and increased density to other living things. On the other hand, the strength of the Creature's emanations seemed to vary in intensity: sometimes he would only feel the slightest stirrings of life, at other time his whole body would vibrate with energy. Of one thing, however, Lephas was certain: the impulses had

been getting stronger: his time of life was extended and his vigour increased. The same thing seemed to have affected his brothers also: their numbers had grown and each time he felt the impulses he found more of his people flooding forth from their hiding places. Their vigour, too, seemed to have increased recently.

Now, suddenly, he cast aside all his thoughts. His blood raced, and he felt the full life-force of the rays pouring into him. Soon he would be once again with his own people. The Creature was here! From all sides he saw his companions rushing forward, running and dancing into a circle before the Creature. With a cry of ecstasy Lephas ran to join them, and together in their hundreds they formed into circles and danced and sang a paean of pure joy, a hymn of triumphant life.

Sean O'Malley staggered across the room. His hand clutched at the side-board, missed, and he was thrown across the hearth into the mantlepiece. No, not again! Not again! and there were more than ever this time. Thousands of the little bastards. Oh no, please God, not more! Go away, damn you, go away! He lashed out at them with his fists but his arm caught the table and tore the flesh from his wrist. He seized a vase and hurled it at them, but it crashed harmlessly on the far wall. And still they danced on, up and down, and round and round, the pink elephants danced for joy.

GEORGE RIGG

ESCAPISM

by Keith Roberts

Ever been hit in the chest by a two thousand foot film spool? I have. That's how I met Dave Curtis.

It wasn't pleasant. Being clobbered by the spool I mean, not meeting Dave. I was walking along Wickenford High Street one Saturday morning in May. Wickenford is a quiet little town in the chalk downs of the West Country. It's a pleasant enough place to be at any time of the year, and with the sky blue and the sun shining I was feeling full of the joys of spring. I hadn't even noticed I was passing the front of the Coliseum. Suddenly there was a crash from somewhere and a yell, a noise of old hinges giving way to an invincible force and I had a glimpse of a black disc about eighteen inches in diameter spinning at my face. Then I was lying flat with a huge stinging in my chest where the spoolrims had caught me and another in the back of my head where I'd cracked my skull on the path. Something prognathous in shirtsleeves leaped across my reoriented angle of vision (it nearly stamped on my hand). Then Dave was leaning over me. He asked me something but I didn't quite catch the sense of it. At first his face seemed to loom and recede, then things steadied and I sat up. He put his arm under my elbow and I was hauled to my feet, a bit wobbly but more or less intact. I started trying to fumble under my shirt to find out the depth of the grooves across my breastbone. Dave said "Frightfully sorry, just one of those things. It was a film spool."

I said "Thanks, I know what it was." I looked across the street. The spool was still moving, unravelling celluloid surprises as it went. Prognathous fielded it at the Town Hall steps. Dave passed a hand across his face like a man suddenly weary. He said "You don't look too well old chap. Come and have a quick one on the firm."

That seemed a good idea to me as well. We extricated

ourselves from the little knot of people that had gathered and worked our way through the traffic, piling up nicely now, and into the saloon of the Old White Hart just across the street. Half a pint of beer later I was feeling better and Dave was explaining he was the chief operator at the Coliseum, Wickenford's one cinema and surely the most misnamed building in town. He said he couldn't help feeling personally to blame for the accident. I wasn't too concerned with moral responsibilities, I was more interested in exactly how a loaded spool happened to be flying at head height across the pavement. Dave explained. The mechanics of the paradox were simple. "Pongo" said Dave, "*Alias Bugdust*" . . . and here he raised his voice to a parade-ground roar and glared out of the window, and Pongo, or Bugdust, trotting back with his arms full of several hundred unravelled feet of 'Love Among the Palms,' grinned an unhappy twitching sort of grin and vanished up the stairs by the Coliseum paybox. "Pongo" went on Dave in a more reasonable tone, "being the sort of lad he is, has only one way of rewinding." He gestured graphically. "Place a full spool on one side, an empty one on the other, and crank like the hammers of Hell." Apparently this time the junior had forgotten to locknut the idling spool onto its shaft, with the result that the thing had passed him on the bench at about a thousand r.p.m., leaped through the open door, gained more acceleration on the way down the stairs, smashed the street door apart and bounded into the Great Outside. The rest I already knew. "Damned sorry old man" said Dave again. "I mean, you might have been killed."

I agreed there had been a possibility.

One beer tended to lead to another and it was nearly twelve before Dave left to salvage what he could of the unfortunate reel. I went across to the Coliseum with him, not having anything better to do, and stood talking while he spliced and swore and made veecuts by the dozen. Finally we screened the result. All considered, it didn't look too bad. The copy had been in a fairly appalling condition to start with; as Dave remarked, half the street sweepings of Wickenford wouldn't have

made a sight of difference to it. He was more concerned about the effects of gritty stock on his machines.

The mechs were years out of date; Simplex heads, Western bases, Ross arcs, they looked like ancient mechanical patchworks. But they had the sleek air that comes from careful handling, the spoolboxes were polished, the driptrays scoured and gleaming. That was Dave's way with mechanical things, he had a feeling for them. He'd spend hours fitting a new intermittent sprocket for one of those old nags, fetching the shaft down with metal polish to get it just exactly right. He loved machines. "Anything dumb" he said once, "That can't defend itself." Dave was a great guy, it's a pity he's dead. Leastways I think he's dead. It's rather a matter of viewpoint.

He didn't look like a chief operator, if there's a way for chief operators to look. He was burly and tall, somewhere over six feet, he was blonde, he had very bright blue eyes and wore a neatly trimmed beard. That and his imposingly hooked nose gave him a vaguely piratical air; somehow wherever he was he never seemed to fit his surroundings entirely. It was as if he'd been born too early or a long time too late.

I had a lot of things in common with him. I'd been in films myself once, on the production side. I finished the hard way; I fell out with a dishy little production secretary who could pull too many strings and I was fired within the month. After that I moved about from job to job, never stopping anywhere too long because show biz had got into my blood and everything else bored me. I finally stopped bouncing in Wickenford, though what I was doing there doesn't concern the story. Dave had had a chequered career as well. Merchant seaman, bit-actor, garage mechanic, salesman, he'd tried his hand at most things. He'd learned to handle thirty five millimetre projection gear on camp cinemas in the RAF, and when he'd blown into Wickenford five years earlier with only a drophead Morris Eight and a teachest full of books to his name and found the local fleapit needed a chief he'd just stepped in. As he said, he spent his days making dreams for himself and his nights doing it for other people. For some men it would have been a lonely

life but it suited his odd temperament ideally. He was in the part of the country he liked best, he had a good pad and a steady job, he wasn't rich but he could afford petrol and beer and that was about all he needed.

I ought to explain about the West Country. He had a feeling that of all the places he'd seen the West of England was somehow the least changed. He was looking for something, he himself was not sure what, and he felt nearer to it here than anywhere else. He had strange fancies about the chalk hills. They intrigued him; I remember once when we were walking on the downs near the sea he stopped and asked me whether I was afraid of waking them. He said we were moving on their backs like fleas on a whale. I asked him what he was talking about and he laughed and said they'd been asleep too long, we didn't mean anything to them now. That was typical of Dave; he was a mystical creature, made all of opposites. He moved in his own paths, I haven't fully understood him yet.

The friendship went well right from its inauspicious start and after a week or so I'd got into the habit of going round to Dave's place on his nights off duty or meeting him in the Old White Hart for a jug of beer and a chat. When he was running the show on his own and he had a programme change I'd go up to the box and plate off reels for him, drag the cans downstairs ready for Transport. That way we'd still have time for a pint before they closed.

I'd known him just over a year when the train of events started that was eventually to part us in a strange way. I remember the evening well. I'd gone over to the Old White Hart; it was a fine night, too warm to stay indoors, and beside myself there were only two or three people in the bar. The door stood open, martens were circling and in the fading light the old High Street looked more like a stage set than ever. Across the road was the Coliseum; I could see the brightness of the undercanopy strips, up on the roof the yellow rectangle of the box door. The noise of the mechs just carried to the pub, and a ghost of sound from the monitor speaker. A Western was running and I could hear the occasional ricochet

of a bullet, the tinny clatter of hooves. Once Pongo's low-skulled head became invisible, silhouetted against the light as he leaned on the parapet overlooking the street and indulged in an illicit fag. Dave usually came over about nine, when they got onto the last run of the feature, but this time he was late. It was nearly half past before he showed up. I was trying to decide whether to have another drink or go over the road and see what was keeping him when he came in the door. I ordered two beers, rolled a cigarette and lit it. He drank absently, frowning and looking out the door into the night. Very obviously he had something on his mind. I said "What's up Dave, Pongo dropped the middle out of a reel again?"

He looked vaguely surprised, then laughed. "No, he hasn't done that for over a week now. I don't know what's happened to the lad, he's nearly efficient. Bill . . ."

"What?"

He pursed his lips. "What do you know about stereo projection?"

I shrugged. "A bit. Probably not as much as you."

He inclined his head toward a corner table. "Let's go sit. I want to talk about stereo."

It was my turn to be surprised. Normally he was a bar drinker. He used to say the stuff wouldn't drain down right unless he was standing. I followed him to the table. He got out a packet of cigarettes and lit one, still with the far-away look in his eyes. He said "Shoot. Tell me about stereo."

I couldn't see why he'd asked me because he knew at least as much about the subject as I did. But I knew enough about him to play along with his mood. Something was worrying him, this was his way of getting round to it. I talked.

I suppose most people know the idea behind the original stereo experiments. We get three dimensional vision from the fact that as our eyes are a few inches apart, each retina receives a slightly different image of anything we look at. The brain translates the differences into terms of depth. If two images are presented to the spectator in such a way that each eye sees only the picture

intended for it, the brain can be fooled into taking the parallax effects for real depth. That's exactly what happens in a three-dee movie; the chair comes out of the screen right at your head.

Getting the images proved simple. Two cameras were used, rigged so that the distance between the lenses corresponded to the space between a pair of human eyes. Putting the results onto a screen was even easier; the two copies were projected simultaneously by the left and right machines working as a pair. The motors had to be interlocked of course, either mechanically or electrically, to keep the mechs in frame sync, but that was technology, it didn't affect the principle. The stumbling block was the reseparation of the images. Unless each eye of each spectator got the picture intended for it the result was just a blur. In the crude three-dee they had in the twenties the images were tinted red and green and the audience wore red and green glasses. Later techniques made use of polaroid screens, allowing films to be shot in full colour, but glasses were still essential and that was where the whole thing fell through. It was fine for a gimmick but that was all; people just didn't like sitting with a pair of cardboard specs on their nose. So commercially three-dee was a lame duck.

That was about as far as I could go. When I'd run down Dave sat and brooded with his tankard in his hand. Then he said. "Fine. Now how about three-dee without specs?"

I described the system the Russians first demonstrated in Moscow. That worked without glasses, the trick was in the screen itself. They'd managed to produce a prismatic surface that reflected different images to each eye. But I'd read that in the cinema where it was demonstrated the seats were arranged on certain optical lines and to keep the illusion you had to hold your head almost completely still. So that hadn't been commercial either.

Dave nodded, twirling the glass. "So far so good. Now tell me about three-dee without specs, without a kinky screen."

I laughed. "You're making your orders rapidly taller. You can play about with split lenses and so on till you're

blue in the face but you won't get true stereo. You might manage some crafty illusions with perspective shifts on twin images but you're lacking two basic essentials. First, the original left and right eye negs. Second, the means of splitting the picture elements on the retinas themselves. That's a physiological must and to do it you need glasses. I'd say anything else is impossible. A one-eyed camera can't see stereo any more than a one-eyed man."

He looked serious. "I'd say so too. That's why I'd like you to see some. Full three-dee without specs, on an ordinary screen, through an ordinary lens, from one projector running as far as I can tell a completely standard thirty-five mil. print. Coming across?"

Like Hell I was. I dumped the glasses on the counter and followed him out the door. I said "Dave my son, if the heat hasn't addled your tiny mind we have a fortune in our grasp."

He was dour about it. "We'll see, shall we?" That was all I could get out of him.

We thumped up the stairs to the box. The last reel was on when we arrived, and the Queen was laced ready to run. Dave checked the incoming mech, ran the leader down to the three frame, reset the carbons and dropped the mirrorshield. Then he came and leaned against the back wall of the projection room, talked over the monitor noise and the clatter from B machine. "Been running rushes every night now for nearly a week. Some film company or other. Don't know where they're shooting."

I was incredulous. "Rushes? Here?" Units on location often use a local cinema like that but in my experience it had generally been a circuit house, an ABC or an Odeon, certainly not a crummy joint like the old Col. I couldn't understand it.

Dave looked sardonic. "This is our one little moment of glory. Why they come here, I do not know. They've got some sort of agreement with old Watts, that's all I can tell you. I don't know how much they're paying him but when they're up here they fling money about like the proverbial water."

I said "These rushes . . . they're the three-dee you

were on about? "

He said " They are." He snapped his fingers. " Dust-sheets, Pongo." Each night he swathed those old beaten-up mechs like they were babies. That was typical of him.

I walked forward to B machine, saw ten minutes on the takeoff spindle and went back to Dave. Has Watts seen this stuff? "

" Not to my knowledge. You know what he is."

I did know, very well. The old manager had never forgotten the happy plushy days of the music halls. The Coliseum was a sad comedown for him; he hated the place, and every night he drowned its image conscientiously in gin. By ten thirty he could be relied on to be, if not pickled, at least well on the way; the cinema was usually put to bed by Dave and an elderly doorman. If we'd opened up after hours as a strip club Watts wouldn't have cared. Not that such a thing would have gone over in Wickenford . . .

I said " When do these folk arrive? "

Dave shrugged. " On the dot. You'll see."

The last five minutes of film were running. I offered to take dimmer and non-sync for the closedown and Dave looked relieved. " That means we can ditch Pongo. Thank God . . . he's a lovely lad but after ten he gives me the creeping horrors." The lad in question came back into the box, draped the dustsheets over the firebucket brackets and relapsed into rigor mortis. Dave cracked his fingers again, pointed to the door and where Pongo had been, was a space. Dave laughed. " So far I've run all the stuff on my own. I tip him a quid from the perks. He hasn't worked out what it's for yet; he thinks I like him, bless him." He looked into the spoolbox, wound up the carbons, walked round to A machine. " Stand by " said Dave.

He tabbed for the end of the feature, started up again and swung into the Queen trailer. I brought in floats and houselights, started the non-sync and we had a dozen bars of playout. Then Dave zeroed the fader. The Coliseum was empty already, and deader than a mausoleum at midnight. I peered down through the port to the brown vagueness of the tabs. I heard the boys arrive.

They came up the stairs at the double, chattering like

so many parrots, and erupted into the projection room. There were around half a dozen of them, and as far as I could tell they all looked exactly alike. They wore dark suits, they had crewcuts that cropped the hair almost completely away, they sported heavy-framed glasses of the junior exec. pattern. They looked like film men or admen. They didn't talk like either.

Now I'd been around studios for a year or two and I thought I'd picked up most of the jargon of the film world but these boys' chatter sounded half Dutch to me. They clustered round Dave, waving their arms and giggling and talking nineteen to the dozen but I just couldn't make sense of it. I distinctly heard one of them say something about Solidos, and another made a crack about chronoshifting that brought a twitter of laughter from the whole gang. I stood over by the dimmer board trying to work out what the Hell was chronoshifting, then I caught Dave's eye and he shook his head slightly so I didn't say anything. I elbowed my way out to the rewind room and clapped a spool onto one of the takeups. Dave followed me carrying a thousand foot can. I heard the visitors crowding back down to the auditorium. I opened my mouth to ask what was going on and Dave stopped me with a raised hand. "This" he said, "is nothing. We can talk later." He took a cardboard box down from the top of the cupboard and got out a waxer. Obviously it didn't belong to the Col, they hadn't seen a new copy since pictures started to talk. I expect he'd scrounged it from somewhere just for the rushes. It was the sort of thing he would do.

He adjusted the lavender strips above the stock and I ran it on slowly. There seemed to be about eight hundred feet; damned good shooting if that was a day's work. Halfway through I stopped and had a look at the print. It was colour, and it seemed normal enough. It had an emulsion coat both sides but that on its own was nothing extraordinary. I said "No circus tricks tonight, Dave. This is a common or garden mute print."

He shrugged. He said "I can't splice this stuff. Amyl-acetate won't touch it and Tricoid runs off like water so it isn't nitrate base and it isn't tri-acetate. I found

that out the first night trying to put a leader on it. They said not to bother. They said not to do this either but the Hell with it, I'm not running green stock on those nags without wax."

Two of the boys hung round till we'd finished treating the print. Then we shoved them downstairs. ("Chinks" Dave said decidedly on the way back up to the box). I laced A machine, which had the steadier crossbox, and Dave carboned up again and struck the arc. He checked the gates, turned the motor over, gave me the sort of look that told me I was going to get the fright of my life and started up. I snapped out the overhead light, went round to the other operating port and looked down at the screen.

Only there wasn't a screen.

I yelped something, I don't know what, and grabbed at the wall in front of me. For a second I thought I was going to fall straight down into an expanse of sunlit sea. I was suspended over the water, the waves were sparkling in green and blue, I could see little crests of foam forming and breaking and sliding away. This wasn't stereo; it was like the auditorium had vanished, and the box was afloat. There was no sound track but it wasn't necessary. I could hear the surge and chuckle of that ocean in my mind. I could smell the sweet wind moving over it towards the land

Dave was looking at me across the back of B machine. I straightened up to say something, changed my mind and bent to the port again. I couldn't afford to miss any of this. I was watching a technological miracle, and I knew it.

The ships came on in line abreast, dipping in the swell, and they had masts and yards like nothing afloat, they weren't ships of this age. Sails bellied and flapped, long pennants dropped to flirt with the sea and rose again with their tips dark with salt. I looked down on the decks; the standing rigging seemed to move past a few feet from my face. There was an air of excitement and adventure; I saw men talking animatedly, pointing to the loom of the coast. The sun winked on swordhilts and pistols, burned whitely on lace. Subjectively I could

feel that sun on the back of my neck. The viewpoint sank till the hulls towered over me. I saw little details; the decorated mouths of cannon, run out and primed; cracks and weathering on a painted bulwark; weed clinging to the bottom sheathing. Then the vessels were past, heading in toward the land.

A bay opened out ahead. There were houses in the distance. Their roofs seemed to huddle together. The ships passed a headland and the sails emptied one by one as the cliffs took their wind. The hulls rolled awkwardly, sidling in like a troupe of clumsy wooden ducks. I saw the burst of smoke as a cannon was fired, imagined the sound booming across the water. There was a cut, and I was watching from the quay. Boats were being launched and folk were running about. The vessels edged forward under shortened sail. I felt I was being jostled by the crowd. Children were pointing and staring. I saw a mounted man riding away from the water; another waved a musket and shouted something at the people. The leading ship was close now; I saw a rope thrown and caught. Another cannon went off; a group of brightly dressed men appeared in her waist. I screwed up my eyes to try and make out their faces and town, quay and water vanished in brightness. I blinked; Dave closed the dowser and I was staring into a dark auditorium. I heard the tail of the film crackle through the firetrap. Then the cleaners' lights came on and I could see the dinginess of the screen, the open girders in the roof of the Coliseum. Down below the little men were leaving their seats and hurrying up the hall.

Dave shut off the mech and the fireshutter clanged, the sprockets ticked into silence. I frowned across the top of the lamphouse and when I spoke I know my voice wasn't much more than a whisper. "Dave," I said, "What the Hell have we got here?"

He shook his head. "I don't know, Bill. And if you could tell me . . . I'd reckon you were a good bloke."

They came for the print within seconds; Dave said they only ever ran the stuff through once. One of the little people shoved something into his hand and he looked momentarily surprised, then they were gone and

we had the Coliseum to ourselves.

We shut up shop. Somehow the place seemed . . . empty. Drained out. I can't quite describe it; a cinema after the show has finished is always spooky but this was different. It was as if something real had happened inside the walls and the real thing was done and there was nothing left but mortar and bricks and steel. We walked round mechanically to the carpark and got into the Morris. Dave started up and drove to his digs. He only spoke once on the way. He said "And this has been happening every night for a week."

I could see why he'd been worried.

We talked for hour, while the street lamps went out and the crickets started their symphony and stopped again. We brewed endless cups of coffee, smoked cigarette after cigarette. We argued till the dawn was trailing grey rags in the sky and we were no wiser. I was half ready to believe I'd had some sort of hallucination. Dave cured me of that. He laughed suddenly and groped in his pocket. His hand came out holding four crisp notes. Fivers. Ten pounds for each of us. He threw my half across to me and I sat and felt my mouth sag open; it was an effort to haul it shut again. He said "No gags, Bill. These are for real."

Perhaps you'll understand my state of mind better when I say that that gross tip meant next to nothing. I was too wrapped up in what I'd seen. I said "Look Dave, this sounds stupid but I still can't take it in, did that . . . image come out of that machine? I mean, I was there but . . ." My voice trailed off. I didn't know how to finish the thought.

He nodded. "Right through the lens William, the same as any picture. If you stick your hand in the beam you get a shadow. Only the shadow is a solid, it cuts out in depth as well . . . I tried it the first time I ran stuff for them. It looks damned odd, I can tell you."

The hardest thing was to decide on a course of action. We both felt we ought to do something, but what? I knew this thing just couldn't have happened, if any firm or motion picture company had got hold of a process as revolutionary as that it would have been tested behind

locked doors, not rushed casually in a two-bit cinema in a little country town. I said over and over "It's just bloody daft. Turn it about, look at it every which way, it doesn't make sense. There's something here that's outside my experience. I can't even start guessing what it is."

We adjourned at five in the morning and I at least had to face a day's work. I don't know how I got through it. I snapped at the boss and swore at the secretary; somehow beside what I had seen everything else was too trivial for words. All I wanted was to be in on the process helping develop it, use it. A technique like that had no limitations; at least none that I could see.

The next night they brought sound.

I spotted the combined print as soon as I started running it on. The track was not optical, nor did it look like any magnetic stripe I'd ever seen. It was silvery, with queer shadings in it that altered and shifted as it caught the light. At some angles it was as if the frequencies were visible as striations, at others it was blank. Dave fingered the copy and shook his head over it. He said "I can't run this, boys. We've got optical gates."

One of the little men sneered and brought out an object that looked like a contact mike without a lead. He walked through into the box and clapped the thing on the p.e. housing of A projector. He said "Run sound, man." And all I know is, after that sound came through the speakers . . .

I waited till Dave was ready to open up then I scrammed down the stairs. I was going to take this one from inside.

I opened the stalls doors and walked into a grass field. I scuffed my feet to feel the blades move against my shoes. There was no grass of course, it was part of the illusion. I could feel the threadbare texture of the carpet but it didn't help. My eyes told me I was in a field.

I groped forward to a seat and eased myself down into it. I looked right and left but there were no walls, just blue distances. I wanted to walk down the hall and touch the screen but illogically I daren't move. It seemed

I would have to push my way through a column of armed men.

They came on steadily, feet swishing in the grass. The sound seemed to move with them. They carried swords and home-made pikes; behind them children and dogs skirmished about, an old man pushed a rickety cart. Its wheels squeaked abominably. The group passed stolidly and the scene dissolved to show another column and another, moving along rutted lanes or over the backs of the downs. Some men came openly, riding horses and waving crude banners, some skulked in by twos and threes keeping to the shelter of the hedges, but they were all converging on the little town I'd seen the night before. They flocked in by the hundred; it looked like a countryside on the move. Shouts were exchanged; 'he' had landed, 'he' would lead them. Who 'he' was, I had no idea.

The end of the reel took me by surprise again. The film ran through and I was back in the Coliseum gazing at the empty screen. Dave closed the housetabs. The motor clanked in the stillness.

I got up and plunged out to the front of the theatre but I was too late. The little men were piling into a car like so many reversed Jack-in-the-boxes. The car started up and shot away leaving me standing there like a fool. Across the road the Town Hall was bright in the moonlight. A policeman was working his beat, checking the fronts of the High Street shops. For a crazy moment I wanted to run over to him and ask him if he didn't know a war had started.

The next night we showed a flashback to the disembarkation. It was a queer affair. A handful of men left the ships and walked up into the town. They moved in a silence so deep I could hear the chink of their sword-hilts, the scraping of their shoes on the cobbles. The crowds parted to let them through. Ruddy-faced men stared blankly; the sun beat down on the old buildings; a woman stood in a cottage doorway and twined her hands nervously in her apron. It seemed that I myself moved between mute lines of people, neither hostile nor friendly. I felt sweat start out on my face. Eyes seemed to bore

into my back.

The strangers nailed up a proclamation. Each stroke of the hammer raised a clapping echo from the house-fronts opposite. The people crowded forward, still quiet. I heard muttering as the news was passed from mouth to mouth from the few who could read. The officers watched anxiously from the windows of an inn. Then someone shouted, and cheering spread out along alleys and streets till the whole town was in uproar. It was a terrific sequence.

When the reel ended the letdown was still as acute; this time though I was quicker off the mark. I intercepted the little men as they scurried out. I caught the last one as he was pushing his way through the door and literally spun him back into the stalls. I said desperately "Look I'm sorry but the Stereo, the Solido, whatever you call it . . . How does it work? I've been in the film game, I thought I knew all the answers, but this . . . I've never seen anything like . . ."

He looked up at me as if I'd just stepped out of a sewer. He said "Yammer-yammer-yammer. Always yammer. Like, making too much wind with the mouth, Daddy-O." He shoved me in the chest and I was startled enough to let him go. Next second he was away with the rest of them.

I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised. After all, film boys are film boys the world over . . .

The following night's reel took the action a stage forward. That prying camera was everywhere. Normal spatial restrictions didn't seem to affect it. It hovered a hundred yards in the air, floated through walls, into closed rooms. This footage had been edited; there was a sardonic montage contrasting the actions of leaders and followers. Here the young prince, as I was beginning to think of him, lifted a wineglass to his mouth and drank; here a square-built, brown-faced man methodically lashed a scythe to a pole, while another hauled an old rusty sword from a trunk and began to work its edge. A blacksmith forged an axe amid a shower of sparks; the prince laughed, showing lines of strong white teeth; a pike slashed into a straw-filled dummy and sent it spinning. A group of

men rode across a field, framed in the fresh green of oak leaves; a squirrel skittered along a branch; a soldier was dragged from his horse. Steel flashed; there was a quick sound of dying. The squirrel scolded; the prince reached for a decanter. A man strutted with the soldier's hat on his head, and waved a stained sword . . .

By this time the thing had grown on me till I could think of very little else. For me, nights were the only reality; that precious ten minutes when I stood in the Coliseum and Dave struck up and trimmed the arc and the people in the film started to breathe again. I watched the growth of the revolution. The rabble became an army, ragged and vast, flaunting its home-made banners and chanting, artillery at its head and horses, and men flocking across the fields to join it. I cheered mentally as old wooden towns fell to it, or opened their barricades with shouts and the noise of bells. The shouts began to make sense. 'Monmouth' . . . The name floated on the air. 'Monmouth . . . Monmouth and the King . . .'

I took a morning off work and spent it in the local library. They didn't have much of a reference section but there was a Britannica and that was all I needed. I read how the Duke of Monmouth, the last of the Stuarts, left exile in France to raise the West against his uncle, James the Second of England. I read how he quartered the country, through Dorset to Somerset, down to Cornwall and back, skirmishing with the Royalist troops, raising men and arms all the way. After that I felt sick because I knew what was going to happen.

I saw his last battle the same night. It went according to the book. After a series of reverses, James in far-off London raised an army big enough to squash the rebellion. A night of early July, 1685, found the King's men under Lord Feversham camped a bare mile or so from the forces of the 'Protestant Duke.' Monmouth, urged by his advisers, decided on a surprise attack. The men who reccied the ground between him and the Royal troops reported it clear. It wasn't clear. A great ditch ran across right in the line of Monmouth's cavalry. The Britannica had hinted at betrayal; Monmouth wasn't betrayed, at least not in the normal sense of the term.

The boys who did the sortie were scared and drunk, nobody got within half a mile of the enemy lines.

They mounted the attack in the dawn, as the sky was lightening to grey. The dew was rough on the grass, somewhere a solitary bird was piping. The jingle of harness, the champ of a bit carried for yards. The lines of horsemen passed pale as ghosts and behind them were the men of the West, silent and dour, holding up a forest of pikes.

The charge went in and the horses crashed over the ditch screaming and threshing. Men writhed in the mud; there were cries from the other camp, the flash of a musket, the dim rumble of the discharge. Then the sun was streaming low across the grass, horses and men kicking in the land-drain and the squadrons behind backing and piling up, gathering into knots and floundering across, rushing onto Sedgemoor Field . . .

They didn't have a chance. Monmouth bolted and the rest was a rout. The film makers wasted no stock on the phoney Pretender. They held the camera on the battle.

I'd seen good filming. I'd seen All Quiet and Gone With The Wind, the Odessa steps massacre and the fall of Babylon from Intolerance, but I'd seen nothing like this. It was the details that got me. A man loping for cover, sweating and grinning with his hands full of his own entrails. Severed flesh on the grass. A soldier's arm stripped by a swordcut. I saw a horse take a pike head in the nostril, saw its face turn to smashed bone. I saw something else too as Monmouth's men rose to receive the Royal cavalry. That upset me worst of all.

Five minutes later it was over. A riderless horse moved past the camera cropping grass. Smoke drifted slowly. There was a noise of birds, mixed with the baby-voices of dying men. The reel ended.

I went up to the box. Dave was walking round methodically snapping off mains. A projector was ticking as it cooled. I stood and looked at the machine that had made the miracle. I said "Dave, that was Sedgemoor."

He got the dustsheet down, flung one end across the back of the mech and twitched a fold over the top spool-box. He said "Yes, I know."

I tucked the sheet round the lamphouse tail, reached up and closed the flue vent. A flake of ash drifted down. I put my hands on the lamphouse and felt the animal warmth radiating out. I said " You don't get me. I don't mean that was a film of Sedgemoor. I mean that was it. The real thing. It wasn't any film."

He stayed still for a moment, looking at the wall. Then he shook his head. " You're round the twist, Bill. You don't know what you're saying."

I followed him through the door and down the stairs. The lights were out in the lobby. Somewhere I could still hear the horse scream as the pike went home. It was like a tinny echo, grating on the nerves. But there was nothing in the Coliseum now, and the people had gone. I said " Dave, I only know what I know."

He started to chain the doors.

I said " Look, the photography. If it is photography. The Solido. That's impossible. We both know it. And the acting. Nobody acted like that, ever. Olivier got closest but it wasn't the same. They weren't actors. It's all impossible, why stick at this? "

He looked at me. He was in silhouette, I couldn't see the expression on his face. He said inconsequentially " That was the time to live, Bill. No main roads, no housing estates. America a pirate's Eldorado, London a town out of fairy tales. It was quite a time."

We walked up the road to the car. I said " What are we going to do about it, Dave? We've got to do something."

He nodded. He said " That's it, William. We've got to do something. We're crazy as coots, but we can't leave it like this."

* * *

We marched up to the reception desk of the Green Dragon. I was lagging behind a little because in the clear light of morning the whole thing seemed too mad for words. There was nobody about. Dave rang the bell and nothing happened. We stood looking at each other in the lavender-smelling quietness. He shrugged. He said " If they're staying anywhere in the district they'll be

here. It's the last chance anyway, we've been everywhere else."

There was a stupendous crash.

Plaster fell from the ceiling, dust rose in clouds. Overhead a lighting fitting swung and tinkled. I stared at it, looked round and found I was alone. I just caught sight of Dave's heels vanishing up the stairs. I ran after him. It seemed the only thing to do.

Upstairs the dust hung in a greyish cloud. There was a babel of voices. An old lady in a floral dressing gown loped past. I ask you, a dressing gown at twelve a.m. . . . I rounded a corner and ran full tilt into a redfaced man with a huge moustache. He vanished behind me, shouting for someone called Robinson. I caught up with Dave at the end of the passage. He was wrenching at a door-handle. From behind the panels came high-pitched shouts. I'd heard that squeaky intonation before. Dave backed away and slammed into the door with his shoulder. It opened abruptly and we fell through it together.

The dust was thickest of all. It was moving in whorls, sparkling in the light from the windows. There were vague shadows flitting about; in the centre of the room stood a great bulk of machinery, indistinct, haloed with blue flashings. It was like somebody had dropped a printing press in the little room. The floor was bowed where its weight was depressing the beams. Dave pulled up short. He bellowed "What the Hell goes on?"

There was silence. The little men stopped gyrating, the machine spun and twinkled. Dave walked forward deliberately and picked up one of the boys by his lapels. He didn't seem to put any effort into it. He said easily "I asked you what the Hell is going on. And what is this machine?"

The dust started to settle in a pale film. I closed the door behind me and I leaned on it. Footsteps clumped past in the corridor; a voice shouted something about "Up on the first floor." I heard the distinct clanging of a fire engine.

A vein bulged on Dave's forehead and he shook his victim like a doll. The little man gurgled; his toes scraped desperately at the carpet. I started to get really scared.

Dave said "How does a Solido work. Who are you people? *What is this machine?*"

Somebody sniggered. A voice said "Like it's played through, fellers. They dig us."

And they were all talking at once.

"So Holman the Fourth he sends for Ferdie, he says Ferdie son and colleague, get me the works. Don't tell me your li'l old troubles, Ferdie, get the works. And when Holman the Fourth talks like that there's a screamstick on the end of every word and things move man, they move . . .'

"So we set up the chronochain plenty fast and we scram. Because when Holman wants the works, things move . . ."

"'I don't buy this crap about temporal interference' says Holman, 'Jeep back to the twentieth, rush your footage in some crazy joint where they don't dig you. We'll pay the fine' says Holman, 'we'll pay plenty. But get the works.'"

"You can't chrono a whole Realization Unit" babbled one of the Chinks. "'Cause the energy displacement ex-poes up to a star-and-space type freightage charge and Holman, he'll stand an interference fine but he can't stand a freight charge like that . . ."

The door started to bulge and I found I was holding it shut. I also found I was covered with little bodies, all shoving the door via myself. It was like being at the bottom of a collapsed rugger scrum. The machine started to emit a roaring note and somebody yelled "Hold 'em man, hold that door, she's displacing . . ." I got a glimpse of the thing fading out like a trick shot in a movie. Soon it was nothing but a lilac and gold outline that the sun-light couldn't touch. Then that vanished; there was a 'plink,' a sense of relieved pressure. The floorbeams groaned and eased back to their normal height.

The door snapped open and I was staring at the top button of a blue uniform. The uniform was on the big-gest firechief I'd ever seen. He glared round the room I found my voice somehow. I said "Er . . . can I help you?"

He squinted at me as if he'd just caught me redhanded

setting light to Buckingham Palace. "Some damn fool let off a bomb somewhere. You people see anything?"

I shook my head, grinning inanely. "Not a thing. Now officer, if you wouldn't mind . . . we've got a . . . script conference going on here, we've been interrupted enough as it is . . ." I occluded him with the door before he could see the shattered catch.

I sat down in the nearest chair and found I was a hero. They had a good bar up there and after I'd shifted a couple of double Scotches I was able to take a calmer view of things. I said "Two questions. Or rather three. First, what was it? Second, where, did it come from? Third, *where did it go . . . ?*"

Dave took over. He looked a bit dazed but his voice was steady enough. "That, Bill, was a chrono generator. They set up a string of them, spaced half a century or so apart, then step back down them to where they want to go. Right?"

The little men chirruped agreement.

"But some fool" said Dave heavily, "parked the nearest stage a little too close to home, temporally speaking. Because when Holman says move they move, and they didn't have time to get organised properly. Right?"

Agreement again.

It was beginning to make a crazy sort of sense but I was still half baffled. "So where did the thing come from?"

"It didn't *come* from anywhere" said Dave. "Today just caught up with it, is all." He sat down too, and reached for a drink.

Jointly we seemed to have made the grade as far as the boys were concerned. They even introduced themselves; Duesey and Smart and Snow and Hope and Thankless, or something like that. Nicknames or Christian names, I don't know. A lot of the ways of twenty-third century admen are still beyond me. Analysing their gabble, they had had a commission to reel in a piece of Old England for the makers of Kaufman WonderSlugs. What they are, or will be, I have no idea . . . And Holman, the mighty Fourth, had promised a rolling of heads if the Solidoreels weren't on his desk by the

Junequarter following. (The names of the months are changed of course in the twenty-third century; or perhaps you know). They'd chosen the Monmouth rebellion, and by God they'd *got* the Monmouth rebellion, and everything had been running super-Duesey until the generator had allowed itself to be caught up with and we had turned up to pull the twenty-third century fat out of a particularly hot fire. And that, with unavoidable gaps and omissions, brought us up to date. "Holman don't care" said one of the Chinks, Snow I think it was, or it might have been Thankless. "Holman wants the action. He don't care we can only shoot ancient-type Solidos, he wants the action. And Holman gets what he wants."

That I could believe . . .

There wasn't much more to it. We all had some more drinks and we praised their filming, and they praised our projection, and nobody got very far with the why and how. I did find out they had some sort of statute about time travel, or chronoshifting as they preferred to call it; they weren't supposed to materialize any of their gear later than the eighteenth century or earlier than the twenty-second because of the danger of effecting a technology jump that was outside the calendar of human development. There were pretty steep fines for breaking regs; a hundred doz of credits was mentioned as a possible settlement for using the Coliseum if they were ever found out. I didn't know how much that was but it seemed a Hell of a lot . . . After that there were more rounds of the hard stuff, we toasted them and they toasted us, and when you're celebrating the displacement of a chrono generator you're apt to drink pretty deep. Half an hour of it and I was fuzzy at the edges, an hour and I was out in space. They'd laced the whiskey with something called 'Rocket Flip' that they'd brought down the ages for a contingency like this and this stuff wasn't a drink, it was hydrogen warfare in a glass . . .

There was only one advantage to it. You didn't get a hangover.

* * *

I woke on the bed in my flat. The sun was low, I guessed the time to be nearly nine. I got up and found a bottle of Rocket Flip on the table beside me. After I'd poured it down the sink I hunted round for the letter from Dave that I knew would be there. I found it on the table in the living-room and opened it knowing more or less what I was going to road.

It looked as if I was going to have to run the last rush at the Coliseum that night; Dave would be indisposed.

I got down to the theatre about twenty after ten and finished the show with Pongo. After he'd gone and the people were out Snow brought me the reel and I waxed and laced, trimmed the arc and started the machine and watched the end of the story. I saw the tarpots bubble on Poole foreshore, saw them bring the salt for the quarterings, so much for each traitor. Jefferies hung his court with red and washed the West in blood.

I shall always remember the last shot of the film. At sunset, a cart rumbled into a village. As it moved down the street people came out the houses and followed it. First there were a dozen, then a score, then a hundred or more, all walking in absolute silence. And they stood in silence and watched while soldiers lifted down the tarred quarters of men and nailed them on the door of the church. So King James' justice was done, and the slack drums beat, the broken staves and banners sank in mud. And the camera planed up from the smoking land, music swelled sullen and deep and the thing was over.

Snow fetched the reel and clapped me on the back, gave me fifty English pounds and scurried out of my life and times.

Dave? He was a great guy. He just didn't belong to the twentieth century though. He was looking for something broader than we could offer, a mystery he thought he could solve in the West. Like he said in his letter, he didn't want to live in a land that was nothing but pink houses and soap coupons. He rode back with the boys to take those final shots, then they carried him farther off again to where he wanted to be. That was some lift to thumb, I couldn't have done it. But Dave

did; he thanked them and waved and walked away from the chrono, into the past.

I keep wondering if there was any way I could have stopped him. I tell myself if I'd warned him of what I'd seen in the film of Sedgemoor he might have changed his mind. But I don't see that I could have altered anything. What he did what already written, and what has to be has to be.

There was a shot of the rebels as the cavalry was coming down on them. A quick track along the lines of faces showing the tension there, the sweat, the bitten lips; and among them, quite unmistakably, was Dave. I saw him go under, offering his pike up to a grinning mounted man . . .

I'm still in Wickenford. As a matter of fact, I run the show at the Coliseum. The screen is just a screen, and the mechs are just mechs, and the place is getting really haggard now; I think it will close soon and where it stood there will be an aridness of shops and flats. The monster that sits in the corner of your living-room has taken the audiences from the little halls; the old Col is no use any more except to lovers when it's raining. It's dreary and dark and full of cobwebs and Keystone ghosts and the smell of gas. But I keep it going because I've had a change of heart and I'd like to see Dave again even if he does have to die at Sedgemoor. And you never know, three hundred years from now Holman the Fourth might bang his desk and yell get me the action, and Snow and the boys might just come back . . .

KEITH ROBERTS.

Here is one of a series of strange little fragments called "Shots from the Looking Glass," sent to me by a friend of the author. This one is dedicated to Elias Canetti.

LOVE FEAST

by Johnny Byrne

You don't like me? You are frightened perhaps? But you are nicer than me. You are fatter, plumper, infinitely more beautiful. You are hungry? Here, I give you some food. I cut beautifully do I not? You don't answer. Look, I eat it myself. You are impressed, I can see that. Don't be afraid. I shall save you. You see? Didn't I use the finest silk to tie you up? You are fatter than me. Oh, I shall save you. I shall save you till the very last . . . If only you knew how bad it is out there. People drying up by the million. Ah, but here I prattle on while you sit there, golden, plump, and famished as a tiger. I know how you feel. Here, I cut you some more. See, I offer you the favoured portion of the leg. But you flinch. You think me indelicate perhaps? No matter, soon you come to your senses, soon you realise how fortunate your position really is. I like your silence. In many ways you are superior to me. Under different circumstances I could even be jealous of you. I wish we could be friends but you make it very difficult. You are hungry? Look, I cut you some more. Times are rather bad as you know. I trust you will forgive the rather crude service. You don't eat. You make me very sad. It is only because you are so plump, so beautiful, that I can save you to the end. I see fear again. You are stubborn. There is nothing out

there, you know, nothing but dust and scorched desert. Even the screams have died away. But here I dine well. You wonder at my appetite? You are hungry yourself? Dinner will soon be over. Then I won't care any more, and you will grow thin and hollow and choke up with dust. You will no longer be an object of envy to anybody. So eat now. Here. for the last time I offer you this choice morsel. You are very foolish to refuse. Ah! so you are hungry. You accept. Good! Good! You see, it is not so terrible. Yes, I thought you were hungry. More? But of course, of course. I will give you more . . . It is nicer like this is it not. You have a beautiful smile. When I am not so tired I shall certainly appreciate it more. You see, only you and I are left now, so we must try to make the best of each other, musn't we? It isn't too bad. One becomes accustomed . . . Hunger dictates the course we must follow. No, I shall keep you to the end. We still have enough for some little time yet. But I am feeling a little tired now. Soon I must sleep. Strange to think that once I was plump and strong as you are now, though never, perhaps so beautiful. Oh, you musn't worry. There is plenty of me left. Tomorrow we can start on my other leg . . .

JOHNNY BYRNE

This Is

SCIENCE FANTASY

(Edited by KYRIL BONFIGLIOLI)

containing stories by

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